



New Westminster's Neighbourhoods Identifying Historical Contexts

West End

- Central location
- Boulevard trees
- Walk to nearby amenities
- Mix of housing types, styles and sizes
- Overall pattern of sidewalk/boulevard/roadway
- Flat topography
- Generally a uniformity of lot layout
- Back lanes
- Lack of green open space
- Older houses may be farmhouses





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West End Values

The West End quite early on became a more modest residential counterpart to Queen's Park. The neighborhood lies between 6th and 10th Avenues on the south and north and between 12th and 20th Streets on the east and west. While some of the terrain is level, other parts give spectacular views of the Fraser River.

The West End neighbourhood is of aesthetic importance for the relative uniformity of its residential development, featuring regularly spaced bungalows along the regular streets with ample sideyards for good views south to the Fraser River and the delta lands beyond, and for the recurring presence of retaining walls to manage the slopes on the uphill sides of streets.

The area's social value lies in its working class roots, with many households headed by employees working in adjacent factories and warehousing. Residents today value its unpretentious culture, enjoying the easy sociability of meeting neighbours on walks up and down the streets and lanes of the area.

The West End neighbourhood is of historical value as the home early civic institutions (such as the Providence orphanage) and large estates on the outskirts of the old centre of town (such as the Melrose Estate and Dorothy Beaches' farm), before being subsumed by the later bungalow development. The neighbourhood is valued for its Art Deco-styled Tweedsmuir School that is the area's central institution today. Neighbourhood residents today value the area's only major outdoor recreational area: Grimston Park.

Beginnings

The West End was like Queen's Park surveyed by the Royal Engineers in 1859, but long used for agriculture. The area became part of the City in 1888. Several farm houses were constructed along 6th Avenue in the 1890s, being joined in the next decade by two of the area's most prominent buildings. Providence St. Genevieve Orphanage and School,



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run by the Sisters of Providence and designed by Sister Mary Joseph, opened in 1901 between 12th and 13th Streets and 8th and 10th Avenues, most of which long remained bush. The imposing brick four-story Providence Orphanage was joined at the end of the decade by ornate 'Melrose Estate', imitating the American White House, stretching two city blocks and renown for its Bloomfield stained glass fabricated by an early New Westminster family company.



The West End acquired an important amenity with the arrival of streetcar service along quite steep 12th Street. In 1890, St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church was constructed on 7th Avenue in 1909. Some residential development ensued during these years, including numerous comfortable but not spectacular homes built mainly along 12th Street, some of them by rail employees. From 1913 streetcars travelling along the middle of 12th Street had to contend with automobiles struggling up the hill.

Building took off in the interwar years during what has been termed a 'bungalow boom.' The reason for choosing the West End given by an arrival of 1937 was for "its nice views and its location to the schools and shopping," a perspective undoubtedly shared by many others (Alan Webster in "Saving": 10). The neighborhood, which grew over the decade to some 5,000 residents as development spread westward to 16th Street and beyond, became known as 'Honeymoon Heights' and 'Diaper Lane.' A consequence was the construction of Westside Elementary School in 1936, being renamed after Lord Tweedsmuir in 1942. The modernist Metro Theatre opened on the corner of 7th Avenue and 12th Street in 1938. As recalled by one resident: "The Metro Theatre was real cheap entertainment in the 1930s. For 25 cents you could sit there all night long" watching movies (Jim Hyslop in Rudolph: 60).

Tract housing followed during the Second World War, commercial development and some apartment buildings in its aftermath. All the same, many of the everyday amenities associated with neighbourliness



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persisted, as with the small family-run store on the corner of 18th Street and Edinburgh, and Stan's Light Lunch on 12th Street near 6th Avenue whose neon sign announced its specialties of hamburgers and ice cream.

Challenging times

The neighbourhood's two most prominent architectural features were both lost to the West End during mid-century. Providence Orphanage was closed in 1960, being demolished a year later and 48 townhouses eventually constructed on the site. Melrose Estate was during the 1940s converted into a private hospital and in 1979 sold for redevelopment. The large property was subdivided into sixteen single-family lots. Its Bloomfield glass was rescued by the Vancouver Museum.



Revitalization

A study undertaken by the city's Planning Department in 1965 for the purposes of urban renewal divided the city into nineteen areas requiring further study, one of them being the present day West End. The neighbourhoods was 82% residential, 8% park, 6% other social amenities (school, church, hospital), 2% commercial, 1% industrial, and 2% vacant land. The assessment was mostly positive:

The general quality of the environment in this area is good, homes are well-maintained, and the local improvements appear to be of a high standard. There are, however, problems of mixed uses, traffic movements through the area, and the gradual deterioration of the structures and municipal services. The location and development of the park facilities could be improved through urban renewal. The most probable treatment for [West End] appears to be conservation and rehabilitation (61)

The West End neighbourhood began to be revitalized in the 1980s. Some new commercial buildings were constructed and street beautification began along 12th Street. A West End Resident's



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Association was formed in 1984.

In 1993, in the course of the city preparing a heritage management plan, several community open houses were held to identify resources and their best management. Over 30 persons attended the open house held in May 1993 for the West End and Connaught Park. According to the summary of the meeting:

People defined heritage resources as being “something of value in the community worth keeping” and “a link to the past” and “things evoking images of time past.” ...As a way of defining what they meant by a “heritage resource,” participants offered examples ranging from renovated house, back alleys, landscapes, streetscapes and views. Reflecting the rural nature of the West End, many people noted that views, gardens, parks and open space were relevant heritage resources. One person notes that the original layout of the area itself was a heritage resource. People thought the definition of heritage should be expanded to include more recent resources. Key management issues relating to heritage involved the retention of views, access to the Fraser River and lack of green space. People also mentioned the need to preserve the continuity of the streetscape and regulate the scale of new development to ensure compatibility with the existing neighbourhood. (np)

In 2000-01 the West End had one of New Westminster neighbourhoods' highest proportions of home ownership at 71% compared with 48% across the city as a whole. Its residents, almost a third of whom were immigrants, were among those with the highest average annual incomes across the city. Immigrants came principally from India, the United Kingdom, and Philippines, immigrants between 1996-2001 from Pakistan, India, and Iran. The neighbourhood contains Grimston Park, which has sports fields, tennis courts, lacrosse facilities, and playgrounds.



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Perceptions from within the neighbourhood

An open house for the West End was held on November 26, 2008. Many of those who attended were long-time residents, having worked at BC Telephone, the Safeway Depot, or Scott Paper. Attendees consider the West End a great location, being “twenty minutes to anywhere.” They like their neighbours and appreciate the character of their neighbourhood. While nostalgic for corner stories, attendees value the retail area located on 12th and 20th Streets along the neighbourhood’s western and eastern boundaries.

The West End was described an oasis surrounded by traffic. Attendees made special note of how much traffic calming adds to the neighbourhood. It was pointed out that avenues are more level and larger than streets. The sidewalks within boulevards, having a strip of lawn between the sidewalk and the street, are appreciated, as are boulevard trees, e.g., on Hamilton Street. Stewardson Way acts as a barrier, cutting off a small part of the neighbourhood.

Back lanes are especially valued as walkways, as being more neighbourly than streets, and as locations for children to play. It was pointed out some lanes have houses built on them and some have names, e.g., Kelvin.

Attendees expressed appreciation for West End houses with their mix of ages and styles. House watching during walks is a favourite pastime. Older houses might have begun as farmhouses as this was an agricultural area at one time. Many other houses were built in the 1940s. Three houses on 7th Avenue and the houses on Nanaimo stand out, as do the structures built along the 12th Street streetcar line, the fire hall constructed in 1949, and the 7th Avenue Greenway. Tweedsmuir School is valued as an Art Deco building

New development is in the view of attendees mostly good with a few exceptions, e.g., 13th Street and Hamilton. Attendees like the large lots and small houses with no ‘monster houses.’ It was pointed out that



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houses must be built with the top floor smaller due to zoning stipulating 60% of the area being on the bottom floor. Houses' smallish footprints plus the distance between them with wide side yard setbacks makes the neighbourhood appear light with good long views between houses.

The environment matters. Attendees appreciate the views to the Fraser River and also to the mountains. They value the sense of light and the green space. Their one park, Grimston Park, is very precious and must be kept. Street trees, boulevard trees, fruit trees are lauded. It is also appreciated how yards are well manicured with mature landscaping.

West End attendees summed up the neighbourhood's importance in word portraits of physical places:

- Grimston Park at 7th Avenue and 20th Street
- old houses, grounds, orchard and trees at Marine Way and 20th Street that is 'old Dorothy Beach's property'
- all the lanes for strolling, a favourite pastime of residents
- Tweedsmuir School as an Art Deco building
- pedestrian and cycling path along 7th Avenue
- the blocks between 12th and 13th Street and 8th and 10th Avenues, described as an 1890 purchase by an institution of some sort, with a compound of buildings between London and the lane between Dublin and Edinburgh; an orchard on the southeast corner of the building compound; and grounds between the compound and 12th Street
- Kelvin Street, which a lane between Hamilton and 7th Avenue
- The many views of the river
- neighbourhood portions cut off by Marine Way
- commercial area along 12th Street, which a bit run down
- disappearance of half a dozen corner stores sprinkled amongst the houses
- lanes for children's play, neighbourly chats, walks
- old boulevard trees on some blocks, e.g., London and 13th



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Streets

- remnants of the old Melrose Estate on 6th Avenue between 16th and 18th Streets including stone walls along 6th Street

West End Thematic Framework

Suburban development:

- Later settlement in a location away from downtown
- Early agricultural history and development of some larger estate lots
- New houses and commercial buildings sprang up during boom years prior to 1913

Transportation corridor:

- BCER connected New Westminster to Vancouver along Twelfth Street
- Post WWII boom and transformation:
- “Bungalow Boom” of modest middle class homes
- Modern styled commercial development on Twelfth Street
- Neighbourhood growth and connection to downtown

Neighbourhood Features

Landscape Characteristics

- An range of suburban landscapes largely dating from the interwar period of the 20th Century

Natural Systems and Features

- relatively flat bench lands above the Fraser River

Spatial Organization

- grid of suburban streets with major roads criss-crossing through

Land Use

- Suburban housing
- local park (Grimston Park)



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Cultural Traditions

- neighbourhood walking/house watching down streets and lanes

Circulation

- grid of major roads and local residential streets

Topography

- flat bench lands

Vegetation

- suburban planting from the times of development in the 20th Century

Buildings and Structures

- suburban houses in the manner of the times they were built

Views and Vistas

- north view of the North Shore Mountains
- south and west views of the Fraser River

Water Features

- none remaining