



INTERNATIONAL ESTONIAN CENTRE

CASE FOR SUPPORT

Honouring the past. Building for the future.

ESTONIAN
CENTRE
PROJECT

EESTI
KESKUSE
PROJEKT

In the aftermath of the Second World War, when the lives of thousands of Estonians were disrupted or extinguished, and the people of our small country scattered throughout the world, renowned Estonian poet Marie Under penned a plea:

“Kas me kunagi veel oma meeli saame tarvitada rõõmu hääks?”

“Will our senses e'er again find use for joy and happiness?”

We have shown unequivocally that we can. Not only have we used our minds, we have used our hands and our hearts to rise above the gravest atrocities imaginable and build meaningful lives, many successes, much happiness. Now, the next chapter of our journey begins.

A unique set of circumstances has made prime real estate available to our community and created a once in a lifetime opportunity to establish a spectacular gathering place for Estonians today and for generations to come.

The new International Estonian Centre, to be located in the heart of downtown Toronto, Canada, is envisioned to be a vibrant, cultural hub that honours our rich heritage and embraces an exciting future.

It will be a place to gather, to celebrate, to attract our young people and to share our culture and achievements with each other and the world.

Imagine a flagship North American gathering place for Estonians from all over the world

People of Estonian descent live around the globe, and North America has been a welcome refuge where many settled and made their mark. We have flourished as teachers, architects, inventors, engineers, lawyers, medical professionals, academics, artists, writers, business leaders and skilled tradespeople.

Our forefathers and mothers taught us well: we know how to survive and thrive.

But no matter what we do in our everyday lives, there is a pull, a magnet that connects us to “eestlus” —a *fundamental sense of being Estonian*. It is a strong and constant reminder of who we are and where we come from.

Now is the time to look ahead. To think clearly and confidently about what's next. For our culture to thrive, we need to excite and engage future generations, and the new International Estonian Centre will fill this need. It will provide a warm and aesthetically pleasing setting for Estonian culture to grow and flourish and attract people of all ages.

Not only will the Centre serve the largest Estonian community in Canada, it will engage Estonians throughout North America and be a welcoming home away from home for visitors from around the globe.

The development of the International Estonian Centre represents the collective effort of four major Estonian organizations: Estonian House, Estonian Credit Union, Estonian Foundation of Canada, and Tartu College. The fact that four organizations of this magnitude are combining efforts is, in itself, a testament to the power of, and commitment to the vision.

The Centre will be located on Madison Avenue in downtown Toronto, adjacent to Tartu College, an existing and vital Estonian cultural and academic hub. Tartu College is the site of the Estonian Studies Centre and home to the future Museum of Estonians Abroad. Tartu College and the museum are members of the Bloor Street Culture Corridor, Toronto's most diverse arts and culture district—as will be the new Centre.

The Estonian community will be a strong contributor to the cultural scene in this district through its involvement in producing and presenting art, music and film events and festivals.

The Culture Corridor is also home to leading institutions such as The Royal Conservatory of Music, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Gardiner Museum, The Japan Foundation and the University of Toronto Faculty of Music. They are an integral part of a sophisticated, cosmopolitan city that embraces and encourages cultural diversity.

In addition, the close proximity of Toronto’s financial and business centres offer the possibility of future links to strengthen and grow valuable partnerships.

We need a new home

Toronto’s existing Estonian House was created in the early 1960s by Estonian immigrants. These visionaries renovated and expanded a former schoolhouse to create a beloved gathering place where children could learn the language, culture and history of Estonia and where the community could gather. We owe these past generations a huge debt of gratitude for their sacrifice and tenacity.

After 60 years, the Estonian House has come to the end of its life. Expert consultation reports show that major capital repairs and extensive renovations are needed. In fact, over the last decade, community meetings and outside experts have delivered a consistent message—that the status quo is not a sustainable option for our community. Leveraging the value of the land is the only realistic option toward developing a long-term, sustainable solution.

This time in our history presents a tremendous opportunity—to think beyond our borders and create an economically sustainable, supportive and welcoming Centre for people of Estonian descent for generations to come.

We invite you to help make this vision a reality.



Bringing the Centre to life

“This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make something significant happen to sustain the Estonian community. We need to embrace the potential this project represents. We have the chance to do something really special here.”

Alar Kongats, Architect

Award-winning, Estonian-Canadian architect Alar Kongats has developed a bold and modern design for the Centre. It integrates Toronto’s cosmopolitan flair with a distinct Nordic aesthetic. His is a modern, clean approach that uses space both beautifully and wisely. Natural, sustainable materials figure prominently in the design.

There will be ample, flexible and comfortable space for a wide range of community uses, social interactions, celebratory activities and simple, quiet contemplation.

Estonians celebrate nature, so green space is an integral part of the design. This includes public outdoor space that can be enjoyed by the community and passers-by, and a charming green roof will be ideal for private events.

This modern design approach will attract outside organizations and individuals to rent space and facilitate long-term tenancies—and help sustain the financial viability of the Centre.

The power of an Estonian village

The International Estonian Centre is envisioned to be a lively community hub—an “Eesti Keskus” or “Estonian Village.”

It will serve as a focal point for Estonian banking (the Estonian Credit Union) and offers the potential for a consulate connecting the Centre to Estonian government matters.



Very importantly, it will be a long-term, financially sustainable operation.

For people who live locally, it will be a place to enjoy a meal, take children to Estonian school, go to choir practice, attend a concert or film, hear a lecture, celebrate a life event, mourn a loss.

There is the potential for “accelerator space” where young entrepreneurs can start new businesses. We have the valuable opportunity here to leverage the works that Estonia has done to create a technology hub that encourages creative minds and builds strong educational links.

For international visitors, it will be a place to gather for celebrations and events, share experiences, catch up with long distance friends and make new connections.

And for people of all backgrounds, it will provide a valuable opportunity for the larger community to share in our history, culture and accomplishments, allowing us to give back to a community that has treated us so well for the past 60 years.

And finally, it will be a place where we can showcase to the world what Estonians have achieved together—and what is on the horizon—a powerful and lasting legacy for generations to come.

We need your help to make this happen

Construction of the International Estonian Centre is projected to be \$25 million. Expected proceeds from the sale of Toronto’s existing Estonian House will account for a substantial amount of this cost, however, additional fundraising support is required to meet the funding gap that remains.

Support from the local Toronto Estonian community, and from donors of Estonian descent in other jurisdictions, will form the cornerstones of a Capital Campaign to meet this need and make the vision a reality.

The Centre’s Campaign will offer prominent naming opportunities, providing donors with the chance to permanently and meaningfully attach their name to key elements of the building.

We invite you to get involved, to make your mark

More than ever before, the world needs more Estonia. Peace and prosperity, steadfast loyalty to our brothers and sisters, making our world a better place—this is what we share, and embody.

Join us in achieving the vision of an International Estonian Centre to preserve and promote our community and its proud heritage today, and for many tomorrows.

Find out more. Please visit: www.estoniancentre.ca Get in touch: info@estoniancentre.ca