

HERITAGE Vancouver N e w s l e t t e r



School's Out — Forever??

by Susan Boissonneault

The province's new program to assist the upgrading of older schools is certainly welcome news to those hoping to see our schools made safer in case of a seismic event. But the program's funding formula, as currently drafted, threatens heritage schools (estimated at 70) with possible demolition and replacement.

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is facing this issue head-on. The initial list of schools being considered for replacement or upgrading includes two of Vancouver's finest heritage educational buildings — Strathcona Elementary School and Kitsilano High School. While both schools are on the Heritage Register, their futures are still uncertain: the Ministry of Education's blind formula, which the VSB must apply, puts a finite price tag on the financial value of these significant cultural institutions and therefore may not recognize their significant heritage value.

Both Strathcona and Kits were built to accommodate rapid population growth. The oldest surviving portion of Strathcona School dates back to 1897. New construction and renovations — in 1904, 1915, and 1929 — barely kept pace with the growing student population. The student community has always reflected the dynamic multi-cultural composition of its immediate area and of the larger city. In the 1930s, for example, students included Japanese (nearly half the student population), Chinese, Italians, Jews, Scandinavians, Russians, Ukrainians and Blacks. To the west, Kitsilano High School was constructed in 1917, as expansion of the streetcar line from Granville Bridge along 4th Avenue to Alma Street caused a population boom. Kits also tried

to keep pace with rapid population increase, through renovations to the original structure and additions. Unfortunately, one unforeseen consequence of this process was the loss of murals created by Order of Canada artist Jack Shadbolt. An art teacher at Kits in the 1930s, the beginning years of his illustrious career, Shadbolt directed students in the painting of two murals. The one, above the entrance to the school auditorium, was inspired by West Coast First Nations art, while the second depicted students at work on their art. Sometime in the 1940s or 50s, however, as increasing demand for space forced renovations within the school, the murals were simply painted over, buried *in* the walls. For years, rumors persisted that Kits High housed artistic treasures, but no one knew where. Luckily, in June 2005, former student Thelma Goudron, whose late husband had been a Shadbolt pupil, found the proof: while working on a project to help celebrate 'Kitsilano 100', she found five 1930s photographs showing Mr. Shadbolt supervising his mural-painting students.

Children's safety at school is a complex and extremely important issue. As the VSB moves ahead with its plans for seismic upgrading, many schools may be at risk of demolition. The current formula weighs the costs between replacing the buildings against the cost of undertaking seismic upgrades. If the cost is more to repair than replace, then, according to this formula, the building should be demolished regardless of the

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ADVOCACY UPDATE

Over the summer, HV has continued to fight on behalf of the Top Ten sites and we can report hopeful progress with regard to Burrard Bridge (the July 19 Council decision to reassign 2 lanes for a 6-month trial period) and Charles Dickens School (the July 21 Council request to staff to explore options with VSB to retain the original building).

As well, we have responded with alacrity to threats to new sites and contributed to the resolution of one of these new issues. Below are four recent letters written to the City's Senior Heritage Planner.



credit: Richard Keate

Damaged Houses: 2103, 2111 MacDonald; 2818 W. 5th Avenue

"We urge the City to explore all possible means to avoid demolition of this important cluster of Craftsman-style houses. 2107 MacDonald (B-listed) was removed after the fire, presumably as unsafe. We commend the City for retaining the remaining structures until an assessment can be made. Fire destroyed the roofs of all the houses and parts of the upper floors are seriously damaged. But cursory inspection suggests that the main and ground levels are largely intact.

We understand that 2103 MacDonald was built as a "show home." It is listed a 'B' on the Register. Much of the exterior architectural detail remains, and damaged materials could be replicated based on surviving materials and photographic records. 2818 W. 5th Avenue, listed as a 'C' on the Register, is across the lane from the other houses, and sustained the greatest damage on its flanking side. 2111 MacDonald is not listed, likely due to insensitive

renovations such as the exterior stucco and aluminum frame windows.

The structural integrity of these houses, and their potential for rehabilitation, needs to be sensitively assessed. We trust that the City will afford all possible assistance and encouragement to the owners to rebuild our heritage."



credit: Penny Street

Salsbury Drive houses, built 1907

Salsbury Garden

Editor's note: At its meeting of August 24, the Board of Variance "quashed" an earlier decision to approve a development permit for the site. The following letter sent August 7 by Heritage Vancouver to the City Heritage Department, the Parks Board, the media, etc. contributed to this success.

"We wish to register our concern regarding the proposed demolition of this endangered site. The site (66' x 122'), called "Salsbury Garden" by the neighbourhood, is at the southwest corner of Napier St. and Salsbury Drive and includes two historic houses (No.1117 & No.1121) and an extraordinary heritage garden/forest. The two small working-class homes, built in 1907, were probably the first houses built on this part of Salsbury Drive. As such, they document an important period in the city's socio-economic history, serving as examples of the small, utilitarian workers' cottages common in Vancouver's early days. Although the houses are rundown, some of their original fittings remain intact; neglect has acted as a form of preservation.

What makes the site particularly significant is the close to 100-year-old garden, which presently occupies 60% of the site. In the early 1900s, Charles Reid bought the corner properties, a rectangle measuring 122 feet (on Salsbury) by 99 feet (on Napier). He then deliberately placed the two Salsbury houses in the southeast corner

and the Napier Street house on the western boundary of his property in order to provide space for a large (66-foot square) corner garden in between. Arthur Greenius, who bought the property from Reid in 1914 and lived at 1760 Napier until the 1950s, was committed to Reid's garden vision and planted many unusual trees such as a California redwood, a giant butternut tree and a California spicebush. The growth of the garden continued undisturbed through the next 80+ years, even though Dr. Greenius was the last person to own the entire property. Throughout the century, Salsbury Garden had a special place and value within the community.



credit: Greenius family

Salsbury Garden 1920s



credit: Penny Street

Salsbury Garden 2005

Now, one hundred years later, the sale of the Salsbury properties and the current development application threatens this heritage. Since the property has absolutely no heritage protection, the new owner, developer Richard Niebuhr, wishes to obliterate the existing buildings and garden treasures with new construction.

Once again, the vulnerability of our heritage is exposed. Like so many areas in Vancouver — and particularly in East Vancouver — this neighbour-

hood is sadly underrepresented in the Heritage Register. For example, most (90%) of the 54 houses with addresses on Salsbury Drive between 1st Ave. and Venables, were built before WWI; none is on the Heritage Register. Little cottages such as those on the site are a fast-disappearing facet of our historical record. Even more significant is the potential loss of a unique development configuration that intentionally created what might be termed a historic ‘vernacular’ landscape. This configuration/landscape is cherished by the community, but the 1986 Register, which focuses on individual buildings and architectural merit, is woefully under-equipped to evaluate its significance or to provide mechanisms for retention. We note City Council’s recent decision to update the Register, and anticipate that ways to recognize and protect sites such as these in the future will be considered. In light of this, we urge the City to explore creative alternatives for the preservation of this unique resource.

By way of context, this site is located in the historic Grandview neighbourhood. Kurrajong, an A-category Heritage Register building, sits kitty-corner from Salsbury Garden. Two churches, the Fiji Shiv Mandir Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre (built originally as a Presbyterian Church), on the northwest corner of Napier and Salsbury, and St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, are both on the Heritage Register. The manse of the Catholic Church, initially a private home, is also on the Register. Salsbury Garden forms an integral part of this historic community.

There is significant public support for preservation of the site. The community-based group, “Save Salsbury Garden” (SSG), has a vision for the site as a public space and educational centre; the 1907 houses would remain and be restored to serve a critical function in the centre. The SSG group enjoys support from both its community and from City officials; members have had positive meetings with several city councillors, the Director of Planning, and Parks Board officials. The City has made two offers to buy the site back but the owner has so far declined.”



credit: Richard Keate

**2936 W. 4th Avenue
 (“Black Swan Records”)**

“We wish to add our voice to others in expressing concern about the imminent loss of this landmark Kitsilano structure. Remarkably, this Edwardian commercial building is not listed on the Register, a fact that underlines yet again the shortcomings of the present Register document.

It is interesting to note that a mid-block brick-faced building of the same era (2904-2906 W. 4th, aka Topanga Café) is listed as a ‘C’. The ‘Black Swan’ building at 2936 is arguably superior architecturally (albeit a frame structure), and has greater prominence as a corner building. Moreover, 2936 W. 4th has a storied history in the neighbourhood (as Black Swan Records) and is a valued heritage resource in the community.

We urge the City to exhaust all avenues to retain this valuable resource — one of the last is its kind on 4th Avenue. At the same time, we look forward to upcoming discussions to ensure a reworked Register that fully reflects community values in heritage preservation.”



credit: Richard Keate

2834 Spruce Street

“We understand that this Craftsman House — listed as a B on the Heritage Register — is slated for demolition due

to redevelopment. We commend the efforts of city staff to find solutions to incorporate the house, but also wish to express concern about the obvious — the impending loss of a highly evaluated heritage resource.

In our view, the loss of a heritage resource — particularly a ‘B’ — should be a rare, if ever, event. But in Vancouver’s robust development climate, demolition is an ever-frequent result. Our heritage management tools, developed in the 1980s in a very different context, are no longer sufficient. As part of the City’s review of the Register, it will be extremely important to develop new, creative and powerful tools for heritage preservation, and to challenge some of our assumptions about how this might be accomplished. We look forward to the discussion.

In the meantime, we suggest that the City consider ways of publicizing the availability of homes slated for demolition. House-moving companies such as Nickel Bros. should routinely be made aware of buildings that could be moved off site for potential buyers.”

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other values associated with the building. This compromises the position of the individual school boards, who may want to preserve individual heritage buildings (and their art) but lack the resources to make up funding shortfalls.

Heritage Vancouver is committed to working cooperatively on this complex challenge; we welcome the decision by City Council, at its 21 July meeting, to direct staff to find a way to achieve a balance between the need for safe schools and broader community goals and tight budgets.

For more about schools, please join us at the Vancouver Museum on Thursday September 15 at 7:30 pm. There will be a panel of representatives from the VSB, Schools Trustees, Friends for Seismic School Safety and the Heritage Society of BC. We’ll explore the implications of seismic policy for the upgrading — or demolition and replacement of — significant heritage schools.

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members

Heritage Vancouver is at the cross roads — please join us to begin the next exciting stage in our development!

Our Society was founded in 1991 and incorporated the following year. Since that time we have grown and matured as a heritage advocacy and educational organization that works hard and gets taken seriously. In order to further our mandate, the Board of Directors consulted with you, our members, reviewed our mission and mandate, and identified new strategic initiatives — in particular a new fundraising initiative. We wish to launch our renewed vision and mandate at the 2005 AGM and ask you to join us as we take bold steps in new directions.

Sincerely



Don Luxton
President
Heritage Vancouver

Heritage Vancouver 2005 AGM

Thursday, October 20th, from 7:30 to 9:30
Vancouver Museum - Joyce Walley Centre
Refreshments will be served.

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