

newsletter

HERITAGE VANCOUVER SOCIETY
PO BOX 3336, MAIN POST OFFICE
VANCOUVER BC V6B 3Y3
604 254 9411
info@heritagevancouver.org
www.heritagevancouver.org

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2008 TOP TEN ENDANGERED SITES

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Welcome to the 8th Annual Heritage Vancouver Top Ten Endangered Sites

Released during National Heritage Week, our Top Ten list is anticipated by many as the 'word on the street' for the city's threatened heritage resources. The list includes sites in danger of demolition or serious alteration, or in some case horrible neglect. Each of these sites also illustrates a larger pattern of danger to heritage, based on inaction, conflicting agendas or bureaucratic policies. Our list of ten cannot begin to do justice to the scores of heritage buildings in harm's way: the explosive real-estate development market and the rising costs of construction are exerting mounting pressure on our vulnerable historic places.

Since the list was released in February, we have already seen the situation on some of these sites shift radically. Several buildings have already been demolished in the Zero Block of West Hastings Street, further eroding its heritage character. Meanwhile, opportunities for preservation are being missed because the City has frozen density transfers pending the outcome of a current policy review. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the current heritage incentives are inadequate to address the economic challenges of heritage rehabilitation. The promised Heritage Register

Upgrade gave us a glimmer of hope, but it's now on the back burner indefinitely until some of the issues regarding incentives are addressed. Many sites may not survive the wait, and others have already bit the dust, most notably the destruction of the Moderne landmark 'Fido' building (1948 Colliers Showroom) at 450 West Georgia. Among repeat sites from last year's list are the Burrard Bridge, and Vancouver's schools, headed one-by-one for demolition as part of a seismic 'upgrade' program. And no surprise, a new host of landmarks continue to be endangered, including the houses of lower Mt. Pleasant, the Dal Grauer Substation, the York Theatre, and Arthur Erickson's internationally-renowned Robson Square.

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BURRARD BRIDGE

Constructed 1932



Now over 75 years old, the venerable Burrard Bridge is one of Vancouver's true landmarks.

This stunning structure, the ceremonial entrance to both downtown Vancouver and False Creek, has been evaluated as an 'A' on the City's Heritage Register. The Burrard Bridge, with its sculptural details, including intricately decorated towers and entrance pylons with flaming torches - a tribute to Canadian World War I Prisoners of War - is one of the only pure Art Deco bridges in the world. Opened in 1932, the bridge has remained substantially intact, except for the removal of its original light fixtures.

The current City of Vancouver's re-purposing initiatives threaten to significantly compromise the Bridge's original design. For years the City has been seeking ways to better accommodate cyclists; many options have been on the table including lane closures, improved use of the Granville Street Bridge, a separate cyclist and pedestrian bridge, and a bikeway under the bridge. Despite Heritage Vancouver's support for all these options, the City has remained steadfast in selecting the widening of the Burrard Bridge at the roadbed level as its only option. Heritage Vancouver, Heritage Canada and worldwide Art Deco organizations have consistently spoken with one voice in opposing this option.

As predicted, the cost of the proposed outriggers was finally released – over \$60 million. This enormous increase was clearly predictable (we did!) and still does not include the potential cost of the bridgehead improvements. Paralyzed by the reality of the costs, City Council could not proceed, and the decision-making process is again stalled. There is no clarity on what steps the City will take next, and any action prior to November's election is unlikely. This leave the Burrard Bridge in limbo again – the same state it has been since the early 1990s. Heritage Vancouver urges the City of Vancouver to once and for all stop thinking about a widening of the Burrard Bridge and get on with a meaningful restoration of this City landmark!

Vancouver Schools – General Gordon Elementary & many others

1911-13 & 1922-25; 2896 West 6th Avenue



One of the most striking elements of Vancouver's Heritage landscape is the sprinkling of landmark heritage schools throughout the city.

Each has its own unique story, harbours shared memories and is cherished by members of its community. Many of these treasured schools will soon be disappearing – General Gordon Elementary and Dickens are both slated for demolition in 2008 with more to come in the near future.

General Gordon's history is as old as the neighbourhood. The original section was built at West 6th and Bayswater in 1911-13, then the western edge of residential development. The red and yellow brick building — an example of Edwardian classicism in school design — features pediment-like gables, decorative brick quoins, Renaissance-inspired pilasters and multiple-paned wood-sash windows all contributing to the school's 'B' listing on the Heritage Register and its importance as a neighbourhood landmark.

Why all of a sudden are many of Vancouver's heritage schools in the endangered category?

The province has initiated a seismic mitigation program which doesn't distinguish between heritage and non-heritage buildings. Unfortunately its funding formula favours new construction over rehabilitation. It has become abundantly clear that the new schools will have less community and amenity space and shorter life spans. They have none of the landmark status or architectural character of what they are replacing.

Heritage Vancouver is involved with a number of community groups in an initiative to bring the Provincial Government, the Vancouver School Board and the City of Vancouver together to find a solution to achieve the two important goals of seismic mitigation and heritage preservation, which are not mutually exclusive.

Robson Square Complex

1973-79; 800 Hornby Street



Robson Square is home to the Arthur Erickson-designed provincial buildings that put Vancouver on the map.

Built over six years starting in 1973, Erickson's design for the Three-Block Project known as Robson Square employs concrete and glass as the predominant building materials – the forms are simple and rectilinear, employing verticals, horizontals and terraces, softened by the pools and green spaces designed by renowned landscape architect Cornelia Oberlander.

Envisioned by Erickson and Oberlander as a "linear urban park, importing nature into the city" and pioneering one of the first major uses of green roofs in North America, Robson Square won the prestigious American Society of Landscape Architects President's Award of Excellence in 1979, where the jury commented on the "extraordinary integration of landscape architecture with architecture—consistent and coherent." The complex is internationally recognized as a masterwork of modernist architecture.

The Provincial Government recently announced plans to build a giant wooden "clamshell" spanning Robson St. between Hornby and Howe. The clam is to provide a covered 'live site' showcasing BC wood products during 2010 Olympics and remain after the Games as a permanent 'legacy'. The massive wooden arch, high enough for buses to pass under, would have an enormous physical and visual impact not only on Robson Square, but also on the Art Gallery, a National Historic site. The proposal bears no relationship to the form, material or design ethos of Arthur Erickson's architectural masterpiece. This would be an urban design mistake of epic proportion.

Heritage Vancouver urges the Provincial Government to provide a more architecturally sensitive and functionally appropriate open space for the 2010 Olympics on the Georgia Street side of the Vancouver Art Gallery. This is the only portion of Mr. Erickson's three-block-long scheme that was never completed. His concept was for a largely hard-surfaced plaza — adapting itself readily to multiple uses, ranging from concerts to demonstrations to ethnic fairs. The completion of this plaza would be a fitting legacy to the Olympics and to Arthur Erickson.

Historic Areas: Gastown, Hastings, Chinatown



In 1971, The Province designated Gastown and Chinatown as "Historic Areas". In 2002 the city adopted the Gastown Heritage Management Plan to retain the heritage character of Gastown including the distinctive sawtooth streetscape profiles and height limits of 75 feet.

To defray some of the costs of restoration, building owners were given incentives - later extended to Chinatown and Hastings Street.

One of the incentives "the transfer of density to sites outside of the Historic Areas" proved to be hugely successful – apparently too successful for the City of Vancouver – and a freeze was placed on this very effective restoration tool in 2007.

The city has since announced a Historic Precinct Height Study to identify specific areas and sites in the historic precincts where additional height might be considered. The City's EcoDensity Charter proposes increased building heights in Gastown, Hastings and Chinatown districts and the extension of the transfer of density to include "Green projects", at a time when the city is worried that the density bank already contains too much density.

If these initiatives go ahead, the weakening of the transfer of density tool and the increase in heights, they will effectively gut the Gastown Heritage Management Plan and more insidiously could destroy the character of Vancouver's historic neighbourhoods. It is ironic that these threats to our historic neighbourhoods are coming less than a year after of the city received a Provincial Heritage award for excellence in heritage restoration as embodied in the Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program.

It is equally ironic that as cultural tourism is increasing by 15% annually, Vancouver is introducing measures that could effectively destroy our historic areas.

Dal Grauer Substation

1953-54; 970 Burrard Street



A local landmark, B.C. Hydro's Dal Grauer Substation is one of the great early works of the Modern movement in Vancouver, and an 'A' on the Recent Landmarks Inventory.

In 1953-4 the BC Electric Company hired young architect Ned Pratt and artist B.C. (Bert) Binning, to develop a light, open design that deeply integrated art and architecture.

Embodying the Modernist form-follows-function philosophy, the entire Burrard Street elevation featured a floor-to-ceiling glass and steel curtain wall, exposing electrical machinery, staircases, and other functional elements set against a backdrop of bright primary colours. Pratt and Binning created, in essence, a three-dimensional 'canvas' which, when viewed through the exterior glass and steel grid, has been said to resemble a Mondrian De Stijl painting.

In period nighttime photos, the glass exterior membrane becomes invisible, the coloured backdrop glowing with light in a celebration of electrical consumption.

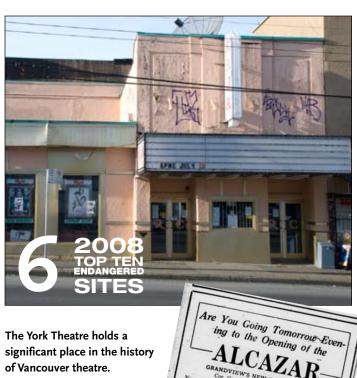
Notably, when the same architects were commissioned to design the adjoining BC Electric office tower (1957), the design philosophy was extended to the 23-storey glass and aluminum curtain wall that, famously, radiated like a night-time beacon with all of its office lights deliberately left blazing.

In the 1980s, when a transformer explosion damaged the facade, the plate glass was replaced by plexiglass panels, which rapidly became dull and semi-opaque, compromising the original design. Although consultants have prepared a restoration plan for the building, the restoration work itself appears to be stalled. Although not endangered by demolition, this neglected landmark sits demoralized and obscured, a very sad remnant of its former glory as a civic icon.

Heritage Vancouver encourages BC Hydro to take the Dal Grauer building out of the dark and once again create a flood of light and colour on Burrard Street. What a fitting contribution that would be to the 2010 Olympics.

York (Alcazar) Theatre

1913; 639 Commercial Dr. (1913)



It is the only purpose-built theatre with a fly tower and proscenium stage on the east side of the city and one of only two or three such early theatres left in Vancouver.

Built in 1913 as "the Alcazar" the theatre is an early design of budding architect John McCarter who, with his later partner George Nairne, designed the iconic Marine Building.

Too Much Johnson

As home of the Vancouver Little Theatre Association for 54 years, the York has great historical and cultural significance. Over the years, upand-coming actors such as Dave Broadfoot, Don Gerrard, Joy Coghill and Bruno Gerussi graced its stage.

According to a survey conducted by the Coal Harbour Arts Complex Society, there are 915 potential uses annually for a theatre in the size range of the 500-seat York. At a time when the City of Vancouver has a serious lack of performance space, the York was purchased by a developer who plans to demolish it and build a rowhouse complex. Realizing that Vancouver cannot afford to lose yet another of its historic theatres, a group of community members met to come up with a solution.

The group, led by Tom Durrie of "Save the York Society", and other stakeholders including Heritage Vancouver, recognized that a community-based solution for saving and restoring the York Theatre is the only way to go. The group has put out a request for someone in the community to buy the York and create a theatre that will contribute to the cultural development of the city.

The future of the York is still uncertain.

Firehall No. 15

1913; 3003 East 22nd at Nootka



From its position on a prominent rise in this eastside neighbourhood, Firehall 15 commands a view of the city and a special place in the hearts of local residents.

This well-loved community landmark is known for its striking hose tower, complete with brass pole, its Craftsman detail and distinctive bracketed eaves, its handsome interior woodwork and its ornate pressed-metal ceilings.

When talk began some time ago of replacing the 85 year old Firehall #15, local groups and community members banded together and worked tirelessly to convince city council to preserve this city-owned heritage building that is filled with community memories.

Victory for the community came on July 20, 2006. Council voted 10-1 to preserve and restore the firehall on its current site and incorporate it into the new firehall. The celebration was short lived.

In an about-face on March 1, 2007, city council voted 6-4 to demolish the building. The old firehall currently sits in political limbo waiting for a change of heart from one city councilor to breath new life into its deteriorating frame. A 2/3 council majority is required to overturn a previous council decision, and this technicality means that the building cannot be demolished until someone changes their mind.

Heritage Vancouver urges city council to "do the right thing" and restore its own heritage building. This is a great opportunity for the city to become an exemplary heritage role model and a leader in the field of heritage conservation by preserving this community landmark.

Zero Block W. Hastings Street

Various dates c.1900-04; 44 - 68 West Hastings Street



The north side of the zero block W. Hastings is one of the city's most intact historic streetscapes.

— completely unprotected save the 'B'-listed Paris Block — a goodnews rehabilitation project currently underway. Other buildings in this fascinating streetscape include the 1906 Army & Navy building — its floor-to-ceiling continuous windows an important forerunner of modernism — the delightfully quirky Palace Hotel at 33-37 W. Hastings and the Save-On-Meats building better known for its landmark 'flying pig' neon sign.

The south side of this block was once a glorious location boasting the opulent Pantages Theatre (2^{nd}) (long since demolished and now home to a special needs residential facility) and the twin National and Columbia Theatres (now a huge vacant lot the aftermath of arson).

The three remaining historic buildings, the 1900 McRae/Hall building, the 1904 Furuya Block and the 1904 Forbes & Van Horne Building have seen better days. Archival photos show handsome brick facades, now hidden behind layers of corrugated metal, stucco and cheap paint jobs.

The City of Vancouver did not flag sites on the historic Hastings Corridor to ensure that options for heritage retention would be considered, until December 2007. By this time development plans for 44-68 W. Hastings were well advanced, and a developer had already assembled development sites including these three historic properties. This, coupled with the city's lack of restoration incentives puts these buildings at imminent risk of demolition.

Heritage Vancouver anticipates the coming change in the Downtown Eastside with both fear and anticipation — new investment is urgently needed before decay becomes terminal, yet how many of these precious streetscapes will be retained if the economics of retention are outbid by the economics of redevelopment?

Lower Mount Pleasant

Houses at 144 E. 6th (1888); 304 W. 5th (1905) + others

Heatley Block

684 E. Hastings Street (1931; 1890s)





The present commercial/industrial area bounded by Cambie Street, West Second Avenue, Main Street and Broadway, has its origins as a workers neighbourhood serving the water-based industries of southeast False Creek. In the late 1880s, the first houses appeared, giving birth to the City's first neighbourhood south of False Creek.

In the ensuing decades, industrial uses crept southward, the area declined, and in the 1950s, property-owners successfully petitioned City Council to re-zone the neighbourhood for light industrial development. Since then, most of the early houses have been replaced by nondescript commercial buildings, but fascinating pockets of the old neighbourhood hang on, including turn-of-the-century houses, apartments and diners.

Typical of the area's endangered stock is the 1888 Lindsay Residence, a Victorian at 144 East Sixth Avenue near Main Street, and possibly the oldest extant house outside of downtown. Built just two years after the Great Fire, the old monarch is vacant and boarded-up, and sits adjacent to a former scrap-yard for sale as an development site. Neglected and stuccoed over, clues to her former glory are still visible, including triple-assembly windows, and a shingled main gable with lunette window and original fascia details. Peel off the stucco, and the original wood siding and other hidden details will still be there.

Currently, the City is conducting a comprehensive heritage evaluation as part of the Mount Pleasant Community Plan. We encourage the city to also evaluate the industrial area of Mount Pleasant to facilitate the conservation of these important remnants of the city's early development.



The Heatley Block, a well-loved Strathcona landmark, houses a cluster of local businesses cherished by the neighbourhood.

The main structure, built in 1931 at the southwest corner of East Hastings & Heatley, is a stucco-clad commercial/residential building. A handsome example of vernacular commercial architecture, the structure is remarkably intact, with pressed metal cornices, crenellated parapets, divided double-hung wood sash windows, original signage and decorative details.

The building contributes to the historic fabric of the neighbourhood as one of the last remaining character buildings on a particularly bleak section of East Hastings.

On the same property, but around the corner at 405 - 419 Heatley are two very early houses. Covered with asbestos siding, one of the houses, with an intact Victorian bay window, dates from the 1893. The Heatley Block and these two very old houses are not on the City's Heritage Register.

The City of Vancouver recently purchased the Heatley Block with the intention of demolishing it to build a badly needed new community library. Heritage Vancouver encourages the city to incorporate the new branch library into the Heatley block. With the adaptive reuse of the block, the city would be able to give this community what it wants; the preservation of one of its valued heritage landmarks and the creation of a new community library.

We also encourage the city to proceed with the update of the Heritage Register, currently on hold, to ensure that restorable gems hidden under later asbestos and other sidings are identified and preserved.



Please visit our website for more information and additional visuals of our 2008 Top Ten list. The website is continuously being updated to indicate any and all progress made in saving these sites. All previous Top Ten lists can also be viewed online (2001-2008)

www.heritagevancouver.org/topten.htm



North side of West Hastings Street, oo block.



House (1905) at 304 West 5th (Mount Pleasant); on the block for demolition to make room for a BC Hydro substation.



Photo 2008. General Gordon Elementary.



A recently uncovered image from the opening night, 1913. Note how the original facade has been drastically altered in later years (see image to the right). Image: Vancouver Daily Advertiser, 1913



The York Theatre, circa mid-1960s. Note the altered facade, now sporting a moderne look.

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Heritage Vancouver would like to extend a special THANK YOU to the wonderful donors who supported our Society in 2007. It is your generous and continuing support that will allow us to achieve our mandate To Protect the Built Heritage of Vancouver. We are the organization that provides a voice for heritage in this city. We thank each and every one of you for your contribution.

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Our Annual Top Ten Endangered Sites Bus Tour

On a sunny Saturday in February, more than forty people boarded a bus for Heritage Vancouver's annual Top Ten tour. The tour is our yearly opportunity to take our efforts in advocacy off the position papers and create a real experience in heritage conservation. Our expert tour guide and President, Donald Luxton helped us see the unique merits of each building and the respective need for retention.

First stop was one of Vancouver's more than 60 threatened schools in an older neighborhood, General Gordon School. This Edwardian era school on the west side is the heart and soul of a neighborhood of modest homes spanning the years 1909 through to the 1930s. The residents of the neighborhood are spearheading the drive to retain the school and advocate Larry Benge spoke to us on behalf of the campaign and how, through this process, they are developing a template for the campaigns to preserve other schools.

We then journeyed over to the east side to view Fire Hall #15 on 19th and Renfrew, still awaiting a decision from the city. This was followed by the viewing of an old roadside inn just off the Kingsway. While now an unprepossessing large rooming house, with Don Luxton's narration we could see it's unique qualities and it's heritage merits.

Next, on the tour was a sad looking old theatre, the York, between Hastings and Venables on Commercial Drive. We had no idea that under its attempt at a deco façade lay a wonderful Arts and Crafts period building replete with a large arch over the box office. Many thanks to Patrick Gunn for sourcing, in the Archives, a distinct photo of the theatre dating to the opening.

Heading west again along Hastings sites threatened and nearly gone were pointed and when we arrived in Gastown, Anthony Norfolk took over and pointed out many of the buildings that have been restored or are under restoration. Anthony also discussed some of the issues regarding ongoing conservation in Gastown. We left for Robson Square where Cheryl Cooper, an expert on Arthur Erikson's work, took over the tour. The discussion focused on the proposed wooden "clamshell" spanning Robson Street and the potential impacts of this Olympic project on this award-winning complex.

As we wended our way back we passed the sad looking Dal Grauer Substation on Burrard and we all hoped that BC Hydro would make the effort to restore the fenestration and coloured lights to return it to being a vibrant addition to the city nightscape.



UPCOMING EVENTS

All of our confirmed events can be viewed online at www.heritagevancouver.org

Annual General Meeting & Reception

Thursday, October 16, 2008; 7:00pm to 9:30pm Location: Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut Street

You are invited to attend Heritage Vancouver's annual General Meeting and Reception in the Joyce Walley Centre at the Vancouver Museum. Following the election of officers, current President Donald Luxton will introduce special guests and exciting new initiatives for the upcoming year.

Our guest speaker this year is *Bill Turner, Executive Director* of *TLC, The Land Conservancy*. Bill will speak about the TLC's mandate, their interest in pursuing projects in Vancouver and opportunities for the TLC and Heritage Vancouver to work together.

The evening is an occasion to mix and mingle with old friends and colleagues while enjoying a wine and hors d'oeuvres reception. Please feel free to invite guests interested in finding out about Heritage Vancouver.

COMMUNITY SUCCESSES RESTORING THE FLACK BLOCK

163 West Hastings Street (at Cambie) Built 1899-1900; Romanesque Revival style William Blackmore, Architect



A remarkable restoration project has been underway in the Victory Square area, and the spectacular final work is just now being unveiled.

At the turn of the last century, during the Klondike era, the **Flack Block** was one of the most lavish and prominent structures in downtown Vancouver. In early 1896, Thomas Flack, a gold seeker from Nanaimo, travelled to the gold fields with three companions. They struck it rich, and sold their claims for half a million dollars – a fortune at the time. Flack moved to Vancouver and built this landmark structure that still bears his name. He acquired a prime site across from the original Vancouver Courthouse, hired prominent architect William Blackmore, and by 1900 construction was complete. Faced entirely in Newcastle Island sandstone, the Flack filled its curving corner site to a height of four stories, with elaborate facades in the fashionable Romanesque Revival style. The rich detailing included an enormous carved entry arch, prominent name plaques, arched window openings and foliate capitals. By all accounts, it was one of Vancouver's finest buildings.

Over time, the Downtown Eastside fell on hard times as the Courthouse and the centre of the business district moved to the west. Once prominent buildings declined as commercial clients disappeared, and as styles changed, owners attempted to "modernize" to improve the viability of the older buildings. Ghastly changes occurred to the Flack, as storefronts were repeatedly altered, details eroded or were knocked off and the entry arch was entirely removed. By early in this century, the Flack was a ghost of its former self, stripped and neglected.

It took visionary action, combined with government incentives, to turn this situation around. A progressive developer, The Salient Group – who has already made a substantial commitment to the improvement of the area – saw the potential in this project, and with the help of the City of Vancouver's Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program and the federal Commercial Heritage Properties Incentive Fund, undertook a full-scale interior rehabilitation and exterior restoration. In addition to seismic upgrading, restoration of the areaways and the sidewalk glass prisms, there was extensive restoration of the windows and the stonework. The project team for this complex and challenging project included Acton Ostry Architects, heritage consultants Donald Luxton & Associates Inc., and contractors Haebler Construction Ltd.

The restoration of the stonework, including the reinstatement of the entry arch, was undertaken by Atlantis Rausch Stonemasons, whose traditional skills in stone carving were exactly what was required to restore the delightful texture and detailing that had been stripped from the building over time. Their pride in their work was obvious, as they carved their own faces into the stone and even a small snail crawling up the arch's complex foliage, a detail that would have approved by a Medieval craftsman.

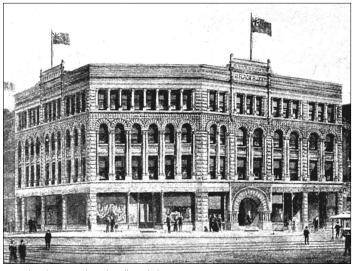
The end result is a first-class rehabilitation project that combines up-to-date technology with the finest of hand craftsmanship, that breathes new life into one of Vancouver's finest heritage buildings.



The new archway, in process and built in sections, yet to be installed



One of the few photos showing the original entry arch in detail. This image served as the basis in recreating the replica archway in stone.



Originals architect's rendering by William Blackmore, 1899



Pre-restoration. Note the loss of details



2008; Almost complete with full facade restoration (replication of missing ornamentation, etc.)

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

For the eighth year in a row, Heritage Vancouver has released its annual Top Ten Endangered List. Everything that is going on in our busy city is putting pressure on our fragile heritage resources, and it is increasingly difficult to narrow the list down to just ten sites. Our list this year contains some unresolved heritage issues like the Burrard Bridge and the increasing threats to our landmark schools. Returning this year is Firehall #15, which we thought was being saved... New on the list are other sites that illustrate groups of threatened resources, the York Theatre (historic performance spaces), Robson Square and the Dal Grauer Substation (our modernist landmarks) and our most historic areas – Gastown, Chinatown and Hastings Street, now apparently threatened by the City's EcoDensity initiatives. Check out our website for more information and for regular updates on these sites and on our previous Top Ten sites.

This list also reminds us that Heritage Vancouver will continue to be very busy representing the heritage community. There are ongoing meetings regarding the Burrard Bridge upgrade, the Schools Seismic Mitigation program, and EcoDensity. I would like to acknowledge the many volunteers who have attended countless hours of meetings on behalf of Heritage Vancouver – your voice for built heritage.

We look forward to seeing you at some of our exciting events in the near future.

Donald Luxton
President



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