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# Laurier House

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2020





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LAURIER HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2020.

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## Foreword



Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world.

This vast network of national parks, historic sites, and marine conservation areas represent the very best that Canada has to offer and tell stories of who we are, including the history, cultures and contributions of Indigenous peoples.

Management plans are key accountability documents for the management of heritage places. They are developed through extensive consultation and articulate a long-term vision, set strategic management direction and establish objectives for Parks Canada places.

This management plan represents Parks Canada's continued commitment to protect and present Laurier House National Historic Site of Canada for the benefit of present and future generations.

Input from many dedicated individuals and organizations, including Indigenous peoples, local and regional residents, visitors and stakeholders has been invaluable in helping shape this plan.

Parks Canada will report on progress toward achieving the objectives for Laurier House National Historic Site of Canada and review this management plan every ten years, or sooner if required.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the development of this management plan for their contributions and their commitment to the future of this national treasure. I am pleased to approve the Laurier House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan.

Ron Hallman  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Parks Canada



## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*

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Andrew Campbell  
*Senior Vice-President, Operations*  
*Parks Canada*

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*Parks Canada*



## Executive Summary

Laurier House National Historic Site is located at 335 Laurier Avenue East in Ottawa, in the heritage community known as Sandy Hill. The land on which Laurier House was built is part of the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. The house is recognized for being the home of two Prime Ministers, the Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King. Laurier House is also unique for its excellent condition and its authenticity, including a collection of over 10,000 items of artwork, furnishings and personal effects.

Its location in the Nation's Capital, and recent investment in new facilities, have given Laurier House the potential to reach broad audiences, to tell diverse stories, and to showcase a world-class collection of historical objects. The key strategies and objectives presented in this management plan will contribute to this potential.

The three key strategies for the 10-year management plan cycle focus on the following:

### **Key Strategy 1: A site of great relevance to Canadians**

This strategy seeks to raise awareness of visitors, Ottawa residents, the large and diverse downtown workforce of public servants, and all Canadians about the unique destination that is Laurier House. It also aims to engage local partners and influencers to support promotion efforts and to act as proud ambassadors of the site so that it becomes known as a gem in the competitive Ottawa tourism and convention market. This strategy will not only increase the profile of the house but it will also result in increased visitation and a greater appreciation of the stories of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King. The site will also be a hub for meetings, gatherings and discussions on what it means to be Canadian, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

### **Key Strategy 2: A place to connect with the different stories of Canada**

With this strategy, Laurier House seeks to share stories of Canada, from the various perspectives of those who helped build the country as we know it today. Visitors, from different backgrounds and origins, will feel a connection to the house, its former residents and the country as they learn through meaningful experiences that link the past with the present. Outcomes of this strategy include an appeal to broader audiences, and higher satisfaction and learning among those who visit.

### **Key Strategy 3: Protection and presentation of four national treasure**

This third strategy focuses on protection and presentation of the house itself and its valued and authentic collection of historic objects. Laurier House will continue to ensure the long term safety and sustainability of the collection, and as such, remain a place where Canadians take pride in its authenticity and develop an understanding of the work of caring for such objects.





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## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

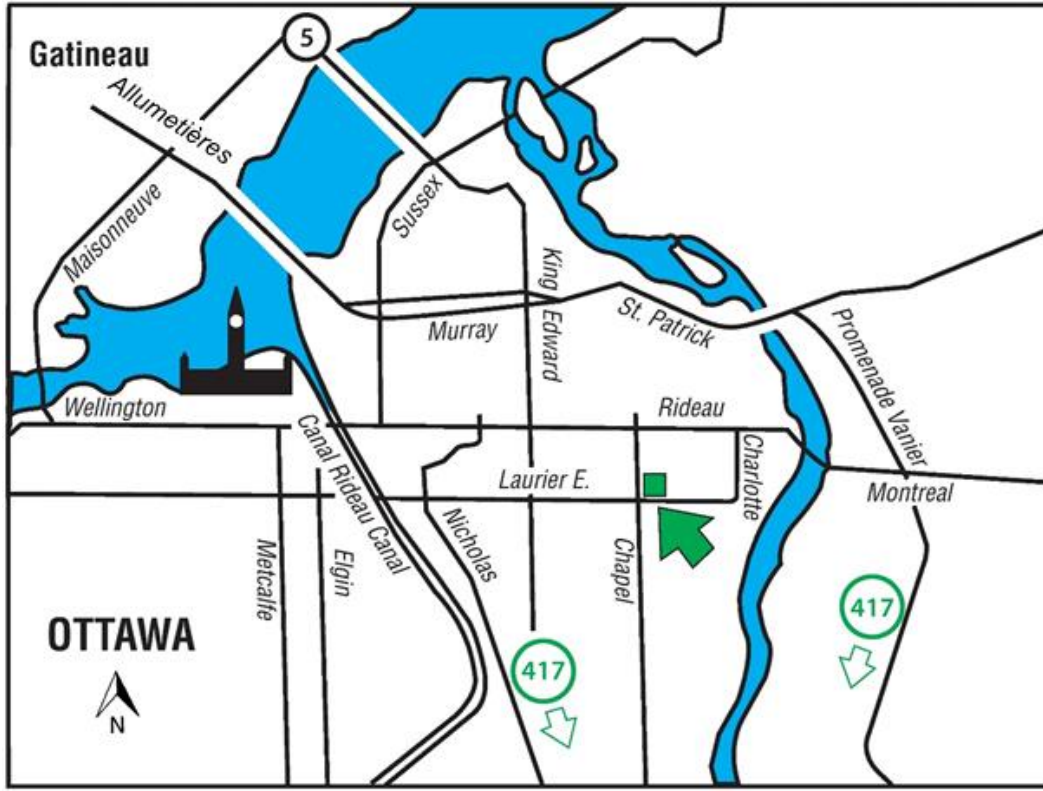
*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Laurier House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the President & Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

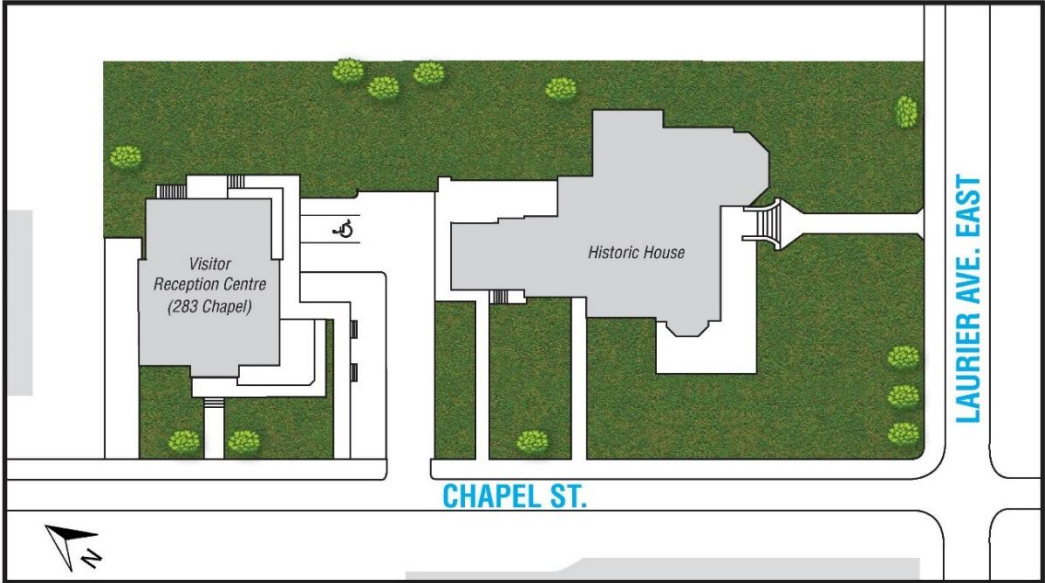
Canadians were involved in the preparation of this draft management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Laurier House National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of Laurier House National Historic Site in years to come.

Map 1: Regional Setting - Ottawa



Map 2: Laurier House National Historic Site – Site Map





## 2.0 Significance of Laurier House National Historic Site

Laurier House is located at 335 Laurier Avenue East in Ottawa, in the heritage community known as Sandy Hill. The land on which Laurier House was built is part of the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. Laurier House is unique in that it was the home of two Canadian Prime Ministers, the Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King. As such, this residence was at the centre of Canadian political life for over fifty years. Decisions made here, whether by Laurier and his colleagues around the dining room table, or by King in the solitude of his study, guided Canada through the turbulent first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The house, a three storey building in the Second Empire style, was erected in 1879 for John Leslie, an Ottawa jeweller. In 1897, the house was sold to friends of Sir Wilfrid Laurier to provide a home fitting of the status of a Prime Minister. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the first French-Canadian Prime Minister, and his wife Lady Zoé Laurier occupied the house for over twenty years. William Lyon Mackenzie King inherited the house from the Lauriers in 1921, and lived there until his death in 1950. During the years when the Liberals did not hold power in the government, Laurier House remained the home of the Leader of the Opposition. Canada did not have official residences for the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition until 1951 when Louis St. Laurent first moved into 24 Sussex Drive.

Laurier House's collection of over 10,000 items of artwork, furnishings and personal effects of the Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King make it unique in Canada. No other Parks Canada site has so many historic objects with a direct, known linkage to the site's commemorative intent. When King died, he willed Laurier House and its contents to the Nation, "in the belief that as the years pass, the citizens of Canada will take an increasing interest and pride in the preservation of a house occupied through many years by two of Canada's Prime Ministers and reminiscent of an environment that was part of their daily lives." Unlike most other historic museum homes, Laurier House has not been restored to period: it remains as it was when King died, where it is forever 1950.

In response to King's will, Parliament passed the *Laurier House Act* in 1952 to protect the site as it was. In 1956, the site was designated a place of national significance. Today, Laurier House remains the only mansion of its era that can be visited in Ottawa.

## 3.0 Planning Context

Before 1988, Laurier House was cared for by the National Archives of Canada, the National Capital Commission and the Department of Public Works. Parks Canada has administered the property since then, but the National Capital Commission retains responsibility for outdoor grounds maintenance (through the *Laurier House Act*) and the National Archives of Canada retains ownership of all archival material, photographs and artwork originating from Laurier House.

This document is the second management plan for Laurier House, with the previous plan dated 2007. Since that time, the site has evolved, with the most significant change being the addition of a new visitor centre in 2013. An investment of \$2.2 million renovated the adjacent house on Chapel Street into a visitor centre, creating a purpose-built place for welcoming visitors and orienting them to the site. The project also improved availability of staff office space and enabled greater visitor experience opportunities. The relocation

of offices from Laurier House to the visitor centre has also freed up premium space to enhance existing programs and to develop new programming within the historic house. The implementation of new and more attractive programs is already resulting in increased visitation and varied visitor experiences.

Visitor enjoyment and satisfaction have remained constant over the last years with more than 90% of visitors being satisfied with their visit. The site has introduced new programming aimed at a variety of audiences. The White Glove Tour takes guests behind the barriers to get a closer view of original artifacts. Interactive theatre programs, first-person interpretation, special events, tea on the veranda, and evening programming have also been presented.

A recent assessment of the current situation at Laurier House revealed excellent ratings for visitor experience, satisfaction, and the condition of the built assets and cultural resources. A focus on priority maintenance work and \$1.7 million from the Federal Infrastructure Investment program has improved the asset condition of exterior woodwork, roof drainage, brick replacement and repointing projects. All work was done in coordination with Federal Heritage Building Review Office (FHBRO) recommendations to preserve the architectural integrity of the building.

Some challenges identified for Laurier House to address in this management plan are the lower than desired level of visitation, considering the site's urban market in the National Capital Region; way-finding and directional signage; the safeguarding of the cultural resources including the extensive collection of over 10,000 authentic artifacts; and, ensuring inclusive access to the historic house.

Furthermore, challenges exist in connecting and engaging with partners who may have an interest in Sir Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King's stories. Controversy surrounding the legacy of Confederation, and the national policies of Laurier and King will require an appropriate, sensitive and inclusive treatment. This work can only be achieved in collaboration with First Nations and diverse communities.

## 4.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Laurier House National Historic Site in 20 years:

*Laurier House is recognized as a significant destination in the Nation's Capital where visitors can connect with two of Canada's Prime Ministers, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King, in a place that remains virtually untouched since the day King left. Parks Canada takes pride in protecting Laurier House, the only historic site in Canada with its own Act of Parliament, and showcasing its priceless authentic collection to the world.*

*Sir Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King's majestic Second Empire home immerses visitors in experiences of the sometimes quirky minutiae of a Prime Minister's everyday life, and connects them to the grandeur of their accomplishments and their imperfect legacy. The Indigenous foundations and multi-cultural heritage of Canada is portrayed to show twentieth-century Canada in a new light, and leaves visitors with a new sense of what it means to be Canadian yesterday, today and tomorrow. By connecting the past to the present, Laurier House remains relevant now and into the*

*future, keeping alive the stories and significance of influential leaders and the decisions they made.*

In the future, those who enter Laurier House will:

- Discover a friendly and inclusive meeting place where they can gather and share thoughts among historians, stakeholders, Indigenous peoples, neighbours, current and former public servants and the country's key and upcoming influencers.
- Be offered refreshed exhibits and new activities that showcase political life and key events of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with immersive hands-on experiences and interactive programs, which include access to additional rooms on the second and third floors of the historic house.
- Connect with the story of the Prime Ministers that resided there in thought-provoking ways and from many viewpoints, including Indigenous and diverse cultural perspectives that resonate with all Canadians.
- Appreciate this “jewel of Parks Canada”, a well maintained property with an extensive, authentic and well protected collection of historical objects that are presented in many ways.
- Be moved by the significance of the place and motivated to act as proud ambassadors of this unique gem of Ottawa.

## 5.0 Key Strategies

Key strategies are broad management approaches that will direct future management activities, working toward achieving the vision for Laurier House. Three key strategies frame the management direction for Laurier House for the next 10 years. Each strategy has corresponding objectives and targets. The targets are designed to measure the success in achieving objectives over the implementation period. Unless otherwise specified, all targets are meant to be achieved within the period of the plan.

### Key strategy 1: A site of great relevance to Canadians

This strategy seeks to raise awareness of visitors, Ottawa residents, the large and diverse downtown workforce of public servants, and all Canadians about the unique destination that is Laurier House. By engaging local partners and influencers to support promotion efforts and to act as proud ambassadors of the site, Laurier House becomes known as a gem in the competitive Ottawa tourism and convention market and will be a hub for meetings and gatherings. This strategy will not only increase the profile of the house but it will also result in increased visitation and a greater appreciation of the stories of the Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King, inspiring discussions on what it means to be Canadian, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

**Objective 1.1:** The Visitor Experience Strategy (September 2017) is implemented and Laurier House attracts identified targeted markets.

Targets

- Annual visitation increases by approximately 100% to 15,000 visitors by 2028, especially among target markets such as Baby Boomers, youth, and local cultural explorers.
- The number of groups visiting the site for school programs increases by 10% over the next 3 years.
- The guided tour is updated and interactive components are added by 2023, differentiating it from the self-guided offer.

**Objective 1.2:** Laurier House is recognized as a distinctive attraction in the Ottawa tourism market.

Targets

- Media coverage averages 10 or more stories annually.
- An active multi-year marketing strategy is developed by 2020.
- Through new relationships developed with influencers (travel writers, tourism partners), the site's presence on social media and blog sites increases.

**Objective 1.3:** The local community, public servants and political communities of Ottawa Centre and Ottawa-Vanier are engaged in the place, in the delivery of programming, and champion the house.

Targets

- Third party use of the site increases by 10% over the next 3 years.
- At least two new partnering agreements are made that preserve and promote the site (e.g. visitor experiences, meetings, way-finding).
- Events, discourse and debates of national significance take place every year at Laurier House—with current and former Parliamentarians, Indigenous peoples or the country's key upcoming influencers.

## Key strategy 2: A place to connect with the different stories of Canada

With this strategy, Laurier House seeks to tell the stories of Canada, from the various perspectives of those who helped shape the country as we know it today. The visitors, from different backgrounds and origins, feel a connection to the house, its former residents and the country as they learn through meaningful experiences that link the past with the present. Outcomes of this strategy include appealing to broader audiences and higher satisfaction and learning among those who visit.

**Objective 2.1:** Through research and varied media, Laurier House presents the stories of Canada and its diverse peoples such that they resonate with all visitors.

Targets

- On the next State of Site Assessment, 90% of visitors meet the target of having “learned something” during their visit.
- The number of visitors who agree or strongly agree with “this place is meaningful to me” remains stable or increases in the next Visitor Information Program (VIP).
- A robust program of evaluation and continuous improvement is put in place, ensuring that visitor experiences stay relevant, fresh and in keeping with evolving understanding of how best to serve Canadians.

**Objective 2.2:** Diversified visitor experiences integrate Indigenous perspectives and incorporate lesser known and diverse cultural perspectives.

Targets

- A framework for dialogue and engagement is initiated with Indigenous, Francophone, and multicultural groups by 2023, with the intent of developing new offers.
- The second and third floors of the house are open to the public by 2023 to facilitate new and up-to-date experiences.
- A new program for youth is established over the next 3 years that connects them to the leadership ideals of the past and what it means in today's context.

### Key strategy 3: Protection and presentation of our national treasure

This third strategy focuses on protection and presentation of the house itself and its valued and authentic collection of historic objects. Laurier House will continue to ensure the long term safety and sustainability of the collection and remain a place where Canadians take pride in its authenticity and develop an understanding of the work of caring for such objects.

**Objective 3.1:** Laurier House's artifact collection is protected and secured for the future.

Targets

- An artifact management plan and associated actions are developed by 2024.
- The historic objects are maintained in good condition in the next State of Site Assessment.

**Objective 3.2:** Laurier House showcases expertise in caring for the collection so that visitors develop an understanding of the work and an appreciation of the authenticity of the site.

Targets

- Special presentations are made annually by experts/historians on historical objects and collections management.
- By 2024, partnerships with heritage conservation or archaeology programs are explored (e.g. Library and Archives Canada, local museums, post-secondary programs).
- By 2024, the site integrates with the new Parks Canada collections facility in Gatineau for the purpose of developing opportunities to make the King and Laurier collections accessible for research, education, ceremonial and exhibit purposes.

**Objective 3.3:** The buildings and landscape are appropriately maintained to the King period.

Targets

- Parks Canada collaborates with the National Capital Commission to implement the *Historic Landscape Conservation Study (1997)* by 2028.
- The landscape features remain in good condition in the next Commemorative Integrity Assessment.

## 6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on ecosystems and on cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* prepared by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, requires a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of all plans and policy submitted to the federal Cabinet or to a Minister for approval deemed to have important positive or negative environmental effects. Strategic Environmental Assessment provides an opportunity to identify broad and unintended impacts of proposed management actions resulting from a proposed policy, plan or program, including the cumulative environmental impacts of multiple activities. Strategic environmental assessment also informs the subsequent assessment of related projects.

A strategic environmental assessment was undertaken for this management plan, and the management direction found within has been adjusted to respond to findings. The following is a summary of the environmental assessment:

The spatial scope of the SEA included areas within the boundary of Laurier House National Historic Site, and the temporal scope was a period of ten years from the date of plan approval, at which time the plan will be reviewed. The resources considered to be valued components are the cultural resource elements commemorated and protected by the historic place designation, the Classified Heritage Building (Laurier House), the artifact collection and the historic residential setting and landscape features. Visitor experience resources are also important resources considered in the assessment.

An important initiative in the management plan is the implementation of the Visitor Experience Strategy (2017). A significant positive effect of this initiative and various promotion efforts will be to expose Laurier House National Historic Site to many more visitors, improving awareness and appreciation of the historic value of the site. Any potential negative environmental effects from increased visitation can be mitigated through the use of existing policies and instruments and by carefully managing visitor use of the areas.

Project-level impact assessment will be able to mitigate any potential adverse impacts from individual projects resulting from this plan.

The management plan for Laurier House National Historic Site provides opportunities to address Federal Sustainable Development Strategy goals such as conservation of energy and water and reduction of waste; these aspects can be considered during design for facility upgrades/maintenance, special events and in day-to-day operations.

If the appropriate mitigation measures are applied, there are no significant adverse environmental effects anticipated from implementation of the management plan. The overall environmental effects of the strategies, objectives and targets of the plan are expected to be positive.