OTTAWA STONEWORK

Heritage Masonry

Brick and stone on Ottawa's designated and heritage-district homes: the Ontario Heritage Act, what three district plans say about repointing and lime mortar, and the City's Heritage Property Grant

5 Expert Answers from Masonry IQ

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Q1

Painting brick in a Centretown heritage district, allowed?

The Centretown Heritage Conservation District Plan says directly that "painting brick or stone is not appropriate." That is the plan's guidance for properties in that district.

Because Centretown is a heritage conservation district, the Ontario Heritage Act also applies. Under section 42(1), an owner in a heritage conservation district cannot alter any exterior part of a property without a heritage permit, unless the district plan describes the work as a minor alteration that is exempt. The plan's list of exempt maintenance covers repointing and foundation repairs using heritage methods; painting brick is not on that list and the plan's own language discourages it.

What that means in practice: painting the exterior brick of a Centretown property would need heritage approval from the City before the work begins. Heritage approval is separate from any building permit. If the property is also individually designated under Part IV of the Heritage Act, the designation by-law may add further conditions; check that document as well.

A few things worth confirming before going further:

- Whether the specific property is in the Centretown and Minto Park district or in a different district with its own plan
- Whether it is also individually designated, which adds Part IV consent requirements
- What the City's heritage staff say about this specific proposal, reached at heritage@ottawa.ca

If the goal is to change the appearance of the brick, a mason experienced in heritage work can walk through what the plan does allow, or whether the brick's condition points to a repair rather than a finish change.
Before committing to any scope of work on a heritage property, ask the mason what heritage approvals they expect will be needed and whether they have worked through that process with the City before.

Q2

Do I need a heritage permit to repoint in Centretown?

Centretown has a heritage conservation district plan, and whether you need a heritage permit depends on what the plan says about your specific work. For repointing, the Centretown and Minto Park Heritage Conservation District Plan (Final Draft, June 2022) lists "regular ongoing maintenance such as repointing and foundation repairs using heritage methods and materials" as work not requiring a heritage permit.

The phrase "heritage methods and materials" is the deciding factor. The plan's guidelines say lime-based mortar should be used when repointing historic brick and masonry, because cement mortar prevents moisture from escaping through the mortar and causes brick damage. The guidelines also say care should be taken to match the colour and joint profile of the mortar, and that using a mason experienced in lime-based mortar is encouraged. If the work follows those guidelines, the plan treats it as routine maintenance. If you are using a different mortar type, changing the joint profile, or doing something beyond straight repointing, the exemption may not apply and heritage approval could be required.

A few other things affect the answer. If your property is individually designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act rather than sitting within the district, the rules come from your designation by-law rather than the district plan, and you should check that document.

The plan's maintenance exemption is narrow: it covers repointing with heritage methods and materials, not cleaning, painting, replacing brick with a different size or colour, or using cement-based mortar on a historic wall. Any of those may need heritage approval.

Start by contacting the City's heritage staff at heritage@ottawa.ca. They can confirm whether your property is designated, which rules apply, and whether your planned work falls within the maintenance exemption before you hire anyone or order materials.

Q3

Is my house in an Ottawa heritage conservation district?

Only the City can confirm it. Ottawa has over 300 individually designated buildings and 20 heritage conservation districts, and the City keeps a Heritage Register that also lists some properties that are not designated.

The difference matters for masonry work:

- A property designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act needs council's written consent before an alteration likely to affect its heritage attributes. Its own designation by-law says what those attributes are.
- A property in a heritage conservation district (Part V) needs a heritage permit to alter any part of the property other than the interior, unless the district plan exempts that class of work. The Centretown and Minto Park, Wilbrod/Laurier and Daly Avenue plans, for example, list repointing and foundation repairs as regular maintenance that needs no heritage permit; the other districts' plans may differ.
- A property listed on the Register but not designated: the City says "There are no restrictions on alterations to non-designated properties listed on the Heritage Register."

Under the Act, "alter" includes to restore and repair, which is why masonry work can be caught. Heritage approval is also separate from a building permit: the City says approval under the Act "must not be construed to meet the requirements for the issuance of a building permit."

To check your property, contact the City's heritage staff at heritage@ottawa.ca with your address, and ask which category it falls in and which plan or by-law applies before you book any masonry work.

Q4

Is an Ottawa heritage approval also a building permit?

Heritage approval and a building permit are two separate things, issued under two different laws. Getting one does not satisfy the other.

Heritage approval comes under the Ontario Heritage Act. If your property is individually designated under Part IV, you need council's written consent before altering anything likely to affect the heritage attributes. If it sits in a heritage conservation district under Part V, you need a heritage permit before altering any exterior element, unless your district plan exempts the work as minor maintenance.

A building permit comes under the Building Code Act. Section 8(1) of that Act says no person shall construct without a permit, and "construct" includes material alteration or repair of a building. The City states plainly that heritage approval does not meet the requirements for a building permit.

In practice this means a masonry project on a designated property can require both approvals, each from a different City department, each with its own application. It can also require only one, or neither, depending on what the work involves. Repointing, brick replacement and stone wall repair are not listed on the City's permit-required or permit-exempt lists, so the starting point for any heritage property is to ask both departments what applies to your specific job before work begins. You can reach the City's heritage staff at heritage@ottawa.ca and the building permits office at buildingpermits@ottawa.ca.

One line worth checking in any masonry quote on a heritage property: whether matching brick or stone is included in the price, since sourcing units that meet the heritage requirement in size, colour and texture can add cost that a bare quote may not show.

Q5

When can I apply for the Ottawa heritage property grant?

Applications for the 2027 Heritage Property Grant Program are accepted from October 19 to November 30, 2026. That is the window to watch if you are planning masonry work on a designated property.

The grant is available for buildings designated under Part IV or Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act, on a matching basis, up to $15,000 for small-scale buildings and up to $35,000 for large-scale buildings. Work such as the restoration and repointing of exterior brick masonry is the kind of project the program could fund. It is not intended for regular ongoing maintenance or routine renovation, so the scope and nature of your project will matter when the

City reviews eligibility. Masonry repair may be phased over up to three years, which can help where the work is extensive.

Check eligibility with the City before you apply, since the program has its own criteria. The City's heritage staff are the right first contact: they can confirm whether your property qualifies, whether your planned work fits the program's intent, and what documentation you will need to support the application.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Stonework. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any fence project. Fences in Ottawa must meet the City's Fence By-law, and a free locate is required before digging any post hole. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawastonework.com** for the latest answers.