

HERITAGE Vancouver Newsletter



HOORAY! FOR HERITAGE

You win some, you lose some — but when we win, we like to win big. Since our last newsletter, two of the HV Top Ten Endangered Sites — the Evergreen Building and the Kogawa House — have been retired from the list with full honours.

On April 18, the Evergreen became an officially designated heritage property, and the owner acquired 177,000 square feet of bonus density for transfer to other projects. A month later, long-time Evergreen owner John Laxton sold the property to a BC government employees pension plan. Under management of the Bentall Capital Group, the Evergreen will continue to operate as an office building with full preservation of its heritage character. Laxton himself intends to retain his law and development firm in the top floor.

On May 31, The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC) became official owners of the Kogawa House. Donations from 550 people around the globe and one last-minute

corporate donation of about \$500,000 made it possible. Many schoolchildren took up the challenge of fund-raising to save the house and one Grade 3 student wrote: “It’s not like anything I’ve done before. It changed every single way I think about every single thing. I think saving Kogawa House is a great way of learning about history. We learned about how people were discriminated against and how we should think more about other people’s feelings. I felt very proud of myself when I heard that the Kogawa House was saved.”

Heritage Vancouver worked closely with other community groups to ensure that the public was aware of the heritage significance of these sites. Once again we’ve shown what a powerful advocacy tool the Top Ten list can be.

Congratulations to the many others who fought tirelessly to save these sites. Now let’s go save some more!

BLACK SWAN

We continue to hope that the City will be able to save the Black Swan, albeit not in its original location. When we placed the site — yet another of many Vancouver buildings that has no heritage protection whatsoever — on our 2006 list of Endangered Sites, its future was precarious. City Council had, on one hand, unanimously approved a development permit to allow the developer, Orca West, to demolish and replace the existing building. Yet, at the same time, the City looked for ways to save the building through relocation. In early February, B.C. Hydro offered a potential site it owns at West 10th and Highbury, just west of Alma. A rectifier station is located at the rear of the property, but the balance of the property is undeveloped. A heritage revitalization agreement would allow BC Hydro to legally subdivide and sell the front portion of the lot, on which a reassembled Black Swan would be placed.

The efforts to relocate the Black Swan continue: on April 20, Council voted unanimously to support in principle the heritage revitalization agreement. The 'presentation' of the building would remain the same, as it would sit on the southeast corner of the street. It would continue to house businesses on the ground floor and residents on the second. The purchaser would disassemble the Black Swan building. On May 19th, B.C. Hydro entered a conditional purchase and sales agreement for the Highbury site. (As part of the agreement, the purchaser's identity is confidential.) B.C. Hydro has agreed to allow the purchaser to store it at its Sperling Substation near King Edward and Arbutus until the new location is ready to receive it.

In less pressing circumstances, it might have been possible to move the existing structure relatively intact, perhaps in segments. However, Orca West, having delayed its project, is anxious to begin site clearance. Lacking additional time to secure the utility relocation permits required to move a structure intact along city streets, the building must be disassem-

bled. We understand that the process may essentially be a salvage operation, only saving portions of upper floor exterior walls, architectural details, and a few ground floor elements such as siding and transoms. Accordingly, the building code would treat the rebuilt structure as 'new construction', requiring concrete main floor construction. This means that the Black Swan will essentially be a new building wearing some of its old feathers. This is not the best of outcomes, but the best of a difficult situation. Kudos to the Kitsilano neighbours for their efforts and to City Council and staff for doing their best under tough circumstances.

BURRARD BRIDGE

A brief update on the proposed Burrard Bridge upgrades. The City's request for proposals — the intent of which is to widen the bridge's sidewalks by constructing outriggers — will go out this month with design proposals expected mid-2007. Further time will be required for Council to choose the design and approve funding.

Heritage Vancouver has vocally and consistently opposed the outrigger solution as unacceptably destructive of the bridge's architecture and appearance, and has supported many other options to improve pedestrian and cyclist capacity on the bridge. We are also convinced that steeply rising construction costs will ensure that, by the time a decision is made, the price of the outriggers will be astronomical — many times the original estimate.

FORMER IMPERIAL BANK OF CANADA (CIBC), 586 GRANVILLE STREET

The Imperial Bank of Canada building, built in 1958 by McCarter & Nairne (who also designed the Marine Building), is an important Modernist work of substantial architectural merit. Sadly, because it was not on the Heritage Register, City Heritage Staff were only asked to comment because it was on the Vancouver Heritage Interiors Project (1996) and the "Modern Landmarks Inventory". A development permit approved in

January allowed the building's unprotected exterior to be quickly and radically altered. Approval of a new corner entry resulted in removal of granite-cladding from exterior columns, a replacement of the original ground floor plate glass windows and major alterations to the canopy.

In late April, when the developer proposed yet further violation of the building, Heritage Vancouver joined the fray. A proposal to extend the mezzanine essentially meant the insertion of an additional floor. HV argued that the "soaring lines of the space" of the earlier banking hall, one of the building's key character defining elements, would be destroyed and the historical references to the building's use as a banking hall erased. As well, the celebrated mural by artist B.C. Binning would no longer be visible from the ground floor. The good news is that this second application has been abandoned — in part due to our vigilance.



FIREHALL No 15

Every year we agonize over which sites must have the dubious honour of being on our Top Ten list. This year, we thought that Firehall No 15 — the last remaining Edwardian firehall in the city — had acquired enough support for inclusion on the Heritage Register that we could retire it from our list. Alas, alack, we underestimated the uncertainty of its fate: in February, when Council asked for an update, City Facilities Staff — who disagreed with the Heritage Commission's May 2005 recommendation to include the Firehall in the Heritage Register — and the Vancouver Fire Department decided to take a recommendation directly to Council without stopping along the way for community consultation. Claiming that the heritage assess-

ment gave no “compelling reason for the merits of this building and retention.” Facilities staff recommended replacing Firehall No 15 at the 18 May Council meeting, Renfrew-Collingwood community spokespeople, however, presented a very different argument to Council, clearly articulating their wish to retain the Firehall in situ and to readapt it to other uses. Fire Fighters’ Union Local 18 formally expressed its interest in developing the “property in a fashion that would be conducive to a better community while accomplishing the retention of the heritage aspects of the building. The union proposes such uses as a museum, a training centre, and a union office.” Both the Heritage Commission and Heritage Vancouver sent strongly worded letters of support for these community proposals.

Council voted unanimously to defer its decision for 60 days, “to allow for public consultation on options to retain the existing fire hall.” It instructed staff “to report back on alternate locations to either build a new station or to relocate the existing Firehall structure.” The first public meeting took place on June 10; an overflow crowd strongly support retention of the firehall in the existing site with the hall preserved and rehabilitated for community uses. Participants noted that, as there are so few heritage buildings remaining in their neighbourhood, this remaining landmark must be saved.

July 18 will come all too quickly, and we’ll be watching the debate closely.

GASTOWN/WHITECAPS STADIUM

The debate about a downtown soccer stadium started October 2005 when the Whitecaps organization submitted a proposal to build a 15,000-seat outdoor venue (with expansion capacity to 30,000) over the CP rail yards directly north of Gastown. It gathered steam as interest groups, residents and government realized that the stadium proposal was but one small part of a much larger site acquisition that would ultimately see development on top of a platform above the entire rail right of way from the train station in the west to

Main Street in the east.

There is reason for cautious optimism: the Gastown Neighbourhood Coalition, GHAPAC and the Vancouver Heritage Commission all articulated their concerns that the stadium proposal would dwarf and destroy the heritage character of the surrounding neighbourhood. On June 27 City Council will review a strongly worded report from the Director of Planning. It recommends that resolution of five “fundamental” issues must precede approval of any proposals for the area, and that it is imperative that the stadium not be considered in isolation, but as part of the overall Central Waterfront Hub & Rail Lands Study planning.

SALSBURY GARDEN

In late 2005, developers Richard and James Niebuhr appealed to BC Supreme Court to overturn the Board of Variance decision on the ground that the Board exceeded its jurisdiction. The first day of the hearing was on May 31 and will continue in July. The issue may not be resolved for a couple more months.

THE 2400 MOTEL

Our concern about this City-owned site increases. The documents posted to the Norquay Village Neighbourhood Centre website, while they recognize that it is a “special site,” make no mention of its special heritage elements. The intent of the special planning process for the site, which is to run from June 2006 to February 2007, is that “the site, if redeveloped, should include new, needed commercial and/or residential uses, after significant public consultation.”

We have made our concerns about the seriously endangered state of this site very clear to the City’s Planning Department. Unless its heritage significance is recognized, it will very likely be razed or seriously compromised to accommodate new development that maximizes the City’s return on its investment. The site deserves better: “The 2400 Motel represents an original example of 1940s motor inn/motor court architecture. As the late 1940s

and 50s ushered in an age of unprecedented mobility, auto-courts sprung up across North America to capture the market for highway-oriented accommodation. Built in 1946, this site is a Kingsway icon, and is simply the best remaining motor court in the Lower Mainland. Typical of the early motels, the 2400 was built as a cluster of cottages on a lawn around a central office, with a freestanding roadside neon sign to attract passing motorists. An early example of the trend to modernism, the Motel’s ‘streamline moderne’ design — most notable in its flat-roofed office building — evokes the new post-war world of speed and personal mobility.

The 2400 Motel has been scrupulously maintained over the years and is virtually unchanged. While motor courts across North America have fallen victim to the wreckers’ ball, a recent trend has seen some of the better examples upgraded and restored as sought-after tourist destinations filling a growing niche demand for unique accommodation and non-generic travel experiences.

We can envision a number of ways that the economics of heritage retention could be enhanced through creative applications of density on this site, or by transfers of density to other sites in the Norquay planning area. It is therefore imperative that the 2400 Motel be evaluated without delay. As City Council has recently approved in principle the proposed VHR upgrade, the 2400 would be an ideal pilot for application of a community values-based process.”

VOGUE THEATRE

HV continues to work behind the scenes to build an arts and heritage coalition to save the Vogue as a theatre. The Vancouver International Film Festival, the VanCity Theatre, and Heritage Canada Foundation have all written letters to Mayor Sullivan and the Council. In response to criticism, Gibbons Hospitality has dropped plans to convert the stage to a kitchen, but continues to press forward with its ‘supper club’ concept.

HERITAGE VANCOUVER PRESENTS

Sunday, July 9th, 10 am.

Walking Tour: *Commercial Drive & Grandview/Woodlands Neighbourhood* with Bruce Macdonald.

Meeting Place: TBA.

Non-Members \$15.00; Members \$10.00.

Join author and historian Bruce Macdonald for an enlightening walk through this historic neighbourhood.

Included will be a visit to one of our Top Ten Endangered Sites — Salsbury Gardens. Further details soon!

Thursday, August 17th, 7.30 pm.

Summer Surprise: *An Evening of Sleuthing*. Vancouver Art Gallery. Robson St. steps. \$20 (includes beer and pizza) Registration required: info@heritagevancouver.org or call 604 254-9411 and leave a message. We'll call back to confirm.

Join Heritage Vancouver for a fun evening of sleuthing. Be part of a Heritage Vancouver sleuthing team or make up one of your own. Pick up your clues and a map at the Art Gallery and head out on an adventure to identify downtown heritage sites. This event is a challenge for the body, a challenge for the mind, fun for the spirit and has a reward at the end. The final clue leads to a heritage brewery where, over a quaff and pizza, our heritage experts will dazzle you with their stories of the many sites you have discovered.

Thursday, September 14th, 7.30 pm.

Panel Discussion re: *The Burrard Bridge*: Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut St. Non-Members \$5.00; Members Free.

Thursday, October 19th, 7.30 pm.

Heritage Vancouver Annual General Meeting. Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut Street. Non-Members by Donation; Members Free.

Thursday, November 16th, 7.30 pm.

St. Paul's Hospital: *Should I Stay or Should I Go Now?* Panel Discussion Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut St. Non-Members \$5.00; Members Free The potential move of St. Paul's Hospital from the downtown core — where it has been located since 1894 — has been a matter of keen community interest. Also at stake is the historic St. Paul's Hospital building itself, which dates back to 1913. Join Heritage Vancouver for a panel discussion of the future of St. Paul's Hospital.

Thursday, December 7th, 5.30-7.30 pm.

HV's Annual Christmas Party at Roedde House. Non-Members \$5.00; Members Free Transport back to a Victorian Christmas, set in the historic Roedde House Museum in Vancouver's West End. Sip hot mulled cider and munch on your favourite holiday goodies. Additional details will be posted.

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