



ROCKLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 5276, Station B, Victoria BC, V8R 6N4

Autumn 2014 Newsletter

CONTENTS

City Councillor's Report
President's Report
Woodland Garden Report
A Heritage Activist Reflects on Change
Board of Directors
About This Newsletter

Please share a copy of the RNA Newsletter with a neighbour.

CITY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT: NEIGHBOURHOOD TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

By Ben Isitt

It has been 20 years since Victoria asked residents what the City can do to make their neighbourhoods safe.

The last round of Neighbourhood Transportation Planning in the 1990s saw the City partner with community associations and residents to identify transportation problems in neighbourhoods and then prioritize and implement solutions.

Residents were canvassed through community open houses, neighbourhood walk-about and mail-out surveys to every household, in a process spearheaded by neighbourhood steering committees supported by planners and City transportation staff.

This resulted in real improvements in neighbourhoods, in the form of cross walks, traffic calming, road closures and other transportation safety measures.

Today, 20 years later, new safety issues have emerged in Rockland and other neighbourhoods across the City. For example, traffic volumes on Richardson Street and Richmond Road have caused concern for residents, prompting petitions signed by dozens of residents and contributing to amendments to the Streets and Traffic Bylaw to reduce the speed limit on these roads and others.

Residents also express ongoing concerns over tour-bus traffic on St. Charles Street and other neighbourhood roads. While impacts around the Craighdarroch Castle have been reduced through a parking stand on Fort Street, ongoing issues relating to the noise and fumes caused by tour buses in Rockland need to be addressed.

Rather than respond to neighbourhood transportation problems on a "one-off basis," where residents are left to muster their forces and pressure the City to act, it is preferable to have a fair, transparent and effective process for residents to bring concerns to the City and co-operatively develop solutions.

In my opinion, the City and its residents would benefit from a program of ongoing Neighbourhood Transportation Planning, recommitting to a vision of safe streets and liveable, walkable neighbourhoods, which has a strong policy foundation in our Official Community Plan.

Residents would be informed at the outset of the process for identifying transportation problems in their neighbourhood, and would be invited to work with their community association and its transportation committee, with support from City planners and Transportation staff, to evaluate options for improvements and prioritize their implementation.

With a budget assigned for each neighbourhood on an ongoing basis, through the reallocation of funds within the Public Works budget, staff resources and capital funds would be available to identify and implement these transportation improvements in neighbourhoods.

This would have very local benefits -- reduced impacts of speed, noise and emissions on the streets where people live -- but also neighbourhood-wide and City-wide benefits, supporting residents in making active transportation choices, with a positive impact on the quality of life, public health, wear-and-tear on local roads and the environmental benefit of reduced carbon emissions.

In conclusion, ongoing Neighbourhood Transportation Planning provides a transparent, fair and effective process for residents of Rockland and other neighbourhoods to raise concerns over safety on their streets or inadequate infrastructure for walking, cycling and other forms of transportation. The process empowers residents to work in partnership with their neighbourhood association and the City to identify options and then prioritize and implement solutions.

Through this process, residents are invited to actively contribute to making their neighbourhood and City a better and more sustainable place to live.

Ben Isitt is the City Council liaison to Rockland. He can be reached via his website at www.BenIsitt.ca or by email bisitt@victoria or telephone 250-882-9302.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Janet Simpson

REZONING BENEFITS DEVELOPERS BUT DESTABILIZES NEIGHBOURHOODS

Why am I hearing from others and feeling myself that properties are constantly being rezoned and projects being approved despite our best efforts to be informed and vocal about our concerns?

I suspect that one major reason is the process itself.

When a developer has a proposal to increase density or change the use of a property, he must apply for a rezoning. Why? For a very good reason: zoning serves to stabilize a neighbourhood. It lets people know what to expect in terms of how changes around them can occur. But Victoria has had a virtual epidemic of rezonings - hundreds more than cities like Toronto! Here's what I think is happening.

A developer approaches the immediate neighbours individually with a flurry of plans and promises, trying to convince them to support his project. **BUT** they may or may not be fully aware of how the proposal differs from the existing zoning or how significantly plans may change during the process.

There is a community meeting at which the developer presents the proposal to neighbours and addresses their concerns and questions, and the neighbourhood association writes a letter to the city based upon the concerns expressed at that meeting. **BUT**

* Planning isn't obliged to take those concerns seriously, and

* Council isn't considering the proposal yet - so they focus on other issues.

3. City planners then tweak the proposal, making it more palatable for Council, who then vote on whether or not the proposal proceeds. **BUT**

* By this time, Planning has put a lot of work into tuning the proposal, and any recommendation by them for approval carries weight, and

* The neighbours still have not had a formal opportunity to address either Planning or Council with their concerns.

4. If the proposal proceeds, there is finally a public hearing, at which neighbours may speak. **BUT**

* This is very late in the process. So much work has been done to enable the proposal that there is little likelihood of Council denying it.

And what the neighbourhood ends up with is something many neighbours do not want.

I think we need a mechanism early on in the process, giving a properly-informed neighbourhood the opportunity to say "No, we do not want this rezoning. We do not believe it would benefit our neighbourhood. Tweaking the proposal would not be good enough."

What do you think? Let me know.

Janet Simpson

President, RNA

WOODLAND GARDEN REPORT

by Sue Simpson

This garden season has turned out to be a challenging one.

First, some of the plants in the upper part of the garden were dying, inexplicably. We are not quite sure why and sought advice from Thomas Munson of the Victoria Parks Department. Thomas provided replacement plants (Indian Plum, Flowering Red Currant and Mock Orange) which were planted. In addition to these, 11 small Salal bushes, two Small-leaved Montai and a small Roemer's fescue were planted. A ps. related to Thomas Munson - he identified a very rare Albino Camas in the lower camas bed-very exciting!

That leads into the second challenge of the summer-months of beautifully sunny but very dry weather. The garden required rain of the artificial kind but even that barely kept the plants happy.

And then there were the deer. For some reason, the deer were particularly annoying this year. They have munched on many of the plants and left their digestive droppings liberally everywhere!! We think that deer fencing is inevitable, especially around the Camas bed and the Goat's Beard. Too bad, but until Victoria comes to grips with this problem, it may be the only way to safeguard our little native sanctuary.

The students at the Middle School started (interrupted by the strike) a project to paint the names of the specimen plants on rocks. These novel name tags look great and we look forward to having the rest completed in the coming year.

The garden group got together a few times this spring/summer to continue to rid the area of invasive plants. Fall will likely bring another round of "sprucing up" to get ready for winter.

Drop by to see this labour of love when you are in the area (corner of Joan and Craigdarroch). It really is a little gem in our neighbourhood.

A HERITAGE ACTIVIST REFLECTS ON CHANGE

by Helen Edwards

Sometimes a Heritage Activist has to take time to reflect on what it is that she does. In the last few months, I have been asked several times why it is important to save old buildings, clock towers, walls, fences, etc.

The quick answer is always the same: they are links to our past and if we don't know where we come from, how will we know where we are going?

But ... it goes deeper than that. All cities are alike, except to those who live in them. Victoria is special to us and so is our history.

For me, old buildings represent a visual link to the time of my grandparents and previous generations. I have fond memories of the wraparound porch on their house (where I spent the first three years of my life) just down from where Central Middle School is today. As a young toddler, I spent hours exploring my environment - the wide sidewalk outside the house, the cool basement carved from rock, the quirky hallways - all were very special to me then. I wish I could go back to see what the house looks like now, but it was demolished years ago and the site is now a parking lot for an apartment complex.

I have fond memories of the two-storey homes that used to line Rockland Avenue between Cook and Pentrelew. To a child they were marvelous places inhabited by "little old ladies" who were very generous with treats to youngsters. No wonder we liked to pass by on our travels. One by one, they came down to be replaced by anonymous boxes - first apartment blocks, then condominiums. The few that remain have now become more valuable as they are the exception, rather than the rule. Cook Street, now almost all multiple units, was also once lined by two-storey Edwardian homes. As a school-aged child, I had friends who lived in many of these homes, some later demolished and others converted for commercial use. We are told that change is inevitable, but it is uncontrolled change that causes concern.

I firmly believe that my exposure to heritage at an early age helped to shape the adult I became. For the past forty years, I have been an active heritage preservationist, developing along the way a tough skin to ward off the inevitable slings and arrows.

I am concerned about the insensitive changes being made in the name of progress, specifically in my neighbourhood. Why tear down functional, useful buildings then leave the

vacant lots as eyesores? Shouldn't there be a law against that?? Once buildings are gone, they don't come back - and the streetscape is altered forever. My current pet peeve is the practice of removing exterior and interior cladding from a vintage building, literally leaving the studding and the complete rebuilding of the structure with new exterior and interior finishes. The ultimate insult is when the building is offered for sale or rent as a "heritage conversion." It is this hypocrisy that annoys me and we seem unable to stem the flow of this type of destruction.

How about the destruction of heritage mansions because *they are expensive to maintain*? Anyone who purchases such a property should be aware of the potential costs before they do so. Attempting to hold a neighbourhood to ransom is, in my opinion, unethical.

To say that the zoning must be changed to allow high-rise development that is clearly contrary to an official neighbourhood plan is unacceptable. If you care about your neighbourhood, take the time to become informed on heritage issues. Write letters, make phone calls, talk to friends and neighbours. Don't let things happen then complain that **somebody should have done something**.

At this time of year, we have a golden opportunity to make our views known to candidates seeking municipal office. Attend all-candidates meetings, ask questions, and do not be afraid to be the sole person in the audience with your point of view. Get involved with individual candidates who support your point of view. The right to vote is a democratic right -- make sure you use it wisely. Those whom we elect on November 15th, will shape our city for the foreseeable future.

I am getting more involved in politics than I have ever done and I am not finished asking questions. In the words of a recent radio commercial - "**I am somebody and I will do something.**"



RNA BOARD OF DIRECTORS – 2014-2015

President: Janet Simpson

Vice President: Bob June

Secretary: David Clark

Treasurer: Norman Clark

Directors: Vanessa Dingley

Marc Hunter

Ian Mayhill

Stephen Roughley

RNA Email Server List

Would you like to hear more about events in Rockland? Please join the neighbours list through the RNA website at www.rockland.bc.ca.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

The Rockland Neighbourhood Association Newsletter is published during the year. It is distributed electronically to all members. Submissions from members on issues of interest are always accepted and photographs are particularly welcome.

Deadlines for the next issue is:

January 15, 2015

All submissions should be sent to Newsletter Editor, Helen Edwards at heritagelady@gmail.com

CAN WE HELP YOU?

Is there a building in Rockland that you would like to know the history of? Do you have an old photo that needs identification? Let me know at heritagelady@gmail.com and I will see what I can find.