



Heritage Vancouver

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Editor,
The Vancouver Sun

**Re: HVS response to The Vancouver Sun Editorial, August 26, 2015,
'Owners must be heard on plans to preserve heritage homes'**

The proposed First Shaughnessy Heritage Conservation Area promotes the greater public good in a balanced way

It has come to light that there is as much information as there is misinformation about the consequences of creating Heritage Conservation Areas (HCAs) in Vancouver. Though we do not have any HCAs in Vancouver, there are around 70 throughout the province. We can gather credible information from these and form opinions that do not rely solely on personal bias and vested interests. In addition to this information, the City of Vancouver commissioned a report to investigate the economic effects of creating an HCA in the First Shaughnessy District (FSD) so that an informed discussion could take place.

Much has been said about the effects of HCAs on property values as evidenced in the August 26th editorial Owners Must be Heard on plans to Preserve Heritage Homes. The main claim that the prohibition of demolition will significantly reduce market value of pre-1940 homes may seem evident to some but does not hold up when we look at the evidence. The report prepared by Coriolis Consulting for the City of Vancouver concludes that the market value would not be reduced if the incentives offered to homeowners and future buyers were used. If they are not used, they predict a modest decline of five to ten percent in a worst-case scenario.

Though we all understand the pitfalls of predicting the future we can perhaps feel more assured if we look at data that tracked the creation of other HCAs. Two reports from 2008 and 2012 (available at <https://uwaterloo.ca/heritage-resources-centre/projects-research/recent-projects>) that undertook a two-phase study of 32 well established Heritage Conservation Districts in Ontario found that "real estate values in Heritage Conservation Districts generally rise more consistently than surrounding areas."

In addition to property values, much has been made of the 1940 date as an arbitrary means to differentiate the housing stock. Once again we must look at the available information rather than succumb to speculation and unfounded opinions. As a matter of fact, the date of 1940 is actually quite reasoned as the historian Michael Kluckner explained at the first public hearing. During the Second World War, the National Resources Mobilization Act in 1940 halted construction. The fallout of this was that with the exception of conversions into rooming houses and poor quality infill in First Shaughnessy, nothing of significance was built there until the 1960s.

Finally, the sentiment that the character of First Shaughnessy would be negatively impacted by additional density is hard to sustain for two reasons. This area has a long history of multiple dwellings and the subdivision of large homes into smaller units. During the Depression years, many single family houses were converted into multiple dwellings and with the outbreak of WWII, City Council, under the War Measures Act, allowed homes to be split into smaller units. This practice continued till 1955 and it was estimated in 1957 that Multiple Dwelling Units were present in about 30% of the buildings.

Aside from the historic prevalence of a density that is present within the estate character of the area, it must be pointed out that it is not the increase in density per se that is potentially detrimental to an area but the manner in which it is increased. In this case, if the increase can maintain the estate character of the area, then it is hard to see how it would have a substantial impact. We would argue that the status quo, where housing size is allowed to increase to the point where it threatens the estate character of the area, is far more malignant to the very things that make First Shaughnessy a treasured place in Vancouver. Given what we know about our environment, it is hard to justify lower density within a larger footprint.

It bears saying that there are real estate agents who have spoken for the creation of HCAs. Though it is understandable that some real estate agents would be vocal about a projected drop in property value if they perceive a negative impact on their livelihood, we believe that if we look at the facts we can move beyond a self-interested and emotional response to this issue and start a rational discussion that balances the needs of property owners and real estate agents with those of Vancouver and its need to preserve and protect its common history through heritage.

In our minds these regulations promote the greater public good in a balanced way and it is why we support the creation of Heritage Conservation Areas in general and specifically in the First Shaughnessy District.

Javier Campos
President, Heritage Vancouver Society

Editorial: Owners must be heard on plans to preserve heritage homes

VANCOUVER SUN AUGUST 26, 2015



Vancouver city council has scheduled a second public hearing on Sept. 15 to hear public views on preserving heritage homes in First Shaughnessy. The city's proposed plan is controversial because it prohibits demolition of pre-1940 structures, and any destruction of their adjacent landscaping, thereby reducing their market value.

Photograph by: Gerry Kahrman, Vancouver Sun

A Vancouver plan to start protecting the city's residential heritage is a worthy one, as long as it does not unduly encroach on the property rights of homeowners.

City council has scheduled a second public hearing on Sept. 15 to hear public views on preserving heritage homes in First Shaughnessy. The city's proposed plan is controversial because it prohibits demolition of pre-1940 structures, and any destruction of their adjacent landscaping, thereby reducing their market value.

Buyers often want to acquire the land rather than older houses to build new. They will not pay as much for property that is encumbered by a no-demo restriction.

In effect the city's heritage-preservation proposal would unfairly create two classes of homeowners in the prosperous residential enclave: those who can fetch big prices for their property in a hot real estate market, and those who will have to take a hit on selling.

In First Shaughnessy, the restrictive provision would affect slightly more than 300 owners. But the

suspicion is it would potentially affect many more if the city uses its First Shaughnessy proposal as a template for neighbourhoods across Vancouver.

The city is proposing to compensate affected homeowners with relaxations that would allow them to develop coach houses, secondary suites and infill housing on the affected lots. But loosening those rules would not represent compensation for generally well-off people who buy into the area for its low density and the privacy the big lots afford. Why turn this special neighbourhood into another Kitsilano, with its much higher densities? one realtor at an August public hearing asked.

City Council is fully justified in tackling the issue of heritage preservation. If anything, it has waited too long to act. Demolition already has destroyed so many lovely character homes throughout Vancouver and resulted in the destruction of so many trees.

But the city also must be mindful of the rights of individual homeowners. If its method of heritage preservation is to be fully accepted by the community, it must be done in a way that preserves the value and salability of such heritage homes. It cannot introduce a measure, based on some arbitrary date, that would penalize those who have already purchased their properties not knowing they subsequently would be devalued by a municipal development restriction.

The only way to achieve fairness would be for the city to offer the affected homeowners viable development bonuses that would fully restore property values.

This might be done through density bonuses or a provision that a home could indeed be rebuilt so long as its front-facing exterior and landscaping either are retained or precisely recreated.

Affected homeowners in First Shaughnessy are in the process of organizing themselves. They deserve to be heard, and heeded.