Welcome to Toronto City Hall
A self-guided tour
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Toronto City Hall is the seat of Toronto’s Municipal Government and is internationally recognized as an architectural masterpiece. Since its opening in 1965, Toronto City Hall has been one of Toronto’s most famous landmarks.

This self-guided tour brochure will assist you on your tour in and around Toronto City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square. Experience the unique features and various pieces of art that have been added to City Hall over the years.

Overview of Toronto City Hall

Toronto City Hall is the result of one of the largest architectural competitions ever held by a city. An international jury judged 510 submissions from 42 countries around the world. In 1958, Mayor Nathan Phillips announced the winner, Viljo Revell, an architect based in Helsinki, Finland. Construction began in 1961. Four years later, on September 13, 1965, the City held the official opening ceremony.

Viljo Revell’s design was divided into four main parts: the civic square, the podium, the convex circular council chamber and two office towers of different heights. The entire City Hall complex has a sculptural quality that makes it a striking landmark and ideal symbol of a growing city.

First Floor Features

1. Commemorative Column
2. Mural of Nails
3. Floor and Ceiling
4. Hallway Gallery
5. The scale model
6. Hall of Memory
7. Base of Council Chamber

Second Floor Features

1. Mosaic Display
2. Coat of Arms
3. Aboriginal Artwork
4. Council Chamber
   elevator access only (open to the public during council meetings)
START THE TOUR ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE ROTUNDA, INSIDE THE FRONT DOORS BY THE MURAL OF NAILS. YOU ARE WELCOME TO TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS DURING YOUR TOUR.

Commemorative column

Opposite the nail mural you will notice that Viljo Revell’s name is etched into the large support column to commemorate Revell. Sadly, the architect died of a heart attack just 10 months before the completion of his famous building. Revell’s wife attended the opening ceremonies in his honour.

Nail mural

The nail mural on the east wall is called Metropolis. Artist David Partridge (1919 – 2006) submitted the winning entry in an art competition held in 1974 to select a permanent work of art. The mural, which compliments City Hall’s architectural style, is a symbolic interpretation of a great city, or metropolis. Created from 100,000 common nails, the mural is made up of nine panels, each weighing about 180 kilograms. The circle of massed copper nails in the centre symbolizes the heart, or downtown core, of the city.

The floor and ceiling

The distinctive floor is made of Carrara marble imported from Italy, cut in Canada and laid by hand. The ceiling consists of aluminum strips that snap out of position to give maintenance staff access to wiring and other equipment.

Hallway gallery

The walls along the corridor, leading to the City Hall branch of the Toronto Public Library, display historic images of the construction of City Hall. Those interested in textile art might like to walk down the stairs (adjacent to the restaurant) to see a large embroidery on the wall at the foot of the stairs. Called Stitches in Time, the ambitious piece was presented to the City by the Toronto Stitchery Guild in 1984 to mark Toronto’s Sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary.

Walk westward past the front doors and across the foyer. You will see a scale model of Toronto on display behind plexiglass.

The scale model

Planning staff created this model of the central part of the city, viewed from the shore of Lake Ontario. This model does not represent the entire city. The boundaries are the Don River to the east, Bloor Street to the north, Dufferin Street to the west, and Lake Ontario to the south. The pink buildings are designated as historical or architecturally significant; the white buildings are non-designated; and the clear buildings were planned or proposed for the future at the time this model was created.

Behind the scale model is an oil on canvas painted in 1914 entitled Toronto in 1897. The artist is Owen Staples. Certain notable buildings that stand today can be seen in this painting – for example, the Gooderham and Worts Distillery to the east near the Don River and the Canadian National Exhibition to the southwest.

Walk to the middle part of the building beyond the 311 information desk. There you will see a massive, rounded structure that rises from a circular column set below floor level. The broad stairs in blue carpeting are part of a structure called the Hall of Memory.

The hall of memory

This feature of City Hall, while not an official war memorial, contains commemorative items related to war. In the glass case, you can see the Golden Book of Remembrance, which is inscribed with the names of 3,500 Toronto residents who died during the Second World War.
The flags flanking the display case are the Canadian Flag on the left and the Union Jack on the right. The Union Jack is included because Canada is a member of the British Commonwealth.

Each of the white plaques on the wall bears the insignia of a Canadian Armed Forces unit that has had its headquarters in Toronto at some time.

The cylinder (capped with a metal plate) that stands part way down the staircase contains a time capsule which was installed on November 7, 1962. Some of the capsule’s contents include coins, municipal handbooks, a synopsis of the City Hall design competition, the Coat of Arms for 1834 and 1962, photostatic reproductions of newspapers, books, maps and more. No opening date was designated.

**Base of Council Chamber**

The massive, rounded structure overhead is the base of the Council Chamber, where City Council holds its monthly meetings. The structure weighs 4,000 tonnes. It is supported solely by the reinforced concrete column, which measures six metres across with walls one metre thick. Its hollow core contains electrical cables and heating and air-conditioning equipment that service the Council Chamber. The column is anchored 16 metres in the bedrock beneath the building’s foundation.

**To access the second floor, walk to either the east or west curved staircases and proceed up, or take the elevator to floor 2.**

Second Floor Features

**Mosaic display**

In reception area “A”, you will see a corridor lined with a colourful mosaic of glass tiles. Called *Views to the City*, this artwork recreates the skyline of the 1960s. Copper forms that recreate the roofs of an earlier era in the city’s history are integrated with the mosaic. Artist Brian Kipping (1953-2007) created the mosaic, and sculptor-designer John McKinnon created the copper structures. This corridor leads to some of the councillors’ offices.

**City of Toronto coat of arms**

(located to the left of the Mayor’s Office)

**The Shield:** This symbolic shield represents the two towers of Toronto City Hall with the blue sky between and above the towers, which form the capital letter T.

**The Eagle:** The golden eagle is a symbol of our Aboriginal background. The eagle is known for its strength, bravery and power.

**The City Wall:** This is a symbol of the City’s responsibility to shelter and protect its people. On the wall are the symbols of
The former City of York (a York rose with green thorns), the former City of North York (a heart for the “city with a heart”) and the former Borough of East York (a York rose with gold centre).

The Intertwining Collar: The collar symbolizes added strength when working together. This is where the City’s motto “Diversity Our Strength” came from.

The Honeycomb: The honeycomb is a symbol of energy and productivity. It is hanging on the collar of the beaver in a gold hexagon shape.

The Green Alder-Leaf: An alder is the name of a tree. This is a symbol of the former City of Etobicoke, whose name means a “place where alder grows.”

The Beaver: This is a symbol of the City’s history for industry and activity. From our history, fur trading made its way to downtown, which became known as “Toronto” (the meeting place).

The Green Grass: The grass symbolizes the many parks and recreational facilities of which the City is proud.

The Bear: The bear represents strength, determination, caring and protection of its offspring. The dark colour brown represents the colour of the earth.

The Columbine Flower: This flower is a symbol of the former City of Scarborough. It is hanging on the collar of the beaver in the gold hexagon shape. The placement of the green alder-leaf and the columbine flower shows the geographic placement of Etobicoke on the west and Scarborough on the east.

The Three Rivers: This symbol represents the three rivers (Humber, Don and Rouge) which flow through the city into Lake Ontario.

Diversity Our Strength: This motto describes our new city - the joining of seven municipalities which creates added strength and the diversity of the city’s 2.6 million residents.

The Chain of Office
(located in glass case in Mayor’s reception area)
For over a thousand years, originating with the Dukes of Normandy, civic authorities have borne an official seal incorporating the arms of the authority. This seal was originally worn on a gold chain around the neck of the chief official. This “decoration” has evolved into the modern Chain of Office. Although decorative, the practice of wearing a Chain of Office is steeped in historic tradition, and is one that is followed not only by elected officials, but by the executives of civic organizations as well. Upon inauguration of a new Mayor of Toronto, the Chain of Office is placed around the Mayor’s neck and traditionally worn throughout the inauguration ceremony and inaugural meeting of Toronto City Council.

When the City of Toronto was amalgamated in 1998, the new Chain of Office incorporated medallions from the five former cities, the Borough of East York, and the regional Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto.

Aboriginal Artwork
(located right of the Mayor’s Office)
Ancestral Figure with Spirit Helpers By Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007)
Norval Morrisseau was one of Canada’s most famous and accomplished Aboriginal artists. He is revered by First Nations people for giving their legends and spiritual heritage visual form. He was a self-taught artist who debuted on the art scene in 1962. His art features bold designs outlined in thick black lines and filled in with dense, striking colours. Norval Morrisseau completed many commissions during his career, including the mural for the...
Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo ‘67 and was presented with the Order of Canada in 1978.

**COUNCIL CHAMBER**

During Council meetings, members of the public are invited to visit the Council Chamber and observe from the public gallery. The chamber is closed for security reasons during non-council days.

If you are visiting the Council Chamber during a Council session, please proceed to the small glass elevators located near the curved stairways and press C. You must be quiet while in the chamber as a meeting is taking place. (You can skip ahead to the instructions on the next page if you are not visiting the Council Chamber.)

Each month, the Mayor and 44 members of City Council meet in the Council Chamber to make decisions about the City of Toronto. The meeting usually lasts about two days. Meetings are open to the public.

The City Clerk, who sits in the centre area in front of the Mayor’s desk, is responsible for preparing Council’s agenda and minutes as well as keeping track of motions and votes.

The public seating gallery accommodates approximately 250 people and is carpeted to absorb sound. The ceiling was sprayed with acoustical plaster with fibres in it for additional sound absorption. In front of the seats are speakers so that everyone can hear the discussion taking place. The area behind the public gallery is the Media Gallery.

The chamber measures 46 metres wide and 12 metres at the highest point. It is supported solely by a circular column, and 23 pairs of concrete struts outside the windows support the roof. The ceiling weighs approximately 2032 tonnes and was made with one plywood mould. Concrete was poured into this mould and took approximately 40 days to dry.

The curved wall is called a “floating wall” and its purpose is to divide the meeting area from the Members’ Lounge. The Members’ Lounge, located on the other side of the floating wall, is a private area where members of council can discuss matters without interrupting the meeting.

If you are in the Council Chamber, proceed to elevator and press 1 for the first floor. If you are on the second floor, proceed to either of the two curved staircases that lead down to the rotunda. Walk toward the nail mural where you started the tour. Proceed outside to Nathan Phillips Square.
Nathan Phillips Square

The square was named after former Mayor Nathan Phillips, who served on Council for 36 years, eight of them as mayor. The square is a popular site for free entertainment, concerts, festivals and exhibitions, as well as a gathering place for citizens. Major features include the Archer sculpture, the Peace Garden, and the reflecting pool/skating rink. Beneath the square is one of the world’s largest underground parking garages, with space for 2,400 cars.

View of Council Chamber and Towers

Facing City Hall, you can see the rounded structure that houses the Council Chamber, with the curved towers rising on each side. The tower on the left (west) is 20 floors high. The east tower is higher, containing 27 floors. In all, there are 8,700 square metres of plate glass in City Hall. If you were to fly overhead in a plane or helicopter, you would notice that, from above, the building looks like an eye between two eyelids.

The Archer

City Hall architect Viljo Revell wanted to purchase a sculpture from his friend, the distinguished British sculptor Henry Moore, for the square at a cost of $100,000. Revell died shortly after talking to Moore, but his idea obviously did not. It sparked a great deal of controversy at the time. A private subscription fund raised the funds for the piece Moore originally titled Three-Way Piece No. 2. It was installed in 1966 and quickly gained the affection of Toronto residents and visitors who shortened its name to The Archer.

The Peace Garden

Trees and bushes in the central part of the square mark the Peace Garden. The Peace Garden opened officially in 1984 during the City’s Sesquicentennial celebrations. His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, lit the eternal flame with an ember from the Memorial for Peace at Hiroshima, and poured a vial of water into the pool from the rivers that flow through Nagasaki. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II officially dedicated the Peace Garden a month later.

The stone wall has a roof with a damaged appearance, which was created to signify conflict and evoke the theme of civilization’s frailty.

The Sundial was a gift from former Mayor Nathan Phillips to the residents of Toronto.
Engineer and geophysicist G.R. Johnson designed the sundial in consultation with City Property Commissioner H.H. Rogers and architect John C. Parkin. The bronze form rests on a cylinder of polished black granite and measures 2.4 meters.

**Reflecting Pool/Skating Rink**

This is one of the features that makes the square famous as a people place.

The shallow pool is converted to a skating rink in the winter (assisted by a chilling system in the concrete floor), making it a popular place to skate. Visitors can rent skates and use indoor change rooms.

**Freedom Arches**

Council approved the naming of the arches over the Reflecting Pool, as the “Freedom Arches” at its meeting of June 29, 1989.

A plaque was placed on the planter at the base of the south-centre Freedom Arch (on a piece of the Berlin Wall), to mark the naming of the arches as the “Freedom Arches”, in August 1991. The plaque reads:

The citizens of Toronto dedicate these arches to the millions who struggled including Canadians, to gain and defend freedom and to the tens of millions who suffered and died for the lack of it. May all that we do be worthy of them.

Only in freedom can the Human Spirit soar.

Against the Human drive for freedom nothing can long succeed.

**Churchill Statue**

(located on the grassy area at the south west corner of Nathan Phillips Square)

Sir Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister in World War II, was the first person to be offered the Freedom of the City of Toronto*, in 1958, by Mayor Nathan Phillips. The statue by Oscar Nemon was erected in 1977 with the generous financial assistance of Henry Jackman and the Jackman Family. On the 25th anniversary of the unveiling of the statue, two Toronto-based Churchill Societies commenced a fund-raising drive to improve the area around the statue with benches, trees and informational plaques. Donations were received from Canadians in six provinces and the site was re-dedicated by Mayor David Miller on June 6, 2004.

*Freedom of the City is a traditional and symbolic military ceremony whereby an individual or regiment is given permission to march into the city. In modern times it is to honour heroic service.

**Historic Neighbours**

Nathan Phillips Square is a good place to view two buildings of historic importance in Toronto. Facing east, you can see Old City Hall, the predecessor of the current City Hall. Designed by E.J. Lennox, Old City Hall opened its doors in 1899. It now houses provincial courts.

Look west and see Osgoode Hall, a legal landmark for over 170 years, home of the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Superior Court Of Justice and Ontario’s Court of Appeal.