

FHBRO HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT VERNON FEDERAL BUILDING, VERNON, B.C.

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| FHBRO number: | 96-1 20 |
| DFRP number: | 18681 |
| Resource name: | Vernon Federal Building |
| Address: | 3101 - 32nd Avenue, Vernon, British Columbia |
| FHBRO status: | “Recognized” Federal Heritage Building |
| Construction: | 1956-7 |
| Designer: | Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt |
| Original function: | Government of Canada Building with local offices for Post Office, Customs, Indian Agent, Agriculture, Veterans’ Affairs, Unemployment Insurance and Public Works |
| Current function: | Government of Canada Building with local offices for Post Office, Human Resources and Development Canada and Correctional Services Canada |
| Modifications: | Windows replaced and brise-soleil removed; handicapped ramp and loading dock added; large mural painted on exterior; extensive interior renovations. |
| Custodian: | Public Works and Government Services Canada |

Reasons for Designation

The Vernon Federal Building is a “Recognized” Federal Heritage Building because of its historical associations, and its architectural and environmental values:

Historical value:

The Vernon Federal Building illustrates the growth of federal government services during the 1950s, and the government’s efforts to expand the delivery of federal social programmes by erecting small federal buildings in local communities. Within the City of Vernon, the construction of the Vernon Federal Building marked the beginning of commercial/government development along the northern edge of the city’s commercial area.

Architectural value:

The Vernon Federal Building is a good example of the modern style of architecture adopted for federal government buildings during the 1950s and 1960s. Modern elements borrowed from the International style include the asymmetrical facades along both streetfronts, horizontal bands of windows, columns expressed on the building’s exterior, the use of smooth, flat surfaces, the use of colour to highlight structural elements, and the absence of decorative elements. Alterations to the building’s exterior have diminished its modern aesthetic: the removal of the *brise-soleil* from the windows, the replacement of windows and the covering of the building’s solid facade surfaces on the east wall with a large multi-coloured mural. In its functional arrangements, the building followed an established and proven pattern. It contained a main floor post office area, second floor office space and basement storage. Subsequent renovations, including an exterior ramp, an elevator, and reconfiguration of office space, addressed contemporary requirements. The building employs standard construction materials and methods handled in a competent manner.

The building was designed by the Vancouver architectural firm Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt, which was

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a pioneer in introducing modernism to Vancouver and in developing the West Coast style of architecture. The Vernon Federal Building, designed by the firm under the supervision of the Department of Public Works, is ~~a relatively undistinguished example of the firm's work.~~

Environmental value:

Alterations to the site have been restricted to those incidental to the building's function: the addition of a loading dock and a disabled-access ramp. The Vernon Federal Building is compatible in function, size and style with surrounding buildings, including the municipal Civic Centre Complex directly across the street. It is well-known in the city by virtue of its function in providing essential government services.

Character-Defining Elements

The following character-defining elements of the Vernon Federal Building should be respected:

Its role in the federal government's efforts in the 1950s to expand the delivery of social services by erecting small federal buildings in local communities, as reflected by:

- its prominent location within the City of Vernon;
- its size, permitting the delivery of various government services in addition to the post office.

Its federal modern style of architecture, as manifested in:

- asymmetrical facades on both street fronts; a flat roof; horizontal bands of windows on both levels; columns expressed on the building's exterior; the use of smooth, flat, concrete surfaces as spandrels and shear walls; the restriction of decoration to incised lines in the concrete shear walls, and the use of lightwells at basement level along the north, south and east elevations;
- low-rise, concrete planters adjacent to the building's east elevation, which integrate the site with the overall design of the building.

Its functional design, as manifested in:

- the main floor post office area, second floor office space, basement storage area and provision of multiple stairwells linking the three levels;
- lightwells located at basement level along three elevations, which provide natural light to lower work areas.

The manner in which it reinforces the government/commercial character of the setting as evidenced in:

- its low-rise height, its modern style of architecture and its function in providing government services.

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For guidance on interventions, please refer to the FHBRO Code of Practice. For further information contact FHBRO.

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