

Opportunities and Challenges of an Interactive Inventory

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Introduction

Building Stories (www.buildingstories.co) is an interactive inventory for historic sites in Canada. It allows for entry of recognized (designated) historic sites, as well as non-recognized historic sites. It has been developed for use by the general public, municipalities, community groups and professionals.

Partners

Building Stories was developed and is managed by a group of three partner organizations:

Heritage Resources Centre

The Heritage Resources Centre (HRC), at the University of Waterloo is a research centre that specializes in built and cultural heritage. The Centre's mission is to promote a better understanding of natural and human heritage for the improvement of planning management and public policy through research, education, and extension work.

Centre for Community Mapping

The Centre for Community Mapping (COMAP), is a not-for-profit corporation based in Waterloo, Ontario devoted to research and development, creation and deployment of strategies for socio-economic, cultural and environmental innovation based on modern information and communications technology.

Computer Systems Group

The Computer Systems Group (CSG) at the University of Waterloo is a research group that specializes in document and software engineering, and software design and implementation. The members of the group study the process of building software and then implement practical software systems to test the ideas.

Benefits

The idea for Building Stories came out of an examination of the needs of volunteers. Local volunteers have significant knowledge about their local resources. But how do you turn that knowledge and enthusiasm into community assets? Building

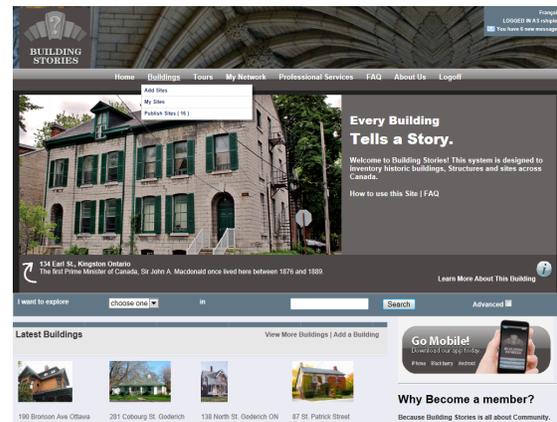
Stories provides a venue for citizens, volunteers and professionals to document their local sites in an accessible and dynamic way.

Building Stories is accessible online and via mobile applications. Anyone can add a site once they have registered, allowing for the crowd sourcing of sites that the community values. Adding sites encourages public input and participation in identifying sites of local importance. Public input is also encouraged by the fact that after an entry is created other users can add comments and documents to a listing.

The project will promote heritage tourism through the use of mobile applications that highlight local sites and tours. This would be particularly useful in municipalities hosting Doors Open Events.

Building Stories Website

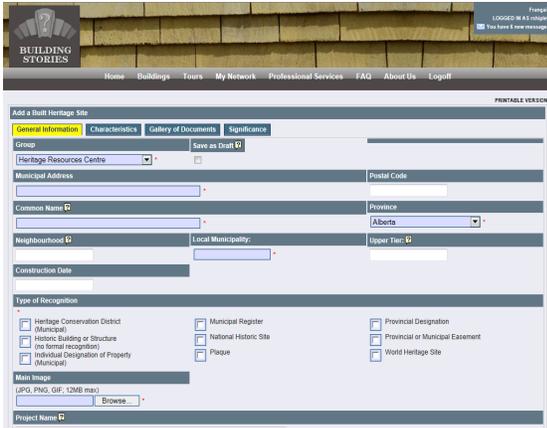
This is the Building Stories website. On the front page you can see the latest buildings entered and the current count of buildings listed on the site. To add a building first you have to register, then click "Add Site" under "Buildings."



Adding a building requires minimal information such as: the name, address, city, type of recognition and a photograph. This information will help to identify a building to those searching the site.

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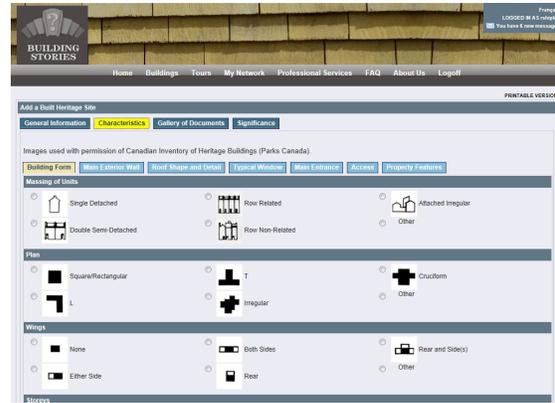
You also need to map the location of the building. This will be very useful in searching for buildings, and will be required when capturing a building using the mobile application.



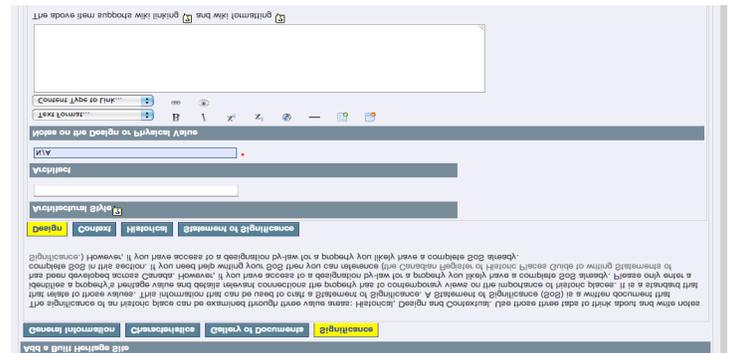
You then have a series of optional tabs where you can add more information about the site. The first tab lists characteristics through a series of icons. These icons are from the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings (CIHB). The CIHB was developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a nation-wide way of recording buildings and was aimed at non-professionals. If you go through all of these icons and select those that apply, you will essentially end up with a graphic description of your building in the final report.

You can then upload any number of documents, including:

- Current and historic photographs
- Other documents (scans of leases, inventory sheets, etc.)
- Videos
- Audio files



The final tab is where you can add any written information about a site. It is set up to meet the Ontario standards of value expressed in *Ontario Regulation 9/06*. These values include: historical value, contextual value and design value. Here you can add the style of the building, any historic owners, and written information. Each tab has its own section to list sources used. If the building is designated you also have a tab where you can add the whole Statement of Significance.



Building Stories Mobile Application

The Building Stories Mobile Application is available for iPhone, Android and BlackBerry Torch. Tablet applications are to be released at the end of 2013.

The mobile application allows you to do three things:

- Browse sites nearby: Using a phone's GPS to show the 30 closest historic sites
- Browse tours nearby: Using a phone's GPS to show nearby walking/driving/event tours
- Capture a site: Must be a registered member to capture information. It captures minimal

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information (photo, address), which can then be added to online from a computer.

provide the public with the ability to comment on and enrich the existing entries.

Successes

Building Stories has had a number of successes:

- Over 1,000 sites added from every province and territory
- Nineteen tours
- Tours and sites in French
- 308 registered members
- Commercial on Old Home Television
- Featured in: *Ontario Planning Journal*, *Globe and Mail*, *Municipal World*

Opportunities: **Examples of Community Use**

Several communities have jumped on board and have begun documenting their local history in unique ways. For instance, the Town of Goderich has not only documented existing buildings, but also those lost in the 2011 tornado. Other examples of community use include:

The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) will be listing all the heritage bridges identified during a recent inventory on their GRIN mapping system. This example shows how the site can be used as a basis for cultural mapping.

The Town of Goderich has had 103 properties added by community volunteers. This included buildings demolished after the tornado in 2011. The Victoria Opera House, once the scene of political rallies, plays, concerts and minstrel shows, sat 750 people in an auditorium on the second floor. Pictures on Building Stories show second floor banked seating exposed during demolition in 2011. They have also included information about changes. For instance, the roof of 40 West Street needed to be replaced following the 2011 tornado, causing the front facade to be heightened by three feet. The original roof began at the decorative cornice without a soffit and new brick visibly delineates the increased height.

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario is currently in discussions and looking for funding to move a volunteer project, TOBuilt, into the system to

The City of Burlington's Municipal Heritage Committee wants to create a portal into the system that will serve as a public consultation tool for their Municipal Heritage Register.

Challenges

Developing the Building Stories system has also come with a number of challenges.

Challenge: Who owns the data on the website?
Lesson learned: The copyright of material that is uploaded is kept with the sourced owner. The person who uploaded it owns all data entered into Building Stories. Building Stories has permission to display it.

Challenge: Ensuring quality information is entered.
Lesson learned: Make essential information required and posted on the front page. We have made the name, address, picture and mapping required. All entries are also reviewed for quality control.

Challenge: Entries must be reviewed, but locals often have the most knowledge.
Lesson learned: Delegated approval. Local community groups can be given permission to approve their own entries. All other entries are "public entries."

Challenge: People love the Building Stories idea, but there is a barrier to them adding properties.
Lesson learned: People need step-by-step instructions to make the process more understandable. As a result we have added a tutorial video to the website and facilitated workshops with groups and municipalities.

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