

Reimagine the Ring Houses
Conceptual Proposal
University of Alberta Ring Houses Coalition
June 23, 2021

Importance and Heritage Value

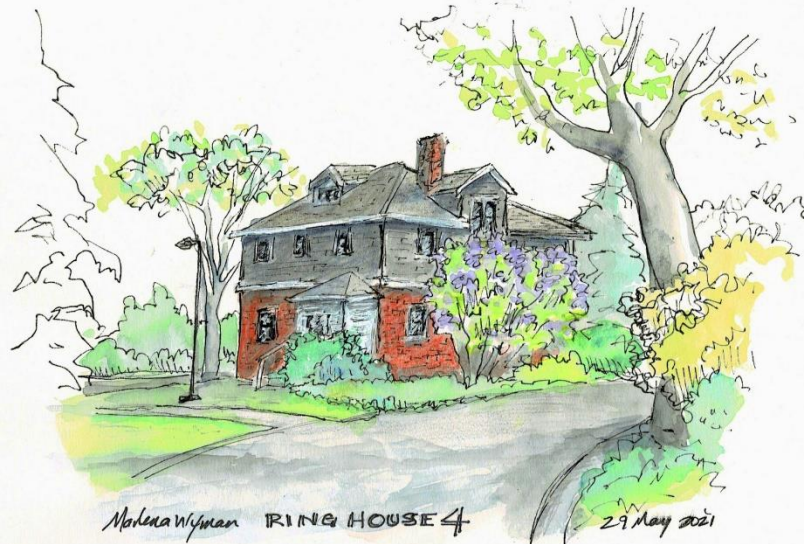
The importance of the Ring Houses goes far beyond the University campus to the making of modern Edmonton and Alberta. Built between 1911 and 1914, inspired by the ideas of the City Beautiful movement in urban planning and a practical need for faculty housing, the original ten houses were home to professors who were newcomers from far and wide; they created a significant new academic community and varsity neighbourhood. University Architect Cecil Scott Burgess designed Ring Houses 5 to 10 which, unfortunately, were demolished in 1970. Of the remaining houses:

- Ring House 1 is Canada's oldest surviving residence of a university president, and was home to the University's founding President Henry Marshall Tory;
- Ring House 2 was home to the first Professor of Engineering Muir Edwards, son of Henrietta Muir Edwards, one of the 'Famous Five' who fought to have women declared persons, and later to national leader Maury Van Vliet, who led the School of Physical Education from 1945 and was the first Dean of Physical Education and Recreation from 1964-75;
- Ring House 3 was home to Professor of Chemistry Adolph Lehmann, who collaborated with Karl Clark to develop the first successful process for separating oil from sand in northern Alberta; and
- Ring House 4 was home to the first Professor of Modern Languages William Kerr, who became first Dean of Arts and was President from 1936-41 and later H.G. Glyde, who taught community art classes in the Department of Extension from 1937 and established the Division of Fine Art where he taught from 1946 to 1966.

President Tory's legacy includes the Alberta Research Council, the National Research Council, the Faculty of Medicine, and University Hospital. In 1949, Tory was designated a National Historic Person through the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act*. Ring Houses 1 to 4 were designed by Gordon Wilson and David Easton Herral, who had a joint practice and were the architects of landmark public buildings in Strathcona, including Rutherford House. Strong cases can be made for the designation of all four remaining Craftsman-style homes as Provincial Historic Resources and for Ring House 1 to be designated as a National Historic Site.

University of Alberta Ring Houses Coalition

A community-driven coalition comprised of community members, professors, students, alumni, heritage architects, consultants, and activists formed a volunteer Coalition in February 2021. It has met weekly for the past four months to discuss the Ring Houses, their value to the University and broader community, and their future. In addition to writing to the Chancellor and President to request a moratorium on their demolition, and meeting with the Chancellor, the Coalition posted a public petition which now has more than 2,500 signatures; established the Facebook page Friends of the U of A Ring Houses; created a Fact Sheet to support the petition



Ring House 4. Courtesy: Marlena Wyman

and designation initiatives; placed the Ring Houses on the National Trust for Canada's List of Endangered Places; created videos to raise public awareness during the annual Jane's Walk with over 1,400 views so far; and conducted original research on the architects, past residents and occupants of these historic sites as well as heritage policy concerns. Ken Chapman filed a FOIP request, in collaboration with the Edmonton Heritage Council, for the University's planning documents related to the Ring Houses, and Architect Darrel Babuk organized a virtual symposium featuring key architects who have preserved historic structures on university campuses in many North America cities.

Benefits to the University of Preserving the Ring Houses

- **Mission:** Preservation of the Ring Houses supports the University's mission to discover, disseminate, and apply "new knowledge for the benefit of society through teaching and learning, research and creative activity, community involvement, and partnerships." The University is committed to values, traditions, and community relationships for the public good.
- **Environmental Leadership and Sustainability:** The University can demonstrate environmental leadership by restoring the Ring Houses. It is better to reuse an existing building than to tear it down and build new. Carl Elefante, former president of the American Institute of Architects, states that "The greenest building is the one that already exists." Demolition and construction debris generate about 35 percent of Canada's landfill waste. According to the National Trust for Canada <https://nationaltrustcanada.ca/what-we-offer/regeneration-works>, a new 'green' building takes 10 to 80 years, depending on its size, to overcome the carbon impacts of construction. The awarding of the 2021 Pritzker Architecture prize to the French architects Lacaton and Vassal, whose central concept is to never demolish, is indicative of this visionary trend. The Ring Houses are made with local red brick and old-growth timber; reuse is the sustainable option for these historic buildings according to best practices.
- **Demonstration Projects with University-Community Partnerships:** The Ring Houses can become demonstration projects for teaching, research, and community service. There are many possibilities that could be explored with further community consultation. To name just a few:
 - The Faculty of Arts could collaborate with Arts Habitat Edmonton if the spaces were to be used by artists, whether for residencies, exhibitions, or performances.
 - The University Club, the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES), the Culinary Arts Program at NAIT, and others could collaborate on the development of a boutique hotel and microbrewery integrated with academic programs as a living lab and generating revenues.
 - The Faculty of Engineering, ALES, and the School of Urban and Regional Planning could collaborate with the Edmonton Heritage Council and others to develop Tri-Council-funded projects focused on sustainability (e.g., energy retrofit and environmental leadership, economic impact) using this redevelopment as a living lab.
- **Historic Designations and Funding Opportunities:** Funding is available for small-scale heritage projects as well as for restoration and maintenance. Organizations like the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Edmonton Heritage Council, and the Government of Alberta fund heritage projects.

- The Ring Houses can be designated municipally, provincially, and/or nationally and if the buildings were designated, specific modest funding sources become options:
 - Municipally designated buildings are eligible for up to 50% of restoration costs for rehabilitation and one third of restoration costs to a maximum of \$50,000 for maintenance every three years;
 - Provincially designated buildings are eligible for up to \$100,000 for a study to outline their conservation costs.
 - While the federal government does not generally provide funding to National Historic Sites, designation can enhance fundraising from other sources; the federal government provides funding for restoration costs depending upon how the project aligns with federal funding priorities (e.g., significant funding is available for green buildings and cultural spaces).
 - Public benefits also ensue as historic designations mark community assets as a legacy for present and future use. The National Trust for Canada maintains a database of funding sources for heritage regeneration projects. See below for more information on funding.
- **Sense of Place:** In her renowned book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs wrote, "Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings." The University, as a place germinating new ideas, must use old buildings. Jacobs also argued about the value of maintaining older, small buildings among medium and large buildings. The University is a city within a city, and the NW quadrant is currently underutilized and could be renewed by this small-scale development. Zita Cobb, a visionary businesswoman who saved the dying outport of Fogo Island, Newfoundland through community, heritage, art, and architecture said, "Place is not a commodity and shouldn't be treated as such...Our human selves crave a relationship with time. Architecture and design help hold us in that relationship with time." The power of memory, community, and architecture create relevance for us today. It is a way that we connect and remain connected into the future. It is critical that the Ring Houses remain in situ and not be moved. Moving a heritage resource destroys the relationship with its surroundings and the loss of historic features such as landscaping or foundations. Relocation is not preservation.
 - **Legacy:** The Ring Houses provide a tangible link to the rich history and importance of the University of Alberta. Learning and research as well as community relationships are achieved by means of heritage conservation. Any redevelopment of the Ring Houses should incorporate exhibitions (e.g., archival photographs, artifacts, artwork) to promote greater understanding of the role and benefit of the University in the larger community and its stories, inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and land relations. Heritage architecture and the land are a tangible connection across generations to convey a pluralistic sense of values, stories, and legacies at the University of Alberta.
 - **Adaptive Reuse:** The Coalition organized two virtual design workshops to explore creative possibilities of how the houses might be reconceived for future diverse uses, and how this development might be governed and funded. Participants in each of the workshops held included architects, artists, designers, developers, entrepreneurs, academics, Windsor Park residents, and Coalition members, facilitated by architect Shafraaz Kaba of Ask* for a Better World and an expert in Integrated Project Delivery. The first workshop focused on the adaptive reuse of Ring Houses themselves with a focus on sustainability, whereas the second explored possibilities for the entire area from the Windsor Car Park to the Ring Houses and the University Club. The

workshops concluded that the Ring Houses could be valuable amenities to any redevelopment planned for the NW quadrant of campus, enliven what is currently an under-utilized space, and provide a friendly connection to the Windsor Park community and Edmonton River Valley. These ideas are presented as a starting point for discussion, not as the final word, to open potential for a once-in-a-generation shift suited to the University of Alberta for Tomorrow vision.

Governance/Operational Options for the Ring Houses

Governance/ Operations Implications	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option I		
University of Alberta owned and operated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current situation • University has full authority • Students, faculty, and staff can access spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University has determined that it does not want to continue with the status quo and seeks new solutions
Option II		
University-owned, establish a ‘Friends of University of Alberta Heritage’ to restore and operate on behalf of the University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University maintains ownership and stewardship • The ‘Friends’ could advise the University on policy related to other heritage buildings on campus and access additional funding sources • In addition to restoration funding, the ‘Friends’ could apply for funding for research, exhibitions, and publications, for example, from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Edmonton Community Foundation: \$50,000-\$80,000, depending on whether the applicant (a registered charity) has a previous relationship with the Foundation https://www.ecfoundation.org/grants/community-grants/ ○ Alberta Culture's Heritage Preservation Partnership Program: \$10,000-\$25,000 https://www.alberta.ca/heritage-awareness-grants.aspx ○ Edmonton Heritage Council: up to \$25,000 https://edmontonheritage.ca/ ○ Depending on the future use of the houses could generate revenue from government grants, foundations, corporate sponsorship, donations, social enterprise, sales, facility rental, leases, programming, and admissions • Members of the Coalition might be asked to serve on the founding board, engage alumni and community members • Students, faculty, and staff might access spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would need to establish the ‘Friends’ and register as a charity • Would take some time to put in place • If not a ‘Friends’ the University could apply in collaboration with another charitable partner

Option III		
<p>University-owned, restored and operated by one or more not-for-profit/registered charities on a long-term lease (99 years, \$1/year)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • University maintains ownership, and staff and students would maintain access under the agreed upon conditions • Revenue neutral • Funding available depends on how the houses are restored and their future; for example, if they are to be Green and Inclusive buildings they would be eligible for federal funding of under \$3 million https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/gicb-bcvi/index-eng.html; if the future use is considered cultural, could apply to the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund for a large grant https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/cultural-spaces-fund.html • Sources in the National Trust database could be accessed for other uses, e.g., environmental, international development, start-up, economic regeneration, https://regenerationworks.ca/resources/find-funding/ • The following are examples of possible uses – and more can be explored: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could collaborate with an organization such as ArtsHabitat Edmonton, with a mandate to develop spaces for artists to live, produce and present to undertake the renovation and assume responsibility for restoration and operations https://www.artshab.com/ • Could collaborate with DOC Alberta to develop a documentary film centre of excellence https://www.docorg.ca/doc_alberta • Could collaborate with an organization like Passive House Alberta that is committed to energy efficient housing https://www.passivehousealberta.com/ • Could develop an incubator for small international development organizations and student training opportunities • A professional association with links to the university might undertake the renovation as offices, for example, APEGA • Strong university/ community collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would need to identify partner(s) through consultation or possibly an RFP process

Option IV		
<p>University-owned, could be restored by the University and/or for-profit corporation or social enterprise; operated on a long-term lease (99 years, x amount/year)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University maintains ownership • Revenue generator • Could consider the entire area, from the University Club to the Windsor Car Park, as one project, with new construction around the Car Park and restoration of the Ring Houses as amenities for the new development and the University Club • Possibilities of a commercial venture such as a boutique hotel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The University Club could be asked to assume the managerial role for the hotel, and be the hotel lobby, with guests given access to the club for meals as well as to the University’s fitness and recreation facilities ○ University could establish special rates for visiting speakers, scholars and artists-in-residence, alumni, Varsity teams/fans, and Homecoming Weekend guests, etc. (see The Swan Hotel and Brewery owned by the University of Victoria as one example www.SwansHotel.com; the Hotel Alma at University of Calgary https://www.ucalgary.ca/ancillary/accommodations-and-events; and Olds College Brewery https://www.oldscollege.ca/shopoc/brewery/index.html); ○ Possible interface with UAlberta North and academic programs (e.g., ALES – brewing; School of Business – hotel operations and marketing; Arts – music, visual artists, writers; Education and KSR – early childhood daycare, play programs, sport camps); ○ Students, faculty, and staff access would be reoriented toward commercial function and possibly teaching/research • Alumni could benefit with more access than currently available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be a social enterprise for the University OR • Could identify for-profit partner(s), possibly through an RFP process • More grants/donations would be possible if the University and/or a social enterprise or not-for-profit organization renovated the houses, rather than a commercial for-profit

