

## OPINION

# Heritage home battle set to erupt

**Opposing interests:  
It's saving homes from demolition, versus the rights of owners to preserve value**



Barbara Yaffe

Vancouver city hall is asking several hundred homeowners in the city's most affluent neighbourhood to be ready to take a hit on their property values in the interests of the greater good.

City council wants to prohibit all future demolition of homes built before 1940 in First Shaughnessy.

The plan, a controversial response to community demands that Vancouver's heritage be preserved, would designate First Shaughnessy as a heritage conservation area, restricting what people can do with their properties. Observers warn that similar plans could be in the offing for other areas in the city.

Certainly the number of homes being razed in some of Vancouver's most historic neighbourhoods is worrying — in Shaughnessy, 202 demolition permits were issued between 2004 and 2014.

The area bounded by Arbutus and Oak, and West 16th and King Edward, is probably Vancouver's most beautiful residential area, not just for its charming homes but its gorgeous gardens.

Created by the CPR in 1907 as a residential enclave, the area features Neo Tudor, Federal Colonial and Arts and Craft style houses to die for, most lovingly maintained, others needing renovation. Properties sell for several million dollars.

Of 529 houses located in First Shaughnessy, 318 predate 1940. If the city does not act to preserve such homes and neighbourhoods, everyone living here will be the poorer.

That is what prompted city council in June 2014 to impose a year-long moratorium on demolitions in First Shaughnessy, which last month was extended a further 120 days.

It is uncertain when council will vote on the Heritage Conservation designation, but already heritage buffs are calling the initiative "fabulous" and "a



JENELLE SCHNEIDER/PNG

Bob Angus, a resident of the First Shaughnessy neighbourhood, says the city's plan to designate it a heritage conservation area is 'probably one of the largest expropriations of value ever to occur in Canada.'

precedent-setting tool for heritage conservation."

But there's a whole other side to this story. Homeowners have an absolute right to want to protect their financial interests, and they attended a city council session Tuesday to express their views.

The city has acknowledged there could be financial repercussions. Vancouver's outgoing planning director Brian Jackson said last month the heritage conservation designation — a first for Vancouver — would give his department the right, for the first time, to nix demolitions "without having to worry about financially compensating the owner for any perceived loss of value."

(B.C. has 70 such heritage conservation zones.)

The city proposes to compensate homeowners by permitting development of coach houses, secondary suites and infill housing on the affected lots.

None of which gives comfort to homeowner Bob Angus. Angus has lived in First Shaughnessy for 50 years, the past 35 years on West 19th Ave. He characterizes the city's plan as "probably one of the largest expropriations of value to ever occur in Canada."

Angus says adding a suite or coach house on his lot would be anathema. "We live in this area precisely because we like the privacy and low density."

A Coriolis Consulting report, commissioned by the city, notes target buyers of Shaughnessy properties generally don't need mortgage helpers and would not care to have their land be part of a strata arrangement.

The report also says some Shaughnessy buyers and developers want land so they can build brand new houses. Indeed, "current sales listings often use ability to demolish as a selling feature." The no-demolition

provision would therefore reduce the number of potential buyers for the protected homes.

Coriolis forecasts "some downward pressure on the value of the pre-1940 houses" — perhaps a five-per-cent loss on lot value. Correspondingly, there would be upward price pressure on the area's post-1940 homes.

Many might scoff at the financial sacrifice to be made by homeowners who, under the new rules might get, say, \$6 million for their homes instead of \$6.2 million. But surely, homeowners have the right to expect their financial investments to be protected from a devaluation forced upon them by a government provision that did not exist when they purchased their properties.

This will be a fight to the finish, with both sides having right on their sides.

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