

New Westminster's Neighbourhoods
Identifying Historical Contexts

Queen's Park

- Adjacent major green space (Queen's Park)
- Tipperary, Sullivan, and Friendship Parks, which in their scale recall and English commons
- Formal boulevard design (legacy of setting for future Legislature Building), both in layout and details
- Regionally important heritage
- Very large well detailed houses on large properties
- Open manicured landscape settings for historic housing
- Common palette of materials (imparting a sense of cohesion to the building design)





Queen's Park Values



Queen's Park is the oldest of the five New Westminster neighbourhoods under consideration. While Albert Crescent was initially intended to be New Westminster's prestige residential area, Queen's Park soon took charge and continues to do so to the present day. The neighbourhood receives the most care and attention from residents and the city alike, due both to its long history of settlement centred on New Westminster's largest and finest park and to the character of many of its homes.

Queen's Park as bounded on the north by 6th Avenue, on the south by Royal Avenue, on the west by 6th Street, and on the east by the 75.5 acre Queen's Park. The Queen's Park neighbourhood is higher in elevation than the Downtown neighbourhood to its south and does not contain steep slopes or rapid topographical change.

The Queen's Park neighbourhood is of aesthetic value primarily for its outstanding stock of houses and older apartments in a variety of stately traditional styles set in a landscape of mature trees, shrubs, and planted borders. It's streets are aesthetically valued for their variety - from the tiniest of lanes to the grandest of boulevards with planted medians - and variety of pavements with great physical character. The intimate parks that are the legacy of the Royal Engineers in the neighbourhood are of aesthetic and social value, giving the area specific unique character.

The area's aesthetic importance lies in part in the relative physical cohesion brought about through the deployment of a common palette of materials commonly found in late 19th and early 20th Century housing.

The area is historically of value for having received much planning and building attention, (for example, being planned to accept the provincial legislative assembly, being the site for the civic and military institutions, and the major recreational park), and yet also for being an area with millworkers' cottages and small informal streets.



Queen's Park is of cultural value for its association with the city's establishment and its role as the most prestigious residential area in the city. It is valued as the historical centre of governmental and military power. Its attention-getting grand housing (often given names) claimed the area for the city's elite . Its residents still figure prominently in civic affairs, playing a central role in foundation of city-wide heritage preservation society and a wider consciousness of the value of heritage in the province.

Beginnings



The Royal Engineers marked out the area that now known as Queen's Park including road allowances for wide streets and landscaped boulevards, land reserves, and squares in 1859. The next year the Royal Engineers surveyed 75.5 acres for what became Queen's Park itself. The area very soon began to attract merchants and entrepreneurs seeking a prestigious location away from the noise and pollution of the downtown and river front. Subdivision into smaller lots began in 1880. The first house was constructed in 1862, being followed by a few others in its wake.

In 1887 the city auctioned off land reserves acquired from the province, which opened up the neighbourhood's southeastern edges and created many more building lots. The manager of the Bank of Montreal had built himself "Breezehurst" in 1888. This was the first of numerous architecturally designed elite residences. The city's growth enriched numerous residents, and it was most often to the area around Queen's Park they headed to make visible their new got gains. The largest house was "Blossom Grove" built for Henry V. Edmonds, one of the wealthiest men in the province. Queen's Park itself acquired public gardens, race track, athletic fields, and the province's finest exhibition building. By 1892 the area around Queen's Park contained 104 houses home to 658 people.

The Queen's Park neighbourhood acquired services at an early date compared to other areas in the city. In 1891 street railway tracks were



laid in Queen's Park, running from Royal Avenue to 2nd Street, up Park Row to 1st Street, and down 3rd Avenue to 6th Street. Water and electricity followed. Just two years later, on the death of the owner of recently constructed "Blossom Grove," located adjacent to the new transit line, the grand house was converted into Columbian Methodist College, the first post-secondary institution in British Columbia.



That was not all. In 1906 Queen's Park acquired paved street and concrete sidewalks, in 1912 a sewer system, and a year later street curbs, making it the first fully serviced neighbourhood in New Westminster. 1912 also saw the design of the landscaped boulevards on 2nd and 5th Streets. By then the area was basically filled up as an elite residential neighbourhood with some more modest houses located to the north and west of the park. In 1912 the area contained 379 houses. New homes constructed during the buoyant 1920s mostly replaced earlier residences dating from the 1880s.

Challenging times

The next decades challenged the character of Queen's Park. A fire destroyed the exhibition buildings in 1929, Columbian College closed in 1936 and its buildings torn down, and interurban service stopped the next year. The depression saw some homes that had reverted to the city for inability to pay property taxes being torn down. Then, during the Second World War, the federal government overruled local zoning laws to allow Queen's Park residences to be converted into suites to meet a housing shortage, a regulation only repealed a decade after the war's end. More change ensued. In 1955 the local zoning board permitted older multiple-story houses considered 'obsolete' to be replaced by more fashionable one-story houses. City policies in 1963 allowed apartment construction in part of the neighbourhood.

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. The area roughly equivalent to today's Queen's Park and Glenbrooke North neighbourhoods was 61% residential, 21% park, 10% other social amenities (school, church, hospital, government services), 6% commercial, 2% industrial, and just 1% vacant land (78). The study sounded the alarm about the neighbourhood's changing character:

This area contains some of the oldest dwellings in the City and some of the finest homes. Many are being converted into multiple use and pockets of deteriorated buildings and mixed uses are scattered throughout most of the area. Evidence of private rehabilitation and redevelopment is apparent….Urban renewal treatment would most likely include rehabilitation and conservation measures. (63)



It was during the 1970s that the Queen's Park neighbourhood turned around. Houses began to be acquired to be returned to single-family residences. A residents' association was formed in 1977, and Queen's Park residents played a central role in the foundation of citywide heritage preservation societies. In 1987 parts of Queen's Park were returned to single-family zoning.

In 1993, by which time the push for heritage conservation was well underway in New Westminster, the city initiated a heritage management plan. During the course of its preparation, several community open houses were held to identify resources and their best management. Eighty-five persons, far more than at any other open house, attended the meeting held in March 1993 for Glenbrooke North and Queen's Park. According to the summary of the meeting, it was Queen's Park priorities, and likely attendees from that neighbourhood, that drove the meeting:

People defined heritage resources as being "something of historical significance"; "whatever a community decides is a resource"; and "older people who tell you about the heritage of the neighbourhood". People agreed that heritage resources contributed to the unique neighbourhood and sense of harmony in Queen's Park. As a way



of defining what they meant by a "heritage resource," participants offered examples ranging in scale from cobblestones to streetscapes and views. Although heritage was defined broadly, Queen's Park residents emphasized the importance of larger older homes and the built environment, and listed many historical homes by name as being important examples of heritage. People mentioned the need to preserve streetscapes instead of concentrating solely on buildings. Small lot development and infill housing were perceived as impacting negatively on the existing neighbourhood – densification was regarded as being undesirable. … Many people wanted to explore the possibility of implementing development permit areas for part or all of Queen's Park. Invoking design controls was also discussed as another management tool. Others mentioned the need to provide incentives to developers and homeowners to build and restore appropriately.



Queen's Park continues to be distinctive, its population containing in 2000-01 the smallest proportion of immigrants, highest average household income, and largest percentage holding a university degree of any New Westminster neighbourhood.

Perceptions from within the neighbourhood

A workshop was held with the Queen's Park Residents' Association on November 30, 2008.Participants expressed appreciation of their neighbourhood, including the relationship of houses to streetscapes. They like the high proportion of older homes, not just pockets here and there. Most of the houses, being older, have a common palette of materials, leading to a sense of cohesion. Residents appreciate Queen's Park as an intact neighbourhood, not just a collection of homes. The whole neighbourhood has a heritage character.

The neighbourhood's past is very much alive to residents. They value the historical significance to homes, many of which were lived in or owned by provincial government officials and other prominent persons. They appreciate the capital city layout by the Royal Engineers that is visible in the boulevards. It was pointed out that the boulevards

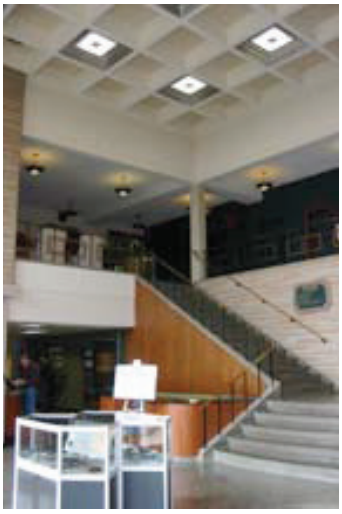


on 2nd and 5th are laid out to symmetrically, framing the grounds between Queens and Royal Avenues for the legislative building which never materialized. Reference was made to resident input into the neighbourhood in 1913 and to the variety of housing styles even from the same era. Residents view Queen's Park as western Canada's oldest city in its collection of old houses.

The residents of Queen's Park consider they share ideals in their love of old houses and appreciation of their care. They like being part of community that holds the heritage important. Residents also understand that the entire city enjoys the Queen's Park neighbourhood. Queen's Park is a regional resource in the sense that people come to it from all over to walk its streets and the adjacent park



Specific aspects of homes were pointed out. There is limited modern infill; rather it is an old house landscape, a time capsule. Residents value that no houses have garage doors as front doors. Distinctive structures were noted. These include the armoury, the buildings in Queen's Park itself, mill workers' cottages behind larger houses as on Arbutus Street, a house that was an old interurban station, a house within the envelope of an apartment building on 2nd Street at the bottom of Queen's Avenue, an old schoolhouse that is possibly the oldest school in New Westminster being moved to 2nd Street between Royal and Queen's avenues, and pre-1896 houses in the Queen Anne style.



It is not just homes but their settings which matter. The variety of lot sizes was pointed out, as was the good spaces between houses. Residents appreciate that people take care of their lawns and gardens. The neighbourhood is unconforming and not homogeneous, with big lots and little lots, but it all works together. Boulevards are in their dimensions, design, and materials very deliberate, forming a hierarchy. There are no sidewalks next to roads; rather they all have a grass boulevard buffer. Reference was made to stone walls such as those of Columbia College at Queen's Avenue between 1st and 2nd streets, to



the boulevards on 2nd, 5th, and Queen's, and to the interurban tracks running along 4th Avenue and Park Row. The quality of workmanship and craftsmanship was mentioned, as with granite curbs, the early asphalt setts on 3rd Street, sidewalks with stamped names. Laneways are important, sometimes having the stature of named streets, often without more than one or two houses fronting onto those lanes.

Less tangible aspects of the neighbourhood also matter. Residents appreciate the aural value of the bells from Queen's Avenue United Church at 6th Street and Queen's Avenue. They value the Mayday festivals held in Queen's Park that are the oldest in the Commonwealth, the Hyack festivals, the farmer's market at Queen's and 4th Street, and Easter in Queen's Park. Sporting activities matter. Residents mentioned the athletic events that have occurred in Queen's Park in hockey and lacrosse. New Westminster is a "City of Champions" and most sports took place in Queen's Park.

The natural environment is valued. Reference was made to Tipperary, Sullivan, and Friendship parks, which in their scale recall an English commons. Queen's Park is a walkable neighbourhood. Residents value the mature trees, the manicured lawns, the established plantings on City and privately held property, and fine views over the river to the south from many places in the neighbourhood. They enjoy living in a well-treed neighbourhood. Queen's Park with its low density and lots of planting represents to its residents an escape from the larger busy city.

Neighbourhood changes were generally commended. New housing of three and four stories fits into the neighbourhood, as do the anomalies, being dwellings apart from the original houses. So do the infills, whether modern or heritage style houses. The neighbourhood, being a strong collection of large gracious homes, is so strong that it can handle the odd idiosyncrasy without dilution of the overall effect.

Attendees did express a number of concerns ranging from affordability to density to incompatibility of some homes, referring both to their building materials and to the quality of the building. There is some bad



new development. They worry about development on the periphery of the neighbourhood and about traffic. The view of the river must not be obliterated with downtown high rises. Trees are unprotected and need a tree protection bylaw. The neighbourhood is not bicycle friendly but could be: there are too many potholes in the streets. Green initiatives need to happen to retrofit and sensitively to upgrade older homes.



Queen's Park Thematic Framework

Suburban development:

- Later settlement in a location away from Downtown
- Early agricultural history and development of some larger estate lots
- New house and commercial building construction during boom years prior to 1913

Transportation corridor:

- BCER connected New Westminster to Vancouver along Sixth Street

Post WWII boom and transformation:

- Conversion of larger and architecturally significant homes into suites
- Construction of multi-family and apartment buildings

Neighbourhood Features

Landscape Characteristics

- An range of suburban landscapes largely dating from the late 19th Century and early 20th Century

Natural Systems and Features

- high ground with waterways to east and south

Spatial Organization

- mix of planned and idiosyncratic residential streets most set orthogonally (with planned exceptions such as Park Row)

Land Use



- Early suburban estate housing
- regional park (Queen's Park)
- major public institutions (recreational facilities in Queen's Park, City Hall, the Armoury, and major churches)

Cultural Traditions

- ready access to major City park: Queen's Park
- cultural and sporting activities and events in Queen's Park
- neighbourhood walking/house watching down streets and lanes

Circulation

- grid of major roads and local residential streets

Topography

- southeastern edge of high land over river lands

Vegetation

- residential streets with suburban planting from late 19th Century and early 20th Century
- formal and informal civic planting on boulevards and medians
- major evergreen (including native species) and deciduous trees associated with areas of Queen's Park not used as playing fields

Buildings and Structures

- often grand suburban estate houses from the late 19th Century and early 20th Century

Views and Vistas

- views east from the Park, views south from the residential streets

Water Features

- none remaining