



Heritage Vancouver Society 1020 Denman St. PO Box 47036 Denman Place, Vancouver, BC V6G 3E1

January 9, 2013

General Manager, Malcolm Bromley and Park Board Commissioners
Vancouver City Hall
453 W. 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1V4

Education Centre: VanDusen Botanical Garden

It has come to Heritage Vancouver's attention that the Education Centre at VanDusen Botanical Garden is in danger of demolition or abandonment. The Education Centre is a "forgotten jewel", a 1976 donation by forestry giant MacMillan-Bloedel intended to explain the role forests play in the province's environment and economy. Known originally as MacMillan-Bloedel Place "A Walk In The Forest", it is a unique, dramatic example of modernist architecture by architect Paul Merrick, working then as chief designer for Thompson Berwick & Pratt. Sited on the edge of a reflecting pond and partially buried in a hillside, the building appears to a passerby like an ancient temple in a deep forest. Its interior itself is a forest of magnificent, tree-like cedar columns, interspersed with the trunks of real British Columbia trees, with dioramas of natural environments flowing from one part of the space to another.

The Education Centre does not appear to be under threat because of significant maintenance issues or lack of a viable use. It is threatened by a policy that requires the removal of a building from Park Board inventory once a new building is constructed. In VanDusen's case, the new building is the new Visitor Centre. Because of cost issues during the Visitor Centre's construction, it ended up smaller than intended and the Park Board decided to retain the offices and public space in the original Floral Hall building which had been slated for demolition. According to Park Board policy some other building has to go and the only alternative seems to be the Education Centre. We understand that, according to current plans, the washrooms in the Education Centre will be retained and renovated, along with some space required for the Garden's Christmas light show, but the balance of the building will be gutted with windows removed and left exposed to the elements. It will rapidly deteriorate and become a ruin and an eyesore in one of Canada's pre-eminent and most beautiful botanical gardens. This situation raises the question of Park Board Policy regarding publicly donated property.

Given the heritage significance of this modernist building we urge the Park Board to write a Statement of Significance and present it to the City's Heritage Commission to determine the heritage value of the building before any action is undertaken.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Luxton".

Donald Luxton, President
Heritage Vancouver

CC Penny Ballem
Mayor Robertson and Members of City Council