

# FHBRO HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

## 9 / BROOKE CLAXTON BUILDING, TUNNEY'S PASTURE, OTTAWA, ON

---

FHBRO Number: 04-053  
DFRP Number: 08752  
Resource Name: 9 / Brooke Claxton Building  
Address: Colombine Boulevard, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario  
FHBRO Status: "Classified" Federal Heritage Building  
Construction: 1961-1964  
Designer: Balharrie, Helmer and Morin and Greenspoon, Freelander and Dunne  
Original Function: Administration Building, Department of National Health & Welfare (now Health Canada)  
Current Function: Unchanged  
Modifications: Reconfiguration of floors to meet the Department's space requirements and renovations for universal access  
Custodian: Public Works and Government Services Canada

### **Description of Historic Place**

The Brooke Claxton Building is a 19-storey office tower, designed in the Modern International style with aspects of Brutalism. Planned specifically to become the focal point of Tunney's Pasture to house a major federal department, the tower is the dominant feature of the modern government complex and is prominently located at the main intersection of the campus at Columbine Boulevard and Holland Avenue where it retains a significant relationship with its associated landscape. The designation is confined to the footprint of the building.

### **Heritage Value**

The Brooke Claxton Building is a "Classified" Federal Heritage Building because of its historical associations, and its architectural and environmental values.

#### Historical value:

As a purpose-built national headquarters for the Department of National Health and Welfare, now Health Canada, the Brooke Claxton Building is one of the best examples of the increased role of the federal government in ensuring minimal health standards for Canadians in the post-Second World War period. The building is closely associated with the extensive phase of construction sponsored by the Department of Public Works to consolidate departmental administrative functions into new modern facilities and it represents the movement to consolidate federal departments into suburban governmental nodes.

As the main headquarters for the Department of National Health and Welfare, the Brooke Claxton Building is directly associated with several flagship plans and Acts in the area of health and welfare, including: the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, Medicare, and the Canada Health Act. The building houses the departmental offices of the Minister of Health. Three noteworthy individuals are associated with this building: The Honourable Judy LaMarsh, the Honourable Marc Lalonde, and the Honourable Monique Bégin.

The Brooke Claxton Building is one of the best examples of the third development phase of Tunney's Pasture as a federal government campus. It speaks to the role of the federal government in the development of government campuses outside the downtown core. The height of the tower broke

---

**FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS REVIEW OFFICE**  
National Historic Sites Directorate, Parks Canada  
25 Eddy Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Gatineau, QC K1A 0M5  
Telephone: 819-997-6740 / Fax: 819-953-6146 / Web Site: [www.parkscanada.gc.ca/federalhb](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/federalhb)

## **FHBRO HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

### **9 / BROOKE CLAXTON BUILDING, TUNNEY'S PASTURE, OTTAWA, ON**

---

through the then 150 foot height restriction in Ottawa's downtown and influenced the development of modern Ottawa.

#### Architectural value:

Designed by the national partnership of two important Canadian architectural firms, Balharrie, Helmer and Morin of Ottawa, and Greenspoon, Freelander and Dunne of Montreal, the Brooke Claxton Building is a very good example of an office tower designed in the Modern International Style. Aspects of the later Brutalist style also contribute to its distinctive appearance. Subtle details and features bring richness and elegance to the building's simple, rectangular massing. The building's composition is characterized by its scale, balance and use of good quality materials. Chosen materials and finishes offer contrasts in textures and colours and contribute to the visual richness of façades and interior spaces. This regularity and balance continues through to the interior.

The Brooke Claxton Building possesses good functional design, and has proven to be effective as an office tower. The simple floor plan is easily understood and its layout has been flexible and functional. The excellent quality materials, innovative approaches and exceptional construction techniques contribute to the tower's lasting solidity.

#### Environmental value:

The Brooke Claxton Building reinforces the current heterogeneous character and multi-layered density of the Tunney's Pasture campus, which features a mixture of low-rise brick buildings and office towers against the silhouette of downtown towers. In keeping with the purposeful new direction of the third phase of development of Tunney's Pasture, the tower terminates the main axis of the campus and stands out as a familiar landmark. By virtue of its high profile, the building also marks the location of Tunney's Pasture in the western part of the city of Ottawa.

### **Character-Defining Elements**

The following character-defining elements of the Brooke Claxton Building should be respected:

Its Modern Style, as manifested in:

- The simple rectangular massing;
- The subtle details and features which bring richness and elegance to the building, including: the wide, half-sunken base, the colonnade created by the extension of vertical pillars from the roof to the base, the recessed ground floor, the 16<sup>th</sup> floor set-back terrace, the non-glazed volume of the top three storeys, the linear, formed-concrete detailing, and the pre-formed concrete teardrops that appear to be suspended under the second floor;
- The balance of the building's modern aesthetic composition as illustrated by: the regular division of bays of its main and rear façades;
- The centrally placed main entrance surrounded by a studied mix of glass and black granite walls;
- The rich contrasting colours and textures of façade materials, particularly as exhibited through the smooth, light coloured concrete pillars, the slick transparent glass and black granite and the rough slate aggregate concrete;
- All features and materials of the interior that contribute to the elegance and richness of the building, including the regular and balanced interior lobby where a central hallway leads to a grand staircase, and the series of enclosed offices on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor which are differentiated by high ceilings and an outdoor terrace offering panoramic views; and

**FHBRO HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**  
**9 / BROOKE CLAXTON BUILDING, TUNNEY'S PASTURE, OTTAWA, ON**

---

- The visual harmony of the tower with the expansive green space of the Ottawa River Parkway provided by the green exterior slate aggregate concrete walls.

Its good functional design, as illustrated in:

- The simple, easily understood floor plan with vertical circulation centralized in a structural core;
- The flexibility in the functional layout; and,
- The areas where users may appreciate the pastoral setting in which the building sits.

Its use of excellent quality materials assembled with exceptional craftsmanship as demonstrated in:

- The reinforced concrete and prefabricated components;
- The teardrop louver supports on lower panels, which were innovative for the time;
- The creativity brought to the concrete from the slate aggregate and the cast relief patterns;
- The remaining original windows; and,
- The materials and finishes at the base and interior which also contribute to the characteristic contrasts in texture and colour, including: the glass, polished black and grey granite and chrome.

The building's role in reinforcing the current heterogeneous character of the Tunney's Pasture campus, and in marking the location of Tunney's Pasture in the Western part of the city of Ottawa, as evidenced in:

- Its design as a dominating feature of the campus, its style, its materials and its intended use as a major federal department;
- Its location, terminating the main axis of the campus; and
- The integrity of the building's historic relationship with its associated landscape, particularly on the ground floor where the plaza and cafeteria offer a quiet place to enjoy the nature of the site and views of the Ottawa River, downtown Ottawa, Holland Avenue and the Tunney's Pasture complex.

For guidance on interventions, please refer to the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. For further information contact FHBRO.

January 2006