

## HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

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FHBRO Number 93-117

DFRP Number - 07605

Hull, Québec

### **National Printing Bureau and Heating Plant**

45 Sacré-Coeur Boulevard

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The National Printing Bureau and its associated Heating Plant were constructed between 1949 and 1956 to the designs of noted Canadian architect Ernest Cormier. Public Works and Government Services Canada is the custodian department. See FHBRO Building Report 93-117.

### **Reasons for Designation**

The National Printing Bureau and its associated Heating Plant were designated Classified primarily for the superior quality of their architecture.

This building complex was designed to be a state-of-the-art high-speed printing facility. It is one of the major architectural expressions of the post-World War II era of expanding federal services. Between the years of 1949 and 1953, almost two hundred new federal buildings were constructed across the country.

One of the most innovative designs by the Montréal-based architect Ernest Cormier, the National Printing Bureau is a significant architectural achievement combining Beaux-Arts planning principles with the functionality of the International Style. The glass curtain wall containing the mechanical and plumbing distribution system is a rare and noteworthy architectural feature in the development of contemporary Canadian architecture.

The National Printing Bureau complex was the first major architectural project by the federal government intended to physically integrate Hull into the National Capital District. The Gréber Plan conceived it as a visual anchor at the end of a major boulevard connecting Hull to Ottawa. Although this formal boulevard was never constructed, the complex does reflect the plan to decentralize federal buildings into urban nodes throughout the region.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage value of the National Printing Bureau complex resides in its composition and massing, architectural design, materials and craftsmanship, and functional characteristics.

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The composition is characterized by the monumentality and axial symmetry of Beaux-Arts planning, and by the Modernist design principle of deriving a building's form from its function. The main central axis of the scheme begins with the monumental yet starkly unadorned, five-bay entrance portico and is terminated by the Heating Plant and former cooling pool. The rear wall of the Heating Plant reflects the five-bay division of the entry portico, and the twinned smokestacks capped by decorative flue caps are an elegant termination of the central axis. Restoration of the Heating Plant and recovery of at least the granite walls and sprayers of the former cooling pool would enhance the axial composition of the scheme. All future work should aim to respect these fundamental design principles.

The massing and elevations contrast the solidity of the granite-clad front office pavilion with the lightness and transparency of the "factory" section, which is defined by the glass curtain wall wrapping the rest of the building. A full-storey granite-clad base unites the whole. Stepped volumes, regularly spaced and severely repetitive fenestration, eaves and canopies of cantilevered concrete plates, and fluted aluminum flashings result in an overall austerity characteristic of Classical-Moderne design. The two distinctive building parts and their respective methods of cladding are important character defining features to retain and restore. Consideration may be given to removing inappropriate additions.

Classical Beaux-Arts inspiration is evident in the organization of the interior plan. Parallel to the main central axis are three service spines containing stairwells, elevators, and washrooms which intersect the transverse circulation corridors. The double-storied entrance foyer with its grand, symmetrical staircase and surrounding rooms, and the wide open spaces of the third floor production area should not be altered. Also of note on the main level is the cafeteria which should be retained and if possible restored more closely to its original appearance. The majority of the other spaces throughout the building may be regarded as somewhat flexible provided that the floor to ceiling heights, fenestration patterns, and the hierarchy of scale between enclosed rooms and open spaces are respected.

The complex is characterized by the quality of its materials and construction. Designed to support the heavy loads of machinery and paper stores, its structural system consisting of a regular grid of columns with floor plates and exterior walls of reinforced concrete should be respected, as should the relationship between the grey Stanstead granite cladding and the windows. Silver-coloured metalwork is found throughout the

complex in fenestration, profiled flashings, glazed interior partitions, decorative grillework and railings. The fenestration is of note, with clear, frosted, pebbled and ribbed glass set into thin-profile, aluminum sections. Every effort should be made to preserve these original materials, and to consult the appropriate specialists for any work affecting the masonry, architectural metalwork, and windows.

Interior finishes, detailing and craftsmanship reflect the hierarchical and functional divisions within the complex. Most richly adorned is the main entrance foyer employing Portland Stone wall finishes, decorative terrazzo flooring, and plaster ceilings with recessed, indirect lighting. Reinstating the silver-coloured, aluminum window and door frames at the five-bay entrance wall would enhance both the interior and exterior appearance.

The industrial-type finishes include the glazed and unglazed brick walls, terrazzo and terra cotta flooring, and the exposed round concrete columns and ceiling structure. It would be desirable to remove the paint from brick walls and to reinstate the original colour scheme of yellow glazed and unglazed bricks with accents of "Pompeian red" such as the round columns. Bricks and terrazzo should be repaired in kind, and compatible materials used in any new work. Most of the doors and brass hardware in the "factory" section have been replaced with steel doors and frames fitted with silver-coloured steel lever hardware. Given the industrial character of this area, this may be appropriate provided all doors and hardware are consistent in appearance and reproduce any significant heritage features such as the diamond shaped door lights. Further investigation of the original interior colour and finish scheme is required and this information should be incorporated into any proposed new work.

The building's most distinctive feature is the double wall system consisting of an exterior glass and aluminum curtain wall wrapping an interior, fenestrated, hollow-core brick wall. It houses mechanical systems and was designed as a buffer zone stabilizing environmental conditions for the printing production areas. New mechanical distribution through this space is acceptable provided it is respectful of the original design intent and does not erode the heritage fabric or appearance.

Should additional air distribution be required and to avoid overcrowding of the curtain wall, consideration may be given to the introduction of exposed ductwork and carefully located bulkheads as architectural features complementing those areas which are

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industrial precincts. Other areas of more refined interior finishes, such as the administrative areas, must be considered separately. Suspended tile ceilings should generally be avoided and existing ones eventually removed in favour of systems that do not interfere with windows, room volumes, or original finishes.

Typical of Beaux-Arts site planning, the building is a monumental object surrounded by open space on all sides and is symmetrical along a central axis. A full view of the front facade and a formalized approach across an open plaza are important characteristics to be maintained. Any site development must be predicated on an understanding of the balanced symmetry and monumentality of the complex.

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