



## New Westminster's Neighbourhoods Identifying Historical Contexts

### What is an Historical Context?

***Historical contexts:***

*Identify and explain the major themes, factors and processes that have influenced the history of an area*

*Their objective is to provide a framework to investigate and identify heritage resources*

*They are not intended to be a detailed account of all aspects of the history of an area*

*They are not intended to replace histories designed to serve other purposes*

An analysis of history, including the very recent past, is central to heritage assessment and management. Any heritage resource needs to be considered in the context of the history and historical geography of the area surrounding it and the underlying historical influences that have shaped and continue to shape the area. The historical context of a place ensures that the significance of heritage resources can be understood, logically analyzed and clearly stated.

An 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. An historic context statement provides direction for evaluating and protecting significant heritage resources. As a planning document, it is meant to be a dynamic work, evolving as community needs and desires change.

Historical contexts, used in conjunction with a thematic framework and information about the physical evidence of a place, can suggest areas requiring more detailed historical research. The use of contexts and themes can draw attention to gaps in an existing heritage register. The historical context expands the thematic framework into an historical narrative about the place.



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### **Historical themes:**

*Put a resource historically in place and time*

*Unite a variety of actions, events, functions, people, place and time*

*Prevent the concentration on any one particular type of resource, period or event in history*

*Ensure that a broad range of heritage resources is considered, touching on many aspects of the region's history*

*Flow across all peoples, places, and time periods*

### **What is a Thematic Framework?**

Historical themes are ways of describing a major force or process which has contributed to history. The following historical themes create an historical context of provincial, regional, and local history within which the heritage significance of each of New Westminster's neighbourhoods and their component parts can be understood, assessed, and compared.

History is complex, and as a result, important historical features, events and/or assets may not be easily slotted into one of the themes. Themes will overlap, and there will be repetition and perhaps ambiguity as to which is the most applicable theme.

The thematic framework summarizes the context and themes identified for the five neighbourhoods. Essentially, the thematic framework is guided by asking the question, "What do people value about their neighbourhood, and why?" The framework is developed through a synthesis of the historical context, research, information collected on site, and input from the New Westminster residents associations.

Historical themes developed for New Westminster's neighbourhoods 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.

Additionally, the themes provide a background on the area's historic identity and sense of place for consideration in any future economic or tourism initiatives.

Because themes connect the historical context to values and places, they are an excellent way to organize information so that it has continuity. This information can then be used to move forward with the community heritage register and the writing of comprehensive statements of



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significance.

Together, the themes are intended to:

- Capture the heritage values of the city of New Westminster and the evolution of its geographic community over time
- Capture the reader or audience's imagination in their language
- 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

These stories of the past and words and themes, that workshop participants, Community Heritage Commission members, the Stakeholder Group and others identified as important characteristics of New Westminster's neighbourhoods incorporate the stakeholders' heritage values. Considered against the factual record of the historical context, heritage values were used by the consultant team as the basis for defining the thematic framework.

### **Public Consultation**

In order to understand what the community valued or was concerned about in their neighbourhood, sessions were held with the resident's associations for each neighbourhood. The following questions were used to stimulate discussions about neighbourhood value and character:

- What are some of the important features of the your neighbourhood?
- Why are they important?
- Where are they located?
- What are some of the historical themes of the neighbourhood?
- What words best describe your neighbourhood?
- What are your concerns about changes to the neighbourhood?



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### **Introduction**

Neighbourhoods may be defined as geographically localized units of identity and cohesion within municipalities, being 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.

New Westminster's neighbourhoods, while responding to present day sensibilities, have emerged out of a long municipal history whose principal features are essential to their understanding. The city's fifteen neighbourhoods, and especially the five under consideration here (Queen's Park, West End, Moody Park, Glenbrooke North, Connaught Heights), go back in time a century and a half.

### **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.

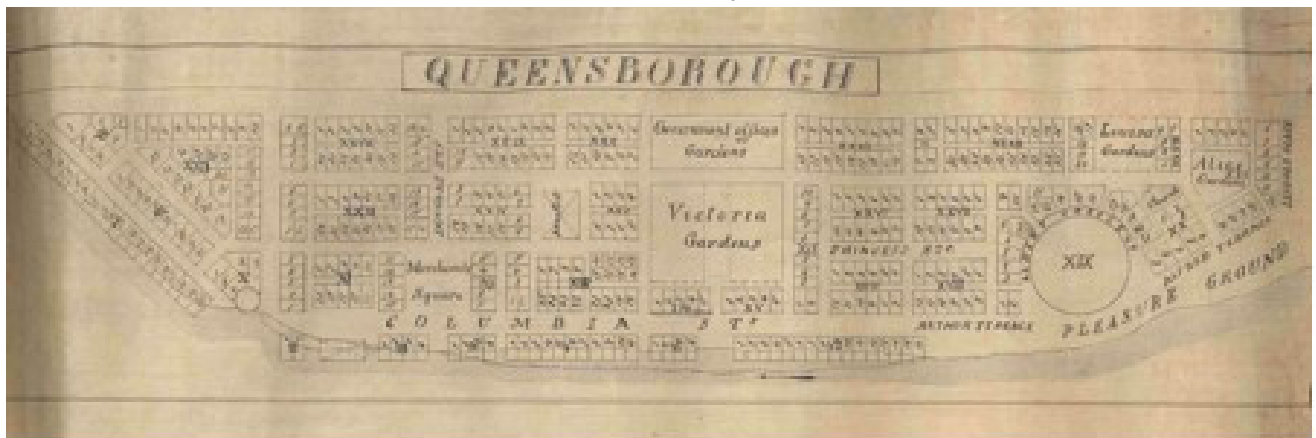
The influx of thousands of miners caused Great Britain to declare a mainland colony named British Columbia and to dispatch the Columbia Detachment of Royal Engineers to provide protection and construct infrastructure. Headed by Colonel Richard Clement Moody, the Royal Engineers arrived in late 1858.

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



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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 Queensborough in honour of Queen Victoria, who shortly thereafter expressed a preference for its



Map 1. Royal Engineers' plan for New Westminster

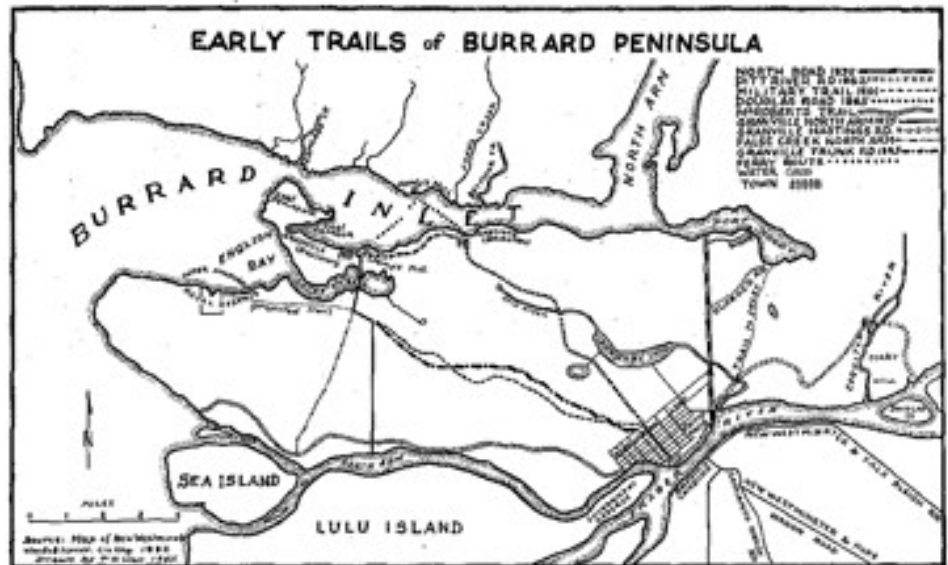
From <http://www.nwpr.bc.ca/parks%20web%20page/pictures/Map%20from%20NWMA%20collection%20web>.

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.



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Map 2. Early New Westminster within its regional context  
From <http://www.royalengineers.ca/earlytrails.gif> from original in BC Historical Quarterly, Oct 1945.

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



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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.





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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.

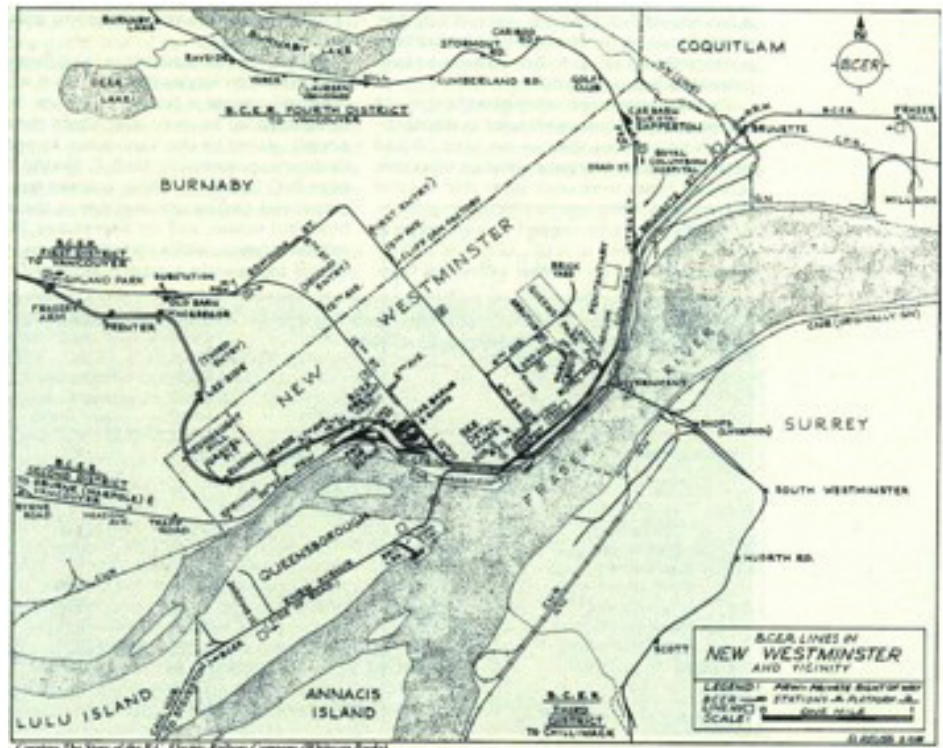
New Westminster's boundaries expanded. In 1888-89 the city acquired the suburban blocks laid out by the Royal Engineers, including Sapperton and a former military reserve on the tip of Lulu Island, named Queensborough. The Westminster Street Railway Company was inaugurated in 1890 to connect the downtown 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.





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Map 3. British Columbia Electric Railway line in New Westminster  
From <http://bcer.trams.bc.ca/pics/nwlq.JPG>

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, Queensborough, 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



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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. Queensborough, 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



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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).



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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, Queensborough, “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.



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**Table 1. Character of the five New Westminster neighbourhoods in 2000-01**

	Population (% of NW population)	Immigrants (%)	Average household income	Home ownership (%)	University degree (%)
Queensborough*	2,515 (5%)	13%	\$75,139	67%	34%
West End	4,310 (8%)	29%	\$71,653	71%	19%
Moody Park**	1,895 (4%)	27%	\$56,257	52%	16%
Glenbrooke North	3,425 (6%)	19%	\$53,477	50%	18%
Connaught Park	1,685 (3%)	36%	\$57,079	60%	11%

\* Queen's Park had slightly smaller boundaries in 2000-01.

\*\* Data is for the Kelvin neighbourhood, which equaled about ¾ of Moody Park.

By the turn of the century the five neighbourhoods under consideration here, as well as the six others located around New Westminster, had acquired distinctive characters. Some attributes reflected the history of the city as a whole, others were specific to processes within the neighbourhood. Each of the five neighbourhoods whose profiles follow has gone through challenging times, been revitalized, and today to a more or less degree possess an identity and feeling of community among its residents.