

Kitchener, Ontario

Government of Canada Building (GOCB)

166 Frederick Street

The Government of Canada Building (GOCB) in Kitchener, Ontario was constructed in 1956-57 to house the offices of Revenue Canada. It was designed by a local architectural firm, Jenkins and Wright. Over the years it has undergone major window replacement and the addition of a canopy in 1997. Other alterations include the addition of a wheelchair ramp at the front of the building and modifications to office interiors. Public Works and Government Services Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 98-44.

Reasons for Designation

The Kitchener GOCB has been designated Recognized for its architectural importance, its environmental significance and its historical associations.

This building is an attractive illustration of modern design, with its horizontal expression and massing, asymmetrical composition, horizontal emphasis created by window type and placement, and the subtle interplay of projecting and receding planes created by the band of first floor windows. The simplification of form, minimal detailing and use of quality materials in a limited range contributes to the early 1950s design character.

The GOCB is located two blocks east of downtown Kitchener on Frederick Street, which marks the division between the business district and residential areas. Set within a block of government buildings and public facilities, it is compatible with its institutional neighbours and sympathetic to its surroundings in terms of design, scale, materials and setback.

The construction of the Kitchener GOCB is directly related to the increased federal spending on Taxation Centres during the 1950s.

It serves as an illustration of the expansion of federal government services to regional centres.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Kitchener GOCB resides in those features which express the modern design, including rectangular massing, horizontal proportions, simple architectural detailing using traditional materials and the site relationships.

The massing consists of rectangular flat-roofed forms and a rectilinear footprint which has slight setbacks that accommodate its functional planning. The front facade has interlocking forms created by the interplay of the projecting ground floor entrances and the stair tower, and the receding plane created by the setback of the second floor. The

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vertical expression of the entrance block is balanced by the horizontal proportions of the facade. The continuous strips of glazing contribute to the horizontal expression of the elevations and should be respected. All these characteristics should be maintained as they contribute to the striking modern composition.

In keeping with modern design principles, which stressed smooth, flat, polished materials and simple geometric forms with minimal detailing, the facades are finished in a limited range of materials. These include a smooth faced, stack bonded, limestone veneer on the principal facades. The rear portion of the building is clad in a grey coloured brick, which is simply detailed with a stone band projecting at the window heads and sills. Black granite spandrel panels are set between aluminum mullions at ground floor windows. Any repairs should respect the existing palette of materials and high quality of workmanship.

The original design included windows with clear glazing set in clear anodized aluminum frames, with a deliberate pattern created by heavy vertical mullions and thin horizontal muntins. This reinforced the strong horizontal emphasis of the overall building design. The new tinted windows maintain the overall window size and shape, however the horizontal line of the muntin has been lowered, and the mullions and muntins are now all of a uniform wider dimension. These changes detract from the integrity of the overall design. Windows should be replaced at the end of their life cycle with glazing that reflects the original design intent.

Similarly, the original entrance had a simple linear canopy which has been replaced with a glazed, arched canopy. The existing canopy is large and introduces a form which is stylistically incompatible with the original design, because it moves away from the building's characteristic linear, horizontal appearance. When alterations are planned, a return to a design more in keeping with the simple linear precedent would enhance the heritage character of the building.

Few original interior finishes have been retained. Any remaining interior materials, such as smooth plaster ceilings and walls, and terrazzo floors, should be noted and retained in any future interior work. New designs should take their cue from finishes and forms characteristic of this era, such as brushed stainless steel, sleek smooth finishes, and simple modern forms and designs. Existing entrance points and the internal circulation pattern should be respected. The location of the flagpole and the use of surface mounted signage at the entrance contribute to the asymmetrical design and the modern character of the building and should be retained.

The pattern of concrete connections to the building from the street is characteristic of the urban style and should be maintained. A simple lawn and low, ornamental plantings

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contribute to the unobstructed relationship of the building to the ground plane.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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