

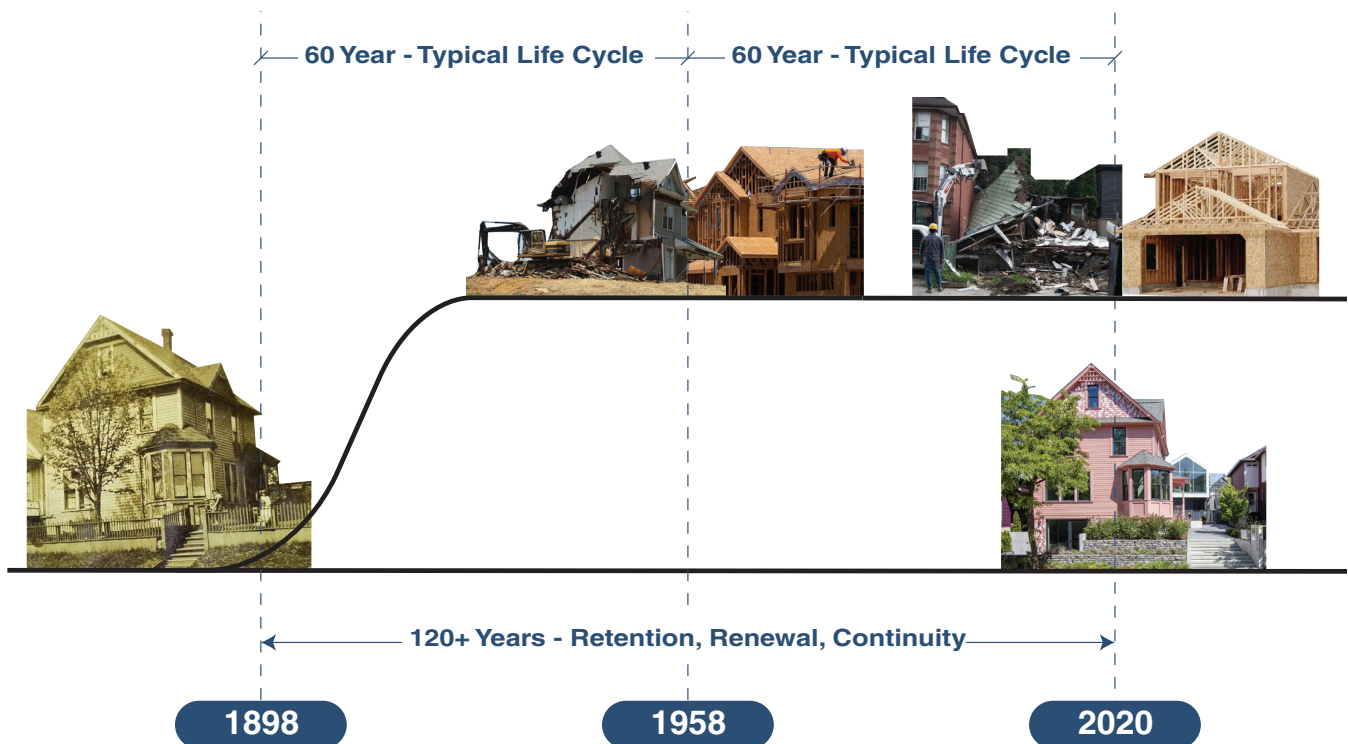
Heritage Homes are the Greenest Homes



Briefing Note 04

Buildings account for about 40% of global greenhouse gas emissions, including emissions from producing construction materials.

Much of this carbon is released before a building is even occupied, meaning existing buildings already contain significant “embodied carbon”. Demolishing buildings wastes this investment and creates new emissions through new construction. Renovations and retrofits are more cost-effective and take less time than building new, while improving comfort, lowering energy bills, and reducing environmental impact.



Archival House Image (left): Courtesy of Mira Project 851 ("Big House" collection). Restored House Image (right): Janis Nicolay, Canadian Architect.

Maintaining and upgrading existing homes avoid these impacts while also preserving the character and cultural heritage of neighbourhoods, allowing buildings to continue serving families and communities for decades.

Excerpts from *Unlocking the Value of Existing Buildings*. This briefing note is part of a series summarizing key insights from *Unlocking the Value of Existing Buildings: a new approach to codes for carbon, culture and cost*. The full report is available here: cahp-acecp.ca/learning-resources/

Call to Action for Homeowners

Maintain and Upgrade Your Home

- Maintain, repair, and renovate existing homes whenever possible instead of demolishing and rebuilding.
- Inspect and repair before replacing , caulking, weatherstripping, repointing mortar, refinishing wood, and patching plaster are lower-cost, lower-carbon interventions that extend the life of existing materials significantly.
- Retaining an existing home's structure reduces cost, material waste and construction-related emissions.

Improve Energy Performance Through Electrification and Retrofit

- Electrifying your home can significantly reduce both carbon emissions and energy costs over time, particularly as Canada's electricity grids become cleaner. Replacing a gas furnace with a heat pump is one of the most impactful changes a homeowner can make to reduce carbon emissions and energy costs over time.
- Consider upgrades such as insulation improvements, weatherstripping, storm windows, air sealing, and efficient heating systems.
- These improvements reduce energy use, lower utility bills, increase indoor comfort, and be completed on a faster timeline than new construction.
- Retrofitting an existing home can achieve energy and comfort benefits comparable to new construction.

Work With Professionals to Meet Building Codes

- A qualified professional can help identify which upgrades will have the greatest impact for your specific home, climate, and budget.
- A retrofit strategy will allow the work to be done in phases that will save money and material up front, while meeting energy performance targets.
- Under the updated National Building Code (NBC) and National Energy Code of Canada for Buildings (NEBC) 2025, designers and energy consultants can use performance-based approaches to show that a renovated home meets the intent of the code, even when existing building elements are retained. You do not need to rebuild to comply.

