

## City of North Vancouver council debates heritage preservation

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Heritage advocate Peter Miller sits on the veranda of the Dalton Residence, a heritage home at 445 East 16th St. in August 2015. The home has since been demolished. file photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

How much are North Vancouver's residents willing to pay for North Vancouver's heritage?

City of North Vancouver council debated the awkward relationship between the memories of yesterday and the tax bills of tomorrow at a meeting April 11.

"How in fact is the community served by heritage buildings?" asked Coun. Craig Keating.

Historic houses may have limited appeal for residents born outside the city, according to Keating.

"I'm not sure how they're served," he said. "As I look around our council table here, we look kind of pale, I have to say."

After advocating for council to consider monetary incentives for homeowners, Coun. Pam Bookham repudiated Keating's comments.

"It's a failure of the imagination not to see that the diversity of our community is one of our greatest strengths," she said. "There are many things we fund in our budget that ... we may not personally enjoy or make use of, but it adds to the richness and completeness of our community."

A small sum could help heritage homeowners – many of whom are "property rich and income limited" – slap on a fresh coat of paint or maintain the windows, according to Bookham.

“Given the value of the land on which a heritage property sits, there’s a tremendous temptation to want to simply sell out,” she said.

Despite owning two heritage homes (“my private tragedy”), Keating was adamant the government not be involved.

“I would certainly never come cap in hand to any level of government suggesting that somehow my neighbours owe me the money necessary to put my house up in better form,” he said.

Council is set to consider several incentives for retaining heritage homes that won’t dip into the taxpayer’s pocket, including allowing heritage homeowners to stratify their house or build a coach house. The city might also ease restrictions on getting a permit to turn a heritage house into a bed and breakfast, according to a staff report.

Heritage is largely based on a building’s age, architectural style, and association with notable figures.

Heritage homes offer “a sense of the past” while helping to define neighbourhoods, according to a city staff report penned by planner Christopher Wilkinson.

“Even though change is constant, the retention of some of these markers can help people accept this change,” he wrote.

Besides being a counterpoint to the more towering houses of today, heritage homes can be instructive, according to Wilkinson, who wrote that their small stature reminds us, “We used to have much less impact on the environment.”

The city’s 2013 heritage roster included 295 buildings divided into A and B rankings.

Since that time, five heritage buildings have been levelled or approved for demolition, including the Finlay’s Row house on 19th Street and the Eatherington residence on East Third Street. Three heritage buildings – including the BC Telephone Building on West 1st Street – were legally protected through rezoning.

The debate over heritage homes is set to return to council this summer.