New Westminster Neighbourhoods
Historical Context Statements

Downtown

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Introduction

Neighbourhoods are geographically localized units of identity and cohesion within cities, characterized by the provision of basic services (church, school, park, transportation, shopping) and a sense of community among residents.

Neighbourhoods emerge, decline, disappear, strengthen, and alter their boundaries depending on a range of factors including the changing character of the municipality of which they are a part, population shifts, urban renewal, service availability, and municipal commitment to neighbourhoods’ value.

By the turn of the century, New Westminster’s neighbourhoods had each acquired a distinctive character. Some attributes reflected the history of the city as a whole, while others were specific to the neighbourhood. Each neighbourhood has gone through challenging times, been revitalized, and today generally possesses an identity and feeling of community among its residents.

New Westminster’s neighbourhoods go back in time nearly a century and a half. Their character and physical features, important to understanding their heritage values, have emerged out of this long municipal history. A wider overall context of New Westminster’s neighbourhoods is included here as Appendix A.

Historical Contexts and Thematic Frameworks

A historic context statement is a document used in planning for a community’s heritage resources. It identifies the broad patterns of historic development in the community and identifies historic property types, such as buildings, sites, structures, objects, landscapes or districts which represent these patterns of development. Documenting the historical context of a place ensures that the significance of its heritage resources are understood and clearly stated.

Historical themes are succinct ways of describing a major force or process which has contributed to the history and development of a neighbourhood. Historical themes form a context of a neighbourhood’s history within which the heritage significance of its characteristics and features component parts can be understood, assessed, and compared.
Historical contexts and themes are developed with community engagement and discussions about what residents find valuable about their neighbourhood. These documents support the heritage values of the neighbourhood as identified by the local community.

The historical context statement provides direction for evaluating and protecting significant heritage resources. It can be used to inform the management of the area’s heritage. This includes the selection of historic and cultural sites for nomination to the Community Heritage Register. It also includes the ability to sustain the area’s rich diversity of intangible cultural heritage, such as stories, festivals, celebrations, arts, sports, and other valued forms of expression and community building.

The context statement is intended to:

• Capture the heritage values of the Brow of the Hill neighbourhood and the evolution of its geographic community over time
• Capture the reader or audience’s imagination
• Capture the unique character defining elements of the community and overlaps between one community and elsewhere
• Connect the past to the present
• Connect heritage values to the experience of physical surroundings

As a planning document, the neighbourhood context statement is meant to be a dynamic work, evolving as more information is uncovered and as a community’s needs and desires change.

Historical photographs courtesy of the New Westminster Museum and Archives (NWMA), New Westminster Public Library (NWPL) and BC Archives (BCAR).
New Westminster: Downtown Neighbourhood
Historical Context Statement

Downtown: Summary of Values

Downtown is valued for its singularity as the beginning of, and original neighbourhood in New Westminster, derived from its riverfront location, geography, culturally diverse early history, significant industrial and commercial history, and continued revitalization and development potential.

Downtown is significant for its central location on the waterfront of the Fraser River. The river is considered key to Downtown, with its connection to nature, ecology, as a historic transportation corridor and as a recreational amenity. A connection to the history of the Fraser River is imperative.

As the economic centre of New Westminster for many years, Downtown is recognized for the importance of its waterfront industries, as an international deep sea port, for its early government institutions and for the commerce that occurred along Columbia and Front Streets. Many still-existing and new commercial and institutional buildings and industrial traces are testament to this economic importance. The revitalization efforts beginning in the 1970s and 80s are a continuation of the economic importance of Downtown.

It is also significant as a place where people did, and still do, make their homes, seen in the wide range of houses from different eras, apartments, and other dwelling places.

The cultural diversity of Downtown is also important, both past and present. There is a significant association to the Qayqayt First Nation which had reserves on Poplar Island and in the nearby industrial area. Chinatown is remembered for its connection to Chinese workers and residents, along with many other ethnicities, European, Japanese, South Asian and others, who found work on the river and became part of the fabric of the place.

Social value is found in the original streetscapes both residential and commercial, the connectness of the place to the river and the rest of the city, and in the public open spaces, museums, festivals and events that have occurred in the past and which continue to take place today.

Views of the waterfront from the upper parts of the Downtown streets are important. Westminster Pier Park, the esplanade and Westminster Quay are valuable as accessible community open space.
New Westminster: Downtown Neighbourhood
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Downtown historical background

Chronology

1859  The Royal Engineers survey Downtown, superimposing a grid pattern parallel to the Fraser River on the natural topography, with streets running up the hill and avenues across it.

1860  The incorporation of New Westminster as a municipality included the area below Royal Avenue, now Downtown.

1864  Downtown streets are cleared and graded and docks extending into the Fraser River are constructed at Front Street. Irving House is built for Captain William Irving, a pioneer in the steamboat industry.

1866  New Westminster is proclaimed the capital of a united Colony of British Columbia.

1860  B.C.’s capital is moved from New Westminster to Victoria.

1870s  Canneries, lumber mills and metal fabricating plants are constructed along the riverfront.

1883  Captain John Irving’s Canadian Pacific Navigation Company is established.

1887-92  The CPR branch line arrives, contributing to the prosperity of Downtown. Columbia Street between Fourth and Eighth Streets assumes its present appearance.

1888  Part of Columbia Street below Fourth Street is developed as New Westminster’s Chinatown.

1891  Downtown is connected to the B.C. Electric Interurban Railway line.

1893  Downtown’s first market, City Market, opens in Lytton Square, today the intersection of Front and Church Streets.

1896  The Armoury, home of the Royal Westminster Regiment, opens on the southeast corner of 6th Street and Queens Avenue.

1898  New Westminster’s Great Fire destroys all but two buildings in Downtown. Reconstruction commences immediately afterward.
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1902 There is a modest economic boom, with the completion of an automobile and railway link to Surrey and the construction of the terminus of the B.C. Electric Railway network.

1904 Completion of the New Westminster Bridge that carried both rail and vehicular traffic.

1905 Police raid Chinatown gambling and opium dens.

1907 The Dominion Trust Block, Downtown’s first highrise building, is constructed.

1912 Royal City (Broder) fruit and vegetable cannery opens on Front Street at the foot of McBride Boulevard.

1913 Harbour improvements are completed to create a deep sea port.

1914-19 The industrialization of the Fraser River during the World War I attracts workers to the area, expanding the industrial economy of the riverfront and spurring the construction of workers’ housing.

1925 Regional farmers begin shipping produce to the Royal City Cannery for processing.

1926 The City Market is moved to 502 Columbia Street where it remains until 1947.

1927 The Columbia Theatre opens.

1929 Pacific Coast Terminals opens its freshwater port operation in Downtown, an international shipping terminal handling lumber, flour, zinc and other Canadian commodities.

1937 The Samson V is launched, the 5th and final federal vessel built to remove logs and other debris from the shipping channel of the Fraser River. The Pattullo Bridge opens.

1944 Local 502 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) is chartered.

1946-52 Record profits and the highest sales per square foot in the province result in Downtown’s Columbia Street being known as the Golden Mile.

1947 The City Market relocates to Columbia Street near Stewardson Way.

1949 Eaton’s department store opens on Columbia Street.
1950  Irving House is purchased by the City as a Historic Centre.

1953  The new City Hall opens at 6th Street and Royal Avenue, a major change in location for the civic government, as all of New Westminster’s previous city halls had been located downtown.

1954  The New Westminster Downtown Business and Property Owners Association is formed.

1957  An elevated parking ramp structure is constructed over the top of Front Street.

1964  A new museum and archives facility is opened by the City at the Irving House site.

1966  Westminster Tugs begins operations.

1967  The Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame is established.

1975  Plans are announced for a new regional courthouse, a GVRD regional town centre and Insurance Corporation of BC headquarters.

1977  Eaton’s department store closes and the site is taken over by the Army and Navy department store.

1978  The City’s first Official Community Plan is prepared, with heritage policies related to Downtown development permit areas.

1979  Downtown’s waterfront lands are sold.

1981  Pacific Coast Terminals moves its operations to Port Moody.

1980s  Westminster Quay is an Expo-era development undertaken to revitalize New Westminster and accompany the development of the Skytrain line to Vancouver.

1980  The new regional Law Courts are completed. Last run of the Samson V sternwheeler, now a museum at Westminster Quay.

1981  Pacific Coast Terminals ceases operations in New Westminster, selling its last 25 acres of waterfront property.

1982  The King Neptune, a popular seafood restaurant on the waterfront, closes and is demolished.

1984  The City acquires the 1937 Samson V sternwheeler and establishes it as a floating museum. The vessel is the sole survivor of the Fraser River sternwheelers.
1984 The downtown campus of Douglas College opens.


1990 The Skytrain Skybridge opens as the extension of the Expo Line to Surrey.

1998 Waterfront Esplanade park opens, developed on land that was New Westminster's deep-sea shipping port.

1999 The Royal City Star casino boat arrives on Downtown's waterfront with construction of the Fraser River Discovery Centre part of the Casino building.

2000 The City purchases Columbia Theatre and the Burr Theatre Society begins restoration of the venue. The theatre is later sold as a comedy club.

2008 The Fraser River Discovery Centre opens, dedicated to educating the public about all facets of the Fraser River.

2010 New Westminster is the first municipality in Canada to undertake a reconciliation process and formal apology to the Chinese Canadian community.

River Market, the former Westminster Quay Public Market, reopens after substantial renovations.

2012 Westminster Pier Park opens.

2013 A fire destroys historic buildings at the corner of Mackenzie and Columbia Street, forcing the closure of several other businesses.

2014 Anvil Centre, including a conference centre, theatre, Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame and the City Museum and Archives opens.

2015 (Re)Claiming the New Westminster Waterfront oral history project is undertaken by Simon Fraser University.

2016 New Westminster presents its vision to reconnect the Fraser and Brunette Rivers through a continuous waterfront experience.

Demolition of the western portion of the Columbia Street parkade to open up Front Street.
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Beginnings

New Westminster’s Downtown neighbourhood is the riverfront area between the Fraser River to the south and west, Royal Avenue to the north and the Pattullo Bridge to the east. Downtown’s steep topography slopes roughly northwest to southwest, resulting in panoramic views from the top of the bench and steep streets sloping down to the river.

First Nations in New Westminster on Victoria Day, 1865. (BCAR e-03962)

Chinese businesses on Front Street, 1909. (NWPL)

Approximate areas of New Westminster’s Chinatowns, the first on Front Street and the second and re-built third in the ‘swamp’ area.

Columbia Street around 1960 showing businesses such as the Army and Navy store, Columbia Theatre, Westminster Trust block, A.W. McLeod, King Edward Hotel, and Phillips Radio. (NWMA IHP0902-27)

Downtown is New Westminster’s riverfront neighbourhood, where today’s reclaimed Front Street was once covered by the Fraser River and the area west of 10th Street a riverine marsh that was often flooded.

Downtown is territory that has felt the presence of the Musqueam, Katzie, Qw’o:nilt’yan, Tsleil-Waututh and perhaps most significantly, the Qayqayt (also known as the New Westminster Indian Band), one of the smallest aboriginal groups in Canada, and the only one without a land base. One of three former Qayqayt reserves was located on land near Downtown, including a 22-acre parcel near the current site of Kruger Paper and Poplar Island. The federal government allocated the
reserves to the Qayqayt people in 1859.\(^1\)

The Royal Engineers’ survey of Downtown in 1860 with its grid pattern parallel to the Fraser River on the natural topography represented the original boundary of New Westminster at its incorporation in 1860. Its population grew and commercial and industrial activity expanded when the city was named the capital of the Colony of British Columbia in 1866, but contracted when the capital was moved to Victoria two years later.

During the 1870s and 1880s, salmon canneries, lumber mills, fabricating plants and other industries began to fill the economic vacuum. The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the infill of the foreshore along Front Street, the construction of docks to support the shipping industry, the construction of the BCER Interurban railway to Vancouver and the beginning of a ferry service between New Westminster and Surrey established Downtown as a transportation and economic hub. Urban infrastructure including water, an electric power plant and telephone system were constructed to service the growing modern city.

The City Market was a key aspect of Downtown. Originally constructed in Lytton Square on the Downtown waterfront in 1892, the market complemented the transportation and shipping activities, allowing New Westminster to become an agricultural distribution centre and the site of food processing and cold storage facilities. The market would move to the west end of Columbia Street and operate well into the 1970s.

Anticipating the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, the city took advantage of the deep sea port potential of Downtown’s Fraser River location. The dominant shipping enterprise, Pacific Coast Terminals, had its beginnings in 1924 as the Fraser River Dock and Stevedoring Company, evolving over time to become one of the largest businesses on the riverfront and establishing Downtown as an international port in 1929.

Other industries included the Royal City (Broder) fruit and vegetable cannery on Front Street at the foot of McBride Boulevard in 1912.

The industrial, transportation, labour and residential activity in

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Downtown produced a place of economic and cultural diversity. The city's first Chinatown was located on the eastern side of Front Street housing merchants and labourers, while wealthy families employed Chinese as gardeners, cooks, servants and houseboys. After Chinatown was demolished, along with a number of Japanese businesses on Columbia Street, the Riverside Apartments on Royal Avenue became home to many Chinese Canadians.

Large homes in the residential suburb on the east side of Downtown, such as those on Albert Crescent contrasted with smaller homes in the centre of the city. Albert Crescent Park was envisioned in Colonel Moody’s original plan for the city, a formal Victorian park with gazebo and gardens. As the population of Downtown grew, there was a need for more housing, resulting in the construction of many three-storey apartment buildings in the 1950s, primarily in the eastern part of the neighbourhood. High-rise apartments would follow, many in the western portion.

A large labour workforce, leisure time and growing wealth helped establish the less reputable side of Downtown. Bars, brothels, gambling dens and opium manufacturing became very profitable. Commercial activities were concentrated mainly along Columbia Street resulting in the construction of substantial, multi-storey brick buildings, while industrial and warehousing functions were naturally located along Front Street.

The opening of the Pattullo Bridge in 1937 was a major event that would energize Downtown and impact the future of the city. The bridge connected New Westminster to Surrey and the Pacific Highway to the U.S. Until the construction of the George Massey Tunnel, the route through New Westminster was the major connection between Vancouver and the south.

As an established commercial centre post-World War II, Downtown became a destination for commercial activity. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, record profits and the highest sales per square foot in the province led to Downtown’s Columbia Street to become known as the “Golden Mile.”

As part of this renaissance, the T. Eaton department store was developed on the original City Market site, a building designed by
C.B.K. Van Norman and representing post-war modernism and style, with white exterior and stainless steel showcase windows. The commercial area began to expand north of Columbia Street, changing land uses from residential to retail.

The opening of Woodward’s Department Store in Uptown threatened to pull retail shoppers out of Downtown. In 1954 the New Westminster Downtown Business and Property Owners Association was formed to reverse the trend of shopping in the new modern Uptown. In 1958, the Front Street parkade opens, effectively blocking off the waterfront, as downtown merchants believe more parking availability would help business.

New transportation networks and the advent of shopping malls brought changing patterns of retail consumption and the decline of Downtown in the 1970s.

**Challenging Times**

New Westminster’s Downtown has seen its share of boom times and lean times. The move to relocated the provincial capital in Victoria, and the bypassing of the New Westminster by the CPR in favour of Vancouver and the great fire were early examples of the city’s challenges. By 1959, the deep-sea shipping docks were in disrepair, and City council recommended they be torn down and rebuilt.

By the early 1980s, the Pacific Coast Terminals operation was on the decline, doing steadily less business over the years as transport moved to container rather than bulk cargo, and longshoremen and dockworkers were unemployed.

The development of facilities such as the public library, Woodward’s department store and bank branches in Uptown, the rise of the automobile and establishment of hotels along Kingsway, and the construction of shopping malls adjacent to highways led to the decline of Columbia Street as a retail and social destination.

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Downtown land uses in 1960 showing Downtown’s focus on commercial activity and medium density residential use. (Urban Renewal Study part 3)

Aerial view of the Downtown waterfront 1951. (NWPL)
Some key historical buildings in Downtown

- Holy Trinity Cathedral 1860
- St. Charles Roman Catholic Church, St. Peters Roman Catholic Church 1861
- Irving House 1862
- St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Bank of British Columbia 1863
- St. Anne’s Academy 1865
- St. Mary’s Hospital 1886
- Guichon Block 1887
- Masonic Lodge 1888
- Brick-constructed St. Andrews Presbyterian Church 1889
- City Electrical Utility, Court House 1890
- Burr Block 1892
- Armoury 1896
- Holy Trinity Cathedral 1898
- Carnegie Library 1905
- Dominion Trust Block 1907
- Russell Hotel 1908
- Cliff Block, Bank of Commerce, Land Title Office, Masonic Lodge 1911
- Arundel Mansions 1912
- City Hall 1953
- Federal Building 1958
- New Westminster Law Courts 1980

Revitalization

New Westminster’s Downtown has always been in the process of re-imagining and revitalizing itself.

A study undertaken by the city’s Planning Department in 1965 divided the city into nineteen areas for urban renewal. Downtown was identified as the economic core of the city, with high investment over time by both private and public sectors warranting special consideration for renewal.

At that time, projects underway included the Front Street parking ramp, Columbia Street revitalization and the establishment of high rise apartment areas. Urban renewal actions recommended included rehabilitation of streetscapes and buildings by private businesses and City involvement in parking, traffic flow and other infrastructure needs.

The study described the Pattullo area, part of the current Downtown neighbourhood, as having urban design challenges primarily related to transportation, with housing ranging from good to very poor. An overall major street plan with improvements to Royal Avenue, Columbia Street, Front Street and bridge exits and approaches was recommended.

As one of the oldest neighbourhoods in New Westminster and the site of its original settlement, Downtown has its share of heritage buildings, one of the highest concentration of heritage buildings in BC.¹ The heritage identified over 75 heritage buildings in Downtown, and in Albert Crescent. They were a wide variety of houses, apartments, commercial, religious, government and institutional buildings, as well as important precincts and open space, and with some exceptions, mostly pre-World War II.

The area’s oldest homes date from 1887 to 1899 and are found on Carnarvon, First, Wellington, Dufferin, Agnes streets and Royal Avenue.²

The 1993 Heritage Management Plan listed the following issues and opportunities as identified by community members:

- A need to identify and prioritize which heritage resources were significant and to work with a manageable number of resources
- Heritage resources are for the common good of the community

¹ New Westminster Downtown Heritage Inventory, 1986.
The presence of heritage buildings makes a valuable contribution to the economic viability of the downtown core and conservation opportunities should be maximized along Columbia Street. The high cost of seismic upgrading and BC Building Code equivalencies for older buildings must be addressed. An overall vision and direction needed to be articulated for Downtown with activities coordinated between civic administrators and downtown landowners. The parkade on Front Street provides valuable parking space but is a physical barrier between Downtown's commercial centre and the waterfront. Make Downtown pedestrian-oriented and a people place by encouraging a diversity of uses and vitality.

Downtown was a fast growing part of the City, and saw a 22% increase in population between 2001 and 2006 based on its previous boundaries. In 2006, there were 8,870 people living in the Downtown neighbourhood. The average family income of Downtown residents was $60,139. 60% of residents owned their own homes and 40% rented their accommodation. Downtown has a 28% higher share of households living in apartments and 6% higher share of owner households than the rest of the city. 32% were immigrants, principally from China and South Korea.

The era of New Westminster's bustling port, once the largest freshwater port in western Canada, came to an end in 1981 when the First Capital City Development Company took over the mile-long, 30-acre site at Pacific Coast Terminals to create a futuristic residential subdivision with hotel, restaurants and commercial space.

For Downtown businesses and the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce, the proposed redevelopment of the area was seen as a new reason for businesses to continue and grow in the neighbourhood. The development was to be pedestrian-oriented with a new city market, restaurants and shops along the waterfront.

The First Capital City Development Company was formed in 1977 with

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3 Downtown Neighbourhood Profile, City of New Westminster
the objective of redeveloping New Westminster’s downtown core and waterfront in accordance with the Downtown Community Plan. The mandate included the assembly servicing, subdivision and marketing of land, the coordination of development and construction of key public improvements. A 1982 Framework for Downtown Revitalization laid out a revitalization program for the area featuring a number of heritage areas. The new provincial Law Courts, Begbie Square and Douglas College were constructed as part of the initial redevelopment concept.

Construction jobs were welcomed as the earlier port economy declined and revitalization projects were underway. Skytrain arrived, and Westminster Quay Public Market opened, both in time for Expo 86. The market was re-imagined and revitalized as River Market in 2008.

Hyack Square, renovated and re-opened in 2009, was designed as a legacy project to provide New Westminster residents and visitors with a Spirit Square to celebrate the City’s 150th anniversary and to create a place to connect the community and display public art.

Today, Westminster Pier Park, built on the abandoned shipping wharves of Pacific Coast Terminals, connects visitors to the Fraser River with a waterfront esplanade boardwalk. Adjacent to this area are places such as the Samson V Maritime Museum, Fraser River Discovery Centre, River Market, Quayside, antique shops on Front Street and Columbia Street.

Other recent development includes the Anvil Centre with New Media Gallery, Lacrosse Hall of Fame, and Museum & Archives the Plaza 88 shopping and residential development.

The Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Association represents the interests of property owners and businesses from the waterfront to Royal Avenue, and hosts various festivals and community events to promote the area.

And, as a way of further understanding the significance and stories of New Westminster’s waterfront, Simon Fraser University has initiated the (Re)Claiming the New Westminster Waterfront project, with collected stories about and from the men and women who worked on the waterfront between the end of World War II and 2015.

Today, the Downtown neighbourhood markets itself as New Westminster’s “Original Downtown.”
Current perceptions from within the neighbourhood

In order to understand what the community valued or was concerned about in their neighbourhood, information about what was valued about the Downtown neighbourhood was collected at two OCP events in May and June 2014. The following questions were used to stimulate discussions about neighbourhood value and character:

- What the heritage of Downtown? Why is it important?
- What are some of the important features of Downtown?
- Why are they important? Where are they located?
- What are some of the big stories or historical themes of the neighbourhood?
- What words best describe your neighbourhood?
- What are your concerns about changes to the neighbourhood?

People identified Downtown as a place that is in transition, undergoing revitalization, and has a spirit of renewal.

While an admiration for all of the heritage buildings in Downtown was evident, the Paramount Theatre was particularly singled out for preservation. There is an appreciation for the materials, colour and sense of historic place of the historic buildings on Columbia Street, especially for the red brick and other earth, which should be used on new buildings, including the Civic Centre.

The historical aspects of Downtown, including transportation, residential dwellings and industry were mentioned.

The Pattullo Bridge has historical value similar to the Lion’s Gate, Burrard, Golden Gate and Sydney [Australia] bridges. The Pattullo Bridge is valued as a connection to the United States, as a viewpoint and as a recognizable landmark of New Westminster.

Three-storey apartments with penthouses are considered to tell a certain part of Downtown’s history, even though they may not be classically aesthetic. They are important as needed rental units, and create a certain type of streetscape that has a feeling of wholeness. Consistent setbacks are part of the character of these streets.

The industrial history of Downtown is considered important, including the site of the Brackman & Ker wharf on Front Street where the fire started (now Westminster Pier Park), and the boat docks and working
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The Harbour, which should be preserved. The site of the Royal City Electric Light Station at 10th Avenue and Stewardson Way was also mentioned.

Downtown was at one time home to drugs and prostitution and is still somewhat rowdy and rough in some places, although perhaps this is part of its heritage.

The character of Albert Crescent is valued, for its unique urban design, street form and old trees.

Attendees felt that Columbia Street today is becoming more relevant to the local community. Many remember the King Neptune Restaurant and other waterfront sites, and wish to continue the trend for more restaurants and social activities Downtown. One suggestion was to put restaurants on the Patullo Bridge, and rehabilitate and re-animate it with events or climbing activities.

The CPR train station (formerly the Keg restaurant building) is highly valued, and there were several ideas for its rehabilitation and use, such as a train museum and tourist information centre. It could be made into a Canada wide train museum with model trains and generate income through heritage.

Downtown residents value the closeness to commercial activities, and the connections, pedestrian, transit and vehicular, to other parts of the city. Westminster Pier Park should be connected to Sapperton Landing as a publicly accessed waterfront park and seawall. A footbridge could be installed on Front Street to access the waterfront, and a pedestrian overpass from the new Qayqayt Elementary School to Tipperary Park.

Views of the waterfront from the upper parts of the Downtown streets are important, particularly those from Royal Avenue and Agnes Street between 4th and 7th avenues. The new Westminster Pier Park is valuable as accessible community open space.

Neighbourhood concerns identified included the following:

- The tourist industry is still struggling
- The ‘heritage wall’ is not safe at McBride and Royal Avenue
- Crossing Royal Avenue is a blind spot and introducing traffic calming would help
- We need more shops downtown, to continue to support local businesses and to bring in visitors from other communities

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• Come of the current businesses River Market (grocery, circus school) there do not attract tourists
• High density building is replacing older homes

Attendees made several suggestions for neighbourhood improvements and contributions to the character of Downtown, such as the following:

• Creating street-side patios on Columbia Street, for example by allowing awnings to project further
• Reviving Front Street with more clubs
• There should be a heritage look for new buildings on Columbia Street
• If both Columbia Street and Front Street can’t be rehabilitated, prioritize Columbia and leaving Front for traffic and trucks
• Transferring density lost on Front Street to Columbia Street
• Using materials such as red brick and earth tone colours on buildings to fit in with Columbia Street
• Showing evidence of railway tracks through Hyack Square
• Installing the famous photo of the boy watching father going off to war on location on Sixth Street near City Hall
• Preserving the old mural advertisements

May Day parade on Columbia Street 1960. (NWPL)
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Downtown Thematic Framework

Industrial traces
• Innovation in transportation and industry
• Location of early waterfront industry
• Original connection to the rest of the riverfront development, from Sapperton to Poplar Island
• Deep sea port
• Warehouses
• Transportation networks
• Manufacturing and support industries

Populating the neighbourhood
• Initial residential settlement in the city
• A variety of dwellings: houses, apartments

Governing and servicing the city
• First city hall, post office, courthouse
• Library
• St. Mary’s hospital
• Many local churches
• New provincial courthouse

Cultural diversity
• Heart of the city
• Chinatown
• Vices and gambling on the waterfront

Post WWII transformation
• Shift in living and shopping to Uptown
• Commercial and transportation hub
• Westminster Quay, market, Anvil centre, new vitality
• Arts and culture
• Tourism
• The City’s waterfront vision
• (Re)claiming the New Westminster waterfront

Neighbourhood Features

Landscape features describe the particular physical attributes of a neighbourhood and, combined with identified heritage values, are a concise way of understanding Downtown’s significance and character.
Natural Systems and Features
• Fraser River, foreshore and frontage

Spatial Organization
• Small-scale street grid from original survey
• Series of open spaces and squares, such as Begbie Square, Hyack Square, Albert Crescent, McKenzie Street urban park and the riverfront promenade
• Small-scale, narrow streets
• Consistent setbacks that provide character

Land Use
• Mix of many land uses in a small area
• Administrative, governance, education and religious
• Residential
• Commercial
• Industrial and waterfront related
• Parks and open space
• Tourism-related uses

Cultural Traditions
• Association with the Qayqayt
• Local events and festivals

Circulation
• Gridded street pattern
• Skytrain and railway tracks
• Major circulation streets such as Front Street, Columbia Street and Quayside Drive
• Pedestrian scale circulation, including the waterfront esplanade

Topography
• Topography of the steep riverbanks
• Steep streets up and down from the river

Vegetation
• Street trees
• Parks and open space

Buildings and Structures
• Commercial buildings along Columbia and Front streets
• Still-existing single family residences
• Churches
• Three-storey with penthouse and high-rise apartment buildings
• Institutional buildings such as the provincial Law Courts and Douglas College

Views and Vistas
• View corridors through the streets of downtown
• To the Fraser River and shipping, retail, residential and tourism activity
• To Surrey, Queensborough and Poplar Island
• Up and down the river to mountains and delta
• From Royal Avenue and Agnes Street

Water Features
• Fraser River

View of the port at foot of 8th Street 1977. (NWMA IHP10001-0891)
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We are the Qayqayt. 7squaremiles.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/


Appendix A

Overall context for New Westminster’s neighbourhoods through time

Long before the first settlers made their way to New Westminster during the gold rush that broke out on the Fraser River in 1858, the area to which they came had been home to the Kwantlen people and an important food gathering site.

The influx of thousands of miners caused Great Britain to declare a mainland colony named British Columbia and to dispatch the Columbia Detachment of Royal Engineers to provide protection and construct infrastructure. Headed by Colonel Richard Clement Moody, the Royal Engineers arrived in late 1858.

Moody decided virtually from his first sight of present day New Westminster on January 5, 1859, that it should, for defensive reasons, become the colonial capital, replacing the initial choice of Derby near Fort Langley further up the Fraser River. Water was the principal means of transportation at the time, and the entry to the gold fields needed to be secured from possible attack by the United States just to the south. On February 14, Moody named the site Downtown in honour of Queen Victoria, who shortly thereafter expressed a preference for its being called New Westminster.
New Westminster was from its beginnings a planned city. The Royal Engineers set up camp just to the east at Sapperton, named for the men of the Royal Engineers who were called sappers. From there they laid out roads, squares and public places, land reserves, and parks. Albert Crescent, distinguished by its Fraser River views, was intended to be the fashionable neighbourhood, its residences abutting a circular Victorian-style park named Albert Crescent after Queen Victoria’s husband. Before being recalled to Britain in 1863, the Royal Engineers also laid out much of the outlying region that would later be incorporated into New Westminster and cut a trail from the new capital to Burrard Inlet, the present day Kingsway.

On July 17, 1860, New Westminster was incorporated as a city, the first west of Ontario.

Map 2. Early New Westminster within its regional context
New Westminster’s good times as a colonial capital and jumping-off point for miners occasioned a number of large residences. The home constructed by Fraser riverboat captain William Irving on Royal Avenue in 1865 would be purchased by the city in 1950 to become part of the New Westminster Museum and Archives. The City established the first public school in 1865 and the Royal Columbian Hospital in 1862. The Sisters of St. Ann founded St. Ann’s convent in 1864.

The decline of the gold rush in the mid-1860s caused New Westminster’s fortunes to ebb. The earlier colony of Vancouver Island with its capital at Victoria was absorbed into the mainland colony in 1866. To pacify Vancouver Islanders, the joint colony’s capital was put at Victoria, denying New Westminster the status on which its ambitious city layout was premised.

The capital remained at Victoria on British Columbia’s joining the Canadian Confederation in 1871. With the loss of the capital and its employment, the city’s population declined. New Westminster did not entirely lose out however, gaining both a new penitentiary built with federal funds and a provincial hospital for the insane, renamed Woodlands School in 1950. Opened in 1878, the pair were constructed respectively on the site of the former Royal Engineers’ camp of Sapperton and on an intended pleasure ground located between Albert Crescent and the Fraser River. In the same year, John Hendry founded Royal City Planing Mills on the New Westminster waterfront.

As a condition of British Columbia entering the Canadian Confederation, the Dominion government committed to building a transcontinental rail line. Once it was known the Canadian Pacific Railway would locate its western terminus on Burrard Inlet, bringing the city of Vancouver into being, New Westminster sought a branch line. To raise the funds needed for a $70,000 construction bonus to the railway, the city council requested from the provincial government title to the land reserves laid out by the Royal Engineers for parks and squares. Victoria Gardens, St. Patrick’s Square, Clinton Place Reserve,
Merchant’s Square, St. George’s Square, Alice Gardens, Louisa Gardens and St. Andrew’s Square were then subdivided into lots and put up for auction. While the action eroded the planned city put in place by the Royal Engineers, it encouraged new settlement. In anticipation of the arrival of the railway, new investment was made in the City.

The completion of the CPR branch line to New Westminster in August 1886 launched a second major period of growth. The branch line left the main line to Vancouver at the future Port Coquitlam and followed the riverfront Downtown on the south side of Front Street to a station at the corner of Columbia and 8th Street, transforming New Westminster into the metropolis for the agricultural Fraser Valley. Warehouses and manufacturing expanded, especially along the waterfront, not far from where many of the men, brought from China to help build the transcontinental line and then left to their own devices, made their homes.

Hundreds of new homes were built in the six years from 1886 to 1892. New investment in institutional buildings responded to the growth in population. In 1886 the Sisters of Providence opened St. Mary’s hospital in the downtown. In 1889, a new Royal Columbian Hospital was built in Sapperton. The Central School was expanded on new schools built in Sapperton and the West End.

A commercial building boom took place, with beautiful three and four storey brick retail and office buildings being put up on Columbia Street. The City took a strong lead in providing infrastructure. A dam was placed across Lake Coquitlam and water supplied to the City and the surrounding municipalities. An electric generating plant was built to supply electricity to the City. Roads were opened and macadamized. In 1892, the City created a city market on the waterfront, a place for farms in surrounding municipalities to buy and sell produce.

New Westminster’s boundaries expanded. In 1888-89 the city acquired the suburban blocks laid out by the Royal Engineers, including Sapperton and a former military reserve on the tip of
Lulu Island, named Downtown. The Westminster Street Railway Company was inaugurated in 1890 to connect the downtown with city neighbourhoods. The next year a line constructed by the British Columbia Electric Railway Company linked New Westminster to rapidly growing Vancouver, whose nearly 14,000 residents were double those of New Westminster. Other lines followed. In 1892 the next door city of Burnaby was incorporated, confirming New Westminster’s northern boundary at 10th Avenue.

Investors were spurred to purchase land and entrepreneurs to construct elegant new homes, many of them near the large Queen’s Park laid out by the Royal Engineers and now sporting public gardens and an exhibition building. In 1892 provincial legislature incorporated Columbian Methodist College as the province’s first post-secondary institution, being opened the next year near Queen’s Park. Families of more modest means opted for newer neighborhoods like the West End with its fine views over the Fraser River.

New Westminster’s growth, curtailed by a worldwide recession beginning in 1892, was about to renew itself when a fire centering on the downtown destroyed a third of the city on September 10-11, 1898. One estimate has almost half the population left homeless.

Good economic times based in lumbering, fishing, and agriculture facilitated rapid rebuilding. The face of the city altered as many rebuilt further from the downtown, along the new streetcar lines.

While Queen’s Park continued to be the favoured residential neighbourhood, the West End, Sapperton, Downtown, and the area around Moody Park, among the locations surveyed by the Royal Engineers, acquired more homes and also commercial and public buildings. New Westminster’s population doubled over the first decade of the new century to 13,000 and upwards to 14,000 at the height of the boom.

New Westminster again expanded during the buoyant 1920s before
being humbled by the Great Depression. Increased industry along the waterfront pushed the remaining upper-class residents in Albert Crescent northward to Queen's Park. In 1929, New Westminster became a major port with the construction of Pacific Coast Terminals. Over 600 new homes, many of them bungalows, were constructed across New Westminster before 1929, when the depression hit. Many vacant houses in good condition that then reverted to the city for non-payment of property taxes, some of them architecturally significant, were torn down. Other large homes were converted to rooming houses.

Newer neighborhoods expanded during the depression years as mostly modest homes went up. The West End grew to some 5,000 residents, resulting in the construction of an elementary school in 1936. Downtown, which shifted from farming to a multi-ethnic residential community, acquired a larger school. Moody Park got playgrounds and sport facilities, including a clubhouse. The city negotiated with the British Columbia Electric Railway Company to provide buses to emerging neighbourhoods, which began running in December 1938. The first was a cross-town bus connecting the West End with downtown, resulting in the corner of 8th Avenue and 12th Street becoming an important junction for shoppers. New Westminster’s population grew from 17,500 in 1931 to 22,000 a decade later.

New Westminster thrived during the good times following the Second World War. The City Council hired well known American planner Harland Bartholomew to create a new city plan. Produced in 1945-47, it advocated New Westminster becoming a more urban place through apartment development in the eastern end of the downtown along Royal Avenue and duplex residences west of 6th Street and in Sapperton. The city’s commercial centre shifted uptown from Columbia Street to the junction of 6th Street and 6th Avenue after Woodward’s department store opened there in 1954 complete with free rooftop
parking for 300 cars with space nearby for 450 more vehicles.

New neighborhoods competed for attention. The subdivision of Victory Heights, located east of Glenbrooke North and honouring by its name those who had served in the Second World War, occupied some of the city’s remaining unbuilt land. The nearby Massey Heights subdivision also filled with bungalows. The outlying area of Connaught Heights was amalgamated into New Westminster in 1965.

New Westminster’s population expanded from 28,600 in 1951 to almost 43,000 by 1971, before falling back to 38,500 a decade later and then climbing back to 43,500 in 1991, 54,700 by 2001 and 58,500 by 2006. One of the consequences was attention to urban renewal.

Some familiar landmarks disappeared. In 1980 the BC Penitentiary closed and was sold by the federal government in 1985 as part of a massive Downtown revitalization plan. The site was developed in stages for housing but two significant buildings were retained and designated as heritage buildings. A waterfront quay project got underway in 1986, the same year Skytrain service commenced. Woodlands School was closed in phases in 1996-2003, being rezoned for residential development under the name of Victoria Hills. St. Mary’s Hospital shut its doors in 2005.

The city’s changing face turned affected the neighbourhoods. In 1975 the New Westminster City Council approved a plan to study each of them “in order to maintain or enhance their livability.” Reports followed on Glenbrooke North in 1975, Victory Heights in 1978, Downtown in 1978, and Connaught Heights in 1983. The question of what constituted a neighbourhood was considered in 1981 in a discussion paper looking towards a community plan: “The neighbourhood should be considered as the minimum planning unit in all residential areas and should be determined by the service area of an elementary school, local park and convenience shopping” (13).
New Westminster: Downtown Neighbourhood
Historical Context Statement

The New Westminster “official community plan” adopted in 1998, seeks to balance growth “primarily through redevelopment and intensification of under-utilized land” with the city “retain[ing] its small town historic charm for residents.” During the consultation process, “the community emphasized that future growth needs to be well planned out, considerate of the neighbourhood and contribute to the overall livability of the City” (27-28). More specifically:

“The community feels that residential neighbourhoods should continue to provide a quality residential environment with quaint historic houses, newer compatible houses, as well as low rise and high rise apartments including neighbourhood facilities (such as parks, schools and grocery stores) within walking distance. The majority of future growth should be encouraged away from established single detached residential neighbourhoods to areas better suited to new growth”. (28)

The areas suggested during community consultation for “the location of new growth” were the Downtown, Downtown, “undeveloped and under-utilized areas” such as Lower 12th Street, along arterials, as part of commercial streets, around the 22nd Street Skytrain station, through secondary suites in houses, and “in neighbourhoods of the City with older, multi-family housing stock” (27-28). The plan also looked to reducing the “impacts of heavy traffic adjacent to single detached homes” along 10th Avenue, 20th Street, and 12th Street.

Residents attested to the value of neighbourhoods and of heritage, the two becoming intertwined in many minds especially in respect to Queen’s Park. The New Westminster Heritage Preservation Society was formed in 1974, shortly after two prominent Queen’s Park houses were demolished. The New Westminster Heritage Foundation was founded in 1992. That same year the older heritage society began publication of The Preservationist intended to draw public attention to heritage issues. Residents’ associations were formed in all New Westminster neighbourhoods.