New Westminster Neighbourhoods Historical Context Statements

Uptown



Woodward's Directory 1954 (NWMA #741)



Uptown from 8th St. and 6th Avenue, 1966. (NWPL 2176)

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Historical contexts

Identify and explain the major themes, factors and processes that have influenced the history of a neighbourhood

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

They are not intended to be a detailed account of all aspects of the history of a neighbourhood

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

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 themes

Locate a heritage neighbourhood or resource historically in place and time

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

Prevent a focus on any one particular type of resource, period or event in the history of a neighbourhood

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

Flow across all peoples, places, and time periods

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 Uptown 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 neighourhood 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) and the New Westminster Public Library (NWPL).



Opening of the New Westminster Public Library 1958. (NWPL 944)



Uptown: Summary of Values

Uptown is valued for its singularity as a neighbourhood of New Westminster, derived from its uphill location, the diversity of its heritage features, particularly its buildings and its mid-20th century commercial evolution, and its citizens' wish to maintain the heritage look and feel of the neighbourhood.

Uptown is historically important for its beginnings as a residential area and its emergence a second, modern city centre in New Westminster. Early development of commercial activity along 6th Street and 6th Avenue at the crossroads of the streetcar line evolved, with the development of Woodward's Department Store in 1954, which transformed the commercial character of the city after World War II.

Uptown's geographical location, stretching up the city's steep slope to a plateau, proved an ideal location for the establishment of a convenient city centre away from Downtown.

A key historical and aesthetic characteristic of the neighbourhood is its mix of buildings, particularly houses, from eras that extend from the 1890s to the 1980s, all of which are important signifiers of its evolution. Large-scale and elaborate homes, pre-World War II cottages, modest post war homes, apartment buildings and early and modernist institutions such as the Armoury and City Hall contribute to the heritage of the place.

Cultural and spiritual value is found in its residents' understanding of the importance of First Nations history to the city, and the need to more properly recognize it. Recognition of the Aboriginal and Chinese cemeteries near New Westminster Secondary School reinforce these values.

While it is an important commercial centre, Uptown is significant for achieving a balance between a small town and a modern city. 6th Strreet and 6th Avenue epitomize the social values of Uptown, through the presence of social gathering places, the New Westminster Public Library, coffee shops, ethnic restaurants, local shops that serve residents, and an overall connection to "main street."

Uptown is valued for its cultural facilities, including the Massey Theatre in the nearby secondary school, the public library, Century House and outdoor spaces and streetscapes that provide venues for cultural events. Moody Park is valued as a significant park space with its heritage walkways and trees.

Features of Uptown



Area of primarily high-rise apartments

Site of original Woodward's Department Store, now Royal City Centre

New Westminster Public Library

Moody Park

Area of primarily low-rise apartments with houses scattered among them

Pocket of modest early homes on 8th Street

Residential streets with street trees and gardens

6th Avenue and 6th Street, the centre of Uptown

Extent of primarily retail land uses

Bent Court, area of heritage character

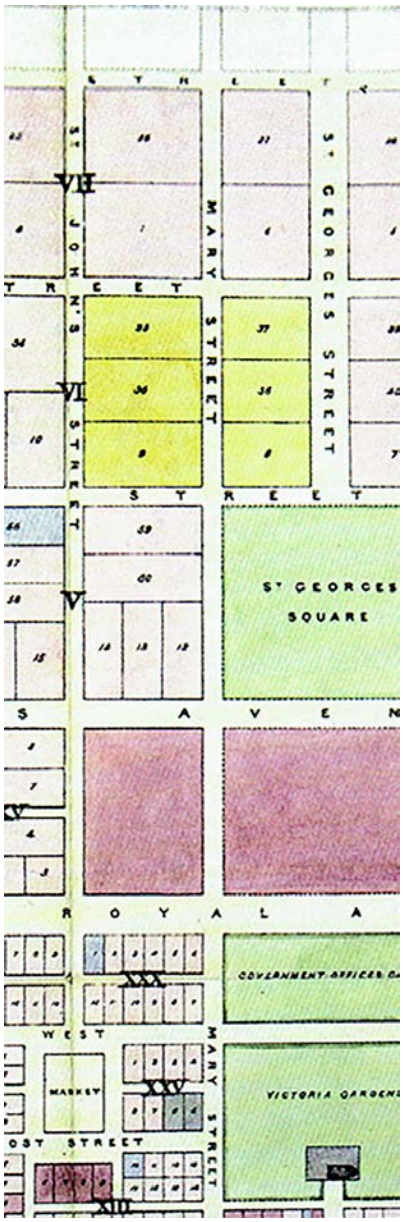
Route of former BCER streetcar line

Armoury

City Hall and grounds

Former BC Electric headquarters and bus depot, now Royal Towers Hotel

Rows of early, large houses on Queen's Avenue and 8th Street



Royal Engineers' plan from 1862 showing the survey of Uptown from Royal Avenue to 5th Avenue. Mary Street is present day 6th Street. (Hayes 2014)

Uptown historical background

Chronology

1863 The Royal Engineers survey the Uptown area, following the earlier established grid pattern parallel to the Fraser River, with streets running up the hill and avenues across it.

1865 Douglas Road, now Eighth Street, connects the area to Burnaby and Hastings Townsite.

1880s Residential development consisting of both larger and more modest homes moves up the slopes from downtown.

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

1912 The interurban streetcar line is established on Sixth Street, connecting New Westminster's downtown to the Marpole area of Vancouver.

The Duke of Connaught High School opens on a site at 4th Street and Royal Avenue. The school remains at this location until 1955.

1914 The streetcar initiates the development of commercial activity along Sixth Street and Sixth Avenue at the crossroads of the streetcar line.

1919 Dr. James G. McKay, past superintendent of Essondale Hospital, opens the Hollywood Sanitarium on Charles Major's estate.

1930 A Safeway grocery store is established on the southwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Sixth Street.

1950 BC Electric Railway replaces streetcars with buses and removes streetcar tracks.

1952 A new City Hall is constructed at the corner of 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.

1952 City Council rezones the property at 610 Sixth Street to allow



Opening of Woodward's Department Store, 1954.
(NWMA IHP10168-002)

the construction of Woodward's department store.

A new BC Electric administration building and bus depot is constructed on the old F.W. Howay school site at 6th Street and Royal Avenue.

1953 The new modern City Hall is opened on the old Duke of Connaught high school site at 6th Street and Royal Avenue.

1954 Woodward's Department Store opens for business, shaping the commercial development of Uptown, spurring residential growth in the area, and emphasizing the shift of businesses away from Downtown.

1957 The first high-rise apartment building in New Westminster is constructed on Ash Street.

1958 The New Westminster Public Library on 6th Avenue is opened by Governor General Vincent Massey.

1968 An addition is added to Woodward's, firmly establishing the success of modern retail in the Uptown area.

1960s Numerous high-rise residential apartment buildings are constructed in the area between 6th and 8th Avenues.

1961 The Royal Towers Hotel is constructed on the BC Electric administration building site.

1975 Hollywood Hospital is closed.

1978 Westminster Mall (now Royal City Mall) is constructed on the old Hollywood Hospital site.

1991 Woodward Place opens on the site of the original Woodward's department store.

2008 Westminster Centre South, a LEED gold standard, four-storey office building is completed.

2014 The Uptown Business Improvement District is established.



House on Milton Street.



BC Electric headquarters and bus depot, 1953. (NWMA IHP8066)

Beginnings

Centred at 6th Street and 6th Avenue, Uptown is located in the middle of New Westminster, situated between 8th Avenue to the north, 6th Street (and portions of 5th Street) to the east, Royal Avenue to the south and 8th Street to the west. Uptown has a combination of commercial areas, high and low rise apartment buildings and single family homes.



An aerial view of Uptown near 6th and 7th avenues in 1973 showing its mix of commercial and residential uses. (NWMA IHP10001-1035)

Uptown's topography is sloped towards the Fraser River and gradually rises from Royal Avenue to a level plateau beginning around 6th Avenue. In 1862, the Royal Engineers applied a consistent grid survey, but the resulting pattern consists of a mix of standard long blocks and shorter streets. The survey shows larger suburban blocks, compared to the small lot pattern of Downtown.

Uptown residents acknowledge the importance of the Musqueam, Katzie, Qw'ó:ntl'an,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



500 block 6th Street, 1965. (NWMA IHP10001-1003)



BC Telephone building on 6th Street, 1964. (NWMA IHP10072-001)



High rises and single family homes on 7th Avenue, 1964. (IHP10001-1036)

base. One of three former Qayqayt reserves was located on a 22-acre piece of land near the current site of Kruger Paper, a second was on Poplar Island. The federal government allocated the reserves to the Qayqayt people in 1859.[1]

Little development occurred in Uptown until the 1890s when a growing Downtown pushed residential development up the slopes. Uptown began as an area of very early housing development in what was originally a planned residential subdivision of the downtown centre of New Westminster in the 1860s and '70s. The initial subdivision consisted of large lots, including estates such as the 6th Street/5th Avenue block owned by city councillor Charles G. Major. This site would become the Hollywood Sanitarium in 1919. In addition to more modest houses, large homes were built along some streets such as Queen's Avenue to take advantage of the riverfront views.



View up 6th Street in 1957, showing Uptown as a still predominantly residential neighbourhood. (NWMA IHP10072-001)

The construction of the BC Electric Railway streetcar line along 6th Street in 1912 connected the neighbourhood to Marpole in Vancouver and was a major factor in the development of Uptown. A small commercial area emerged around 6th Street and 6th Avenue at the

1 Urban Systems. *Reclaiming Roots: Unearthing the lost history of Qayqayt First Nation.* 2014.



7th Street duplex dating from 1893 with contemporary highrise apartments in the background.



New Westminster Uptown Merchants' Association chairmen planning 95-Cent Day to promote businesses in Uptown, 1961. (NWMA IHP10000-2716)

intersection of the streetcar line. Development along lower 6th Street and in the area between Queen's and 5th avenues consisted of a mixture of early residential homes and small commercial or retail establishments. Stores such as a Safeway grocery store, drugstores and other services were established near 6th Street and 6th Avenue during the 1930s.

With New Westminster's suburban post-World War II boom came a transformation in transportation, mainly in the form of the automobile. In the 1950s, the BC Electric Railway modernized its operations and replaced streetcars with buses and removed its streetcar tracks.[2]

Uptown's post-war development began in earnest in 1952, when Charles Woodward bought a block of small stores and houses at 6th Avenue and 6th Street. City Council rezoned the property to allow the construction of Woodward's department store, strategically located outside of the congested downtown. This move would transform the centre of the city.

On opening day, March 11, 1954, crowds lined up at 8:30 before the doors opened at 10:00. Thousands of people arrived to visit the new modern building, a true department store, with the city's largest food market - Woodward's Food Floor - the innovative, and free, rooftop parking, and the grocery pick up service.

Other high-profile businesses soon followed, including the Bank of Montreal and the B.C. Telephone Company. In 1958, Governor General Vincent Massey opened the New Westminster Public Library on 6th Street opposite Woodward's, an essential service in a new modern building that cemented and encouraged the growth of Uptown. As a precursor to the 2014 Uptown Business Association, the 1960s saw the New Westminster Uptown Merchants' Association, formed to promote businesses in the neighbourhood.

Apartment development was attracted to Uptown because of its central location and flat topography, along with an understanding that post-World War II density was needed. Beginning in the late 1950s, high rise apartment buildings began to appear in Uptown, with the first seven-storey high-rise constructed on Ash Street in 1957. Higher concrete residential buildings were subsequently built along 7th Avenue and Ash Street. Much of Uptown was rezoned for higher density multi-family use, and lower-rise wood-frame residential apartment buildings were

2 Jim Wolf. *Royal City, A Photographic History of New Westminster.* 2005.



Westminster Mall c.1980. (IHP8008-123)



IHP10001-1003 500 Block 6th St 1965



1716_Woodward's food floor c.1970 NWPL.jpg

constructed throughout the neighbourhood, especially in the area roughly bounded by 6th and 8th streets, 6th and 3rd avenues.

From a social standpoint, the perception of Uptown was one of a clean, new, middle class neighbourhood. High school students from Sapperton and Queensborough came from working class backgrounds, whereas students from Uptown came from upper class families whose parents would have been shop owners, engineers, doctors, and lawyers.[3]

The city's new "uptown," with its emerging services, clean wide streets, new modern buildings and ease of access by foot or car was popular with residents. While demolishment did occur, such as that of the substantial Cooper House to make way for the public library, new construction was often integrated into areas of earlier residences, where a number of houses from the earlier part of the 20th century remain today.

Royal City Mall (formerly Westminster Mall) was the city's first, constructed in 1978 on the site of the Hollywood Sanitarium.[4] In 1977, the New Westminster Public Library underwent a major renovation designed by Downs-Archambault Architects, including a new facade and plaza, but incorporating aspects of the original library. The Royal Towers Hotel was built on the BC Electric administration building site in 1961, incorporating the original building as part of the structure.

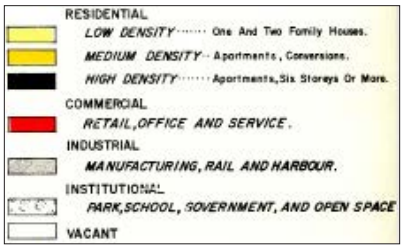
A key aspect of Uptown was its embrace of early modernism along with post-World War II growth, while at the same time retaining many of its early homes and character. Buildings such as Woodward's department store and the First Presbyterian Church (1954), City Hall (1953), and apartment buildings from the 1960s and 70s exhibit the modernist architectural features that are characteristic of parts of Uptown. The result is a unique mix of buildings and streetscapes from different eras.

While development pressure has had an impact on the heritage resources of Uptown, the layers of history can still be found in the mix of residential and commercial buildings, the maintenance of pedestrian-scale shopping streets along 6th Street and 6th Avenue, and the pockets of historical homes on streets such as Bent Court, Ash Street and Queen's Avenue.

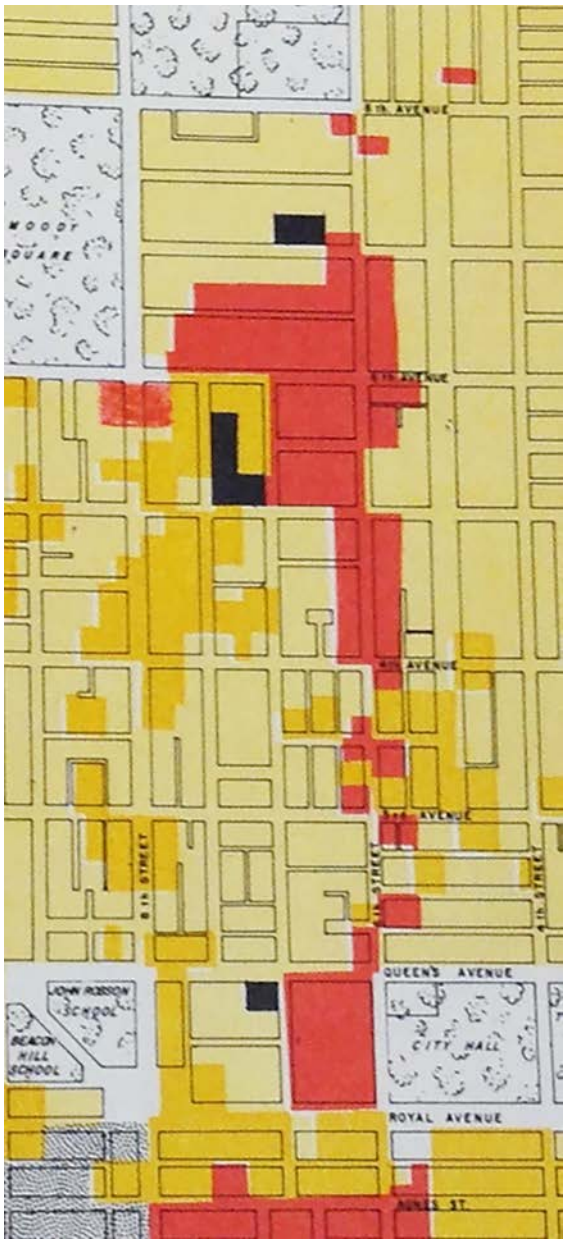
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3 Allen Domaas oral history interview, January 20, 2014.

4 The Sanitarium became the Hollywood Hospital in 1959, known for its experiments in the use of LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs.



Uptown land uses in 1960 showing commercial use along 6th Street and adjacent streets, particularly in the uphill portion, and a mix of housing densities throughout the neighobourhood. Institutional spaces shown are Moody Park, Massey-Pearson High School, John Robson School and City Hall / Armoury. (Urban Renewal Study part 3)





Houses on 7th Street.



Old Bavaria House restaurant on 6th Street.

Revitalization

While Uptown's fortunes may have fluctuated over time, the area has never seen too challenging of a time. The 1986 Heritage Inventory identified a number of heritage buildings in Uptown, primarily centred on pre-war houses, some dating from the 1890s, but including two modern buildings: the First Presbyterian Church (1954), and the public library including its renovation ((1959, 1977).

A study undertaken by the city's Planning Department in 1965 divided the city into nineteen areas for urban renewal consideration. At that time, Uptown consisted of two areas, a section of the Apartment Area and Uptown.

The northern part of the neighbourhood then, as now, was the area of high-rise apartments and the major commercial centre outside of Downtown. Identified problems included traffic movement and parking, and a development plan was recommended for the area. The study showed that the standards of maintenance and occupancy of still-existing single-family dwellings in the southern section was decreasing (an issue mentioned by current residents), while the quality of new apartment construction was improving as the area increasingly evolved into apartment living.

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

- Concern about the intentional neglect and depreciation of properties so that developers or homeowners can bulldoze and build new
- Demolition of older homes was changing the character of the neigbourhood
- The retention of clusters of significant heritage buildings and other resources was considered important
- Promotion of the conservation of resources from all eras, for example, buildings and homes from the 1960s

As of 2006, Uptown had a population of 7,650. The average family income of the neighbourhood's residents was $42,019. Given the high number of apartment units - 94.3% of total housing - it is not surprising that there is high level of rental accommodation and 56% of the population living alone. Uptown has a lower household income



Houses on 8th Street.

generally. The highest age group is age 50 to 69, and almost 25% both live and work in New Westminster.

It is a multi-cultural and diverse neighbourhood of recent immigrants from a wide range of countries, with Philippines, China and Romania being the current most recent source countries. Immigrants make up a 6% higher share of the population than in the rest of the city.

In keeping with its earlier success as a retail centre, the Uptown Business Improvement District established a business improvement area that would help fund street beautification, on-street activity, marketing and promotion, and outreach to community groups. Its vision was to create a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented commercial district that would both continue to serve locals, yet attract visitors from throughout the region.

Uptown today has a wide variety of amenities, with much of its urban activity centering on the crossroads of “6th and 6th.”One of the better known and very contemporary event is the yearly Uptown Street Fest on Belmont Street. The festival showcases the best of B.C.’s independent music scene, and features food trucks, market place, art installations and street entertainers.

Current perceptions from within the neighbourhood

In order to understand what the community valued or was concerned about in their neighbourhood, aspects of Uptown were discussed at a workshop session with the Brow of the Hill Residents’ Association in May 2015, and information 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 Uptown? Why is it important?
- What are some of the important features of Uptown?
- 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?

While the neighbourhood is not near or influenced by the two former New Westminster Qayqayt reserves located near the current site



5th Avenue streetscape.

of Kruger Paper, and on Poplar Island, or other First Nations who inhabited the area, residents commented that “First Nations history is a missing piece of our history.”

What stood out in the comments was the importance of the overall character of Uptown and the wish to retain it. Residents identified Uptown as a place of social centres, including the New Westminster Public Library, New Westminster Secondary School, and the “main street” character of 6th Street and 6th Avenue with its ethnic restaurants, coffee shops, services and retail. Uptown is seen as a connected, warm and friendly place, remarkably similar to its beginnings in the 1950s.

This character is illustrated by a number of areas within the neighbourhood, two of which were specifically identified by residents. One is the cluster of local shops at the corner of 8th Street and 8th Avenue that serves the local population and engenders loyalty to these businesses. Another is the area around Ash Street and 5th Avenue, the character of which is defined by the three-storey apartment buildings typical of Uptown.

Building on the area’s housing that has evolved over time and includes larger homes, a predominance of more modest homes and high and low-rise apartments, the collection of mixed housing in Uptown is considered important. The continued development of a mix of housing types would be beneficial to the neighbourhood.

Adjacent Moody Park is important to the neighbourhood as a notable city park, widely used, and valued for its heritage walkways and significant trees. Cultural features in the park, such as Century House, a senior’s facility established in 1958 to celebrate British Columbia’s Centennial. Another cultural and spiritual feature was mentioned, the area of former Aboriginal and Chinese cemeteries near the secondary school.

Cultural institutions such as the Massey Theatre situated in the secondary school and the library are important for cultural activities, as is the Uptown Street Fest. This festival takes place on Belmont Street, which one respondent recommended be turned into a public park.

The primary concern voiced by citizens was that Uptown was losing its

heritage look and character because of the construction of too many large homes considered incompatible with the neighbourhood.

Attendees made several suggestions about ways in which the character of the neighbourhood could be retained and improved, such as the following:

- Ensuring that Uptown is developed within its existing character and adds density in a compatible yet exciting way
- Creating a comprehensive plan for development so that it does not occur in a piecemeal fashion
- Making the area at Belmont and 6th Street into a park
- Incorporating spot zoning around Ash Street and 5th Avenue to retain character
- Protecting and preserving Century House in Moody Park
- Considering the development of mixed housing
- Creating interpretive plaques or signs to explain the significance of Fifth Street
- Acknowledging the history of the Indigenous and Chinese cemeteries near Massey Theatre
- Repairing Massey Theatre and building around it



Low-rise apartments on 7th Street.

Uptown Thematic Framework

Evolving administrative centre
- Construction of the Armoury
- Location of the new City Hall and modern public library in the Uptown neigbourhood
- BC Electric headquarters

Suburban development
- Early development during the City's boom years around 1912
- Later development as a suburban residential area
- Large homes give way to commercial development and diverse housing styles and sizes
- Provision of affordable and worker's housing
- Diverse building styles and sizes

Cultural diversity
- Multi-cultural and diverse neighbourhood of recent immigrants
- Cultural institutions

Post WWII transformation
- Development of the area into a key commercial hub
- Construction of apartment buildings

Neighbourhood Features

Landscape and built characteristics describe the particular physical attributes of a neighbourhood and, combined with identified heritage values, are a concise way of understanding Uptown's significance and character.

Spatial Organization
- Pockets or areas that have a special character, such as 6th Street, 6th Avenue, Ash Street, Belmont Street, apartment area, parts of 8th Street, modest housing clusters, City Hall and its grounds, the Armouries and others
- Significant streetscapes along 6th and 8th streets and 6th Avenue

Land Use
- A wide mix of land uses, including institutional, government, retail, restaurant, service, hotel, park and open space and residential

Cultural Traditions
- Places of governance such as City Hall

- Cultural venues such as the Massey Theatre and the public library
- Open air festivals

Circulation
- Major streets follow original survey layout
- Gathering spaces such as 6th Street and 6th Avenue, Westminster Place plaza, City Hall grounds, the public library

Topography
- Steep slopes to the south
- Business district and apartment area located on a plateau at the top of the slope

Vegetation
- Street trees
- Gardens

Buildings and Structures
- Significant modern buildings such as City Hall and the public library
- Areas of high and low-rise apartments
- Mixed housing types and scales scattered throughout the neighbourhood
- Larger homes on Queen's Avenue
- Retail buildings, including individual businesses and malls

Views and Vistas
- Views down this hill towards downtown
- Views of the North Shore mountains

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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.

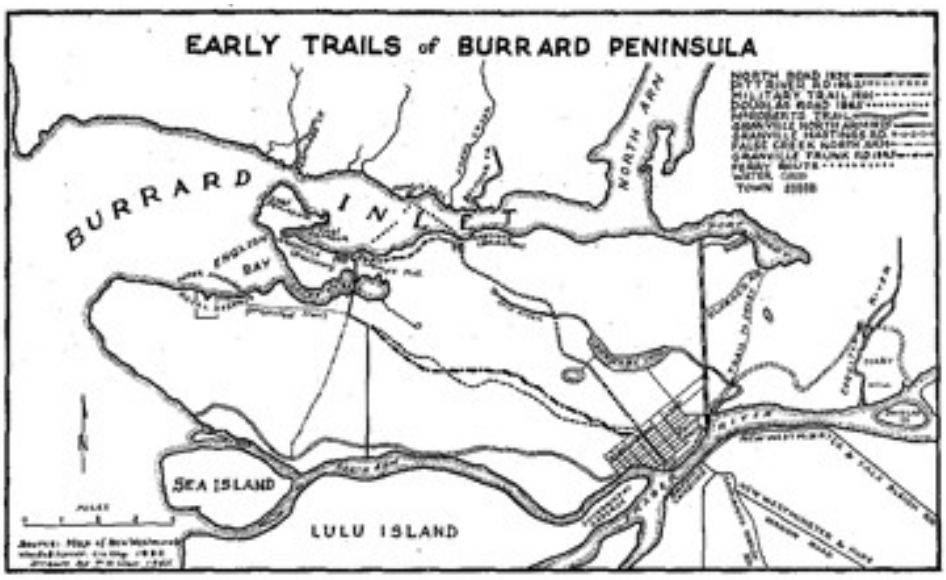
Moody decided virtually from his first sight of present day New Westminster on January 5, 1859, that it should, for defensive reasons, become the colonial capital, replacing the initial choice of Derby near Fort Langley further up the Fraser River. Water was the principal means of transportation at the 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 Uptown in honour of Queen Victoria, who shortly thereafter expressed a preference for its being called New Westminster.



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.



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 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 Uptown. 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, Uptown, 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. Uptown, 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).

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, Uptown, “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.