

CITY OF  
VANCOUVER  
Heritage Award



GHG  
recognized for  
exemplary  
work!

**Award of Merit in 2013!**

The City of Vancouver recognized the Vancouver Heritage Group in 2013 for “initiating a successful community-based education and awareness program, creating public and neighbourhood awareness” of Grandview. Our Century Signs project, our website, and the walking tours and workshops we offer to the community are examples of the work we do.



Century Signs

We recognize some of the many examples of well-maintained heritage buildings in Grandview. Every year we install 24 signs in front of houses that are more than 100 years old and that we think deserve recognition.

See our website for details of all the houses that have signs this year and those that have had them in previous years.

Owners of houses that we have recognized with signs will soon be offered “permanent” signs customized to provide basic information about the house with a link to a page on our website that goes into more detail.

Grandview  
Heritage  
Group



Celebrating  
Historic  
Grandview

We are a few local historians and other interested people in the Grandview community of Vancouver working to identify, preserve, and celebrate the built, natural, and cultural heritage of Grandview and Commercial Drive.



# Grandview Heritage Group

Identifying, Preserving, and Celebrating the Heritage of Our Neighbourhood

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## About Our Group

Our group was conceived at a meeting of the Grandview-Woodland Area Council in the spring of 2011, and we have met regularly ever since.

In the summer of 2013 we restored the Shelly's 4X bakery sign on the side of Via Tevere Pizzeria at the corner of Victoria Drive and William Street.



Grandview Heritage Group offers periodic walking tours, workshops, and lectures. As well, members of our group often make presentations at our meetings.

We meet in the Board Room at Britannia Community Centre on the third Thursday of every month, 7:00. Our meetings are open to the public and are both informative and entertaining.

**Come to our meetings!**

Visit our website at  
[grandviewheritagegroup.org](http://grandviewheritagegroup.org)

or contact us at

[grandviewheritage@gmail.com](mailto:grandviewheritage@gmail.com)

One of our most ambitious projects to date is the development and constant expansion of the Grandview Heritage Group website and wiki.



# Grandview Heritage Group Citizens' Assembly / 4 Oct 2014

## Support City's Green Goals:

The "Edwardian Village" of Grandview was almost completely built out before WWI, that is between 1905 and 1913, during the Edwardian period.

The greenest building is one that already exists. If Vancouver is ever to become the Greenest City, it will be because it keeps its precious existing housing stock.

The City should actively discourage demolition and new construction. Instead, it should do more to encourage people to retain/restore/renovate/repurpose Grandview's splendid heritage housing stock. As has been done in other old neighbourhoods, what is needed is a new version of RT zoning, with a new detailed set of Guidelines for that improved zoning.

Grandview's heritage buildings are still strong after 100 years, whereas today's new construction is estimated to last 35–40 years.

A new "heritage building code" should be introduced that recognizes the unique features of heritage homes and to make heritage home renovation less onerous. For example, rain screens and whole-house sprinkler systems should not be required for houses built before 1940. Older houses don't require rain screens, because they 'breathe'. This also makes for better indoor air quality in them.

Grandview's huge number of Edwardian houses and commercial buildings should be formally recognized as a Heritage Area District, as has already been done with Gastown, Chinatown, and Yaletown. Then Grandview should qualify for funds such as the Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program and the Heritage Facade Rehabilitation Program.

Grandview's heritage houses are made from some of the highest quality building materials in the world — old-growth Douglas fir and cedar. These trees are almost entirely gone, but our heritage houses remain as a testament to what were some of the largest and finest trees in the world. They were the reason why the first non-Natives came to Vancouver in the 1860s Timber Rush—they were loggers and sawmill workers who came to cut down those trees. Our first goal is to retain these sturdy homes made of rare 1,000-year-old trees. Failing that, if a house must be demolished, these precious materials should be salvaged and reused.

## Retain Grandview's Marvelous Diversity:

RT5 zoning does not adequately protect the diversity of living accommodation in Grandview and the resulting diverse demographics of its people, an important part of the special character of the neighbourhood that is so appreciated. The current RT-5 (duplex) zoning is designed to encourage a family in each new large half duplex. Grandview looks like a single-family neighbourhood, but many homes have two, three or four suites of varying sizes. Affordable housing in the form of small suites or shared accommodation creates Grandview's diversity and makes room

for groups such as young, single people pursuing artistic dreams. A sturdy home on Napier Street with two small suites and shared accommodation was home to nine adults until last month — when it was demolished to be replaced with a new duplex. Heritage, culture, zoning and the range of people are all tied together.

Keep both the **Grand** and the **View** in Grandview. Our Grand old housing stock and our Grand quirky diversity of people; these are what make Grandview Grand. Keep low-cost housing options in the neighbourhood by providing incentives for owners to keep (rather than sell) and maintain (rather than neglect) Grandview's remaining older houses that are divided up into affordable suites or shared accommodation.

The **View** in Grandview is that you can see the downtown skyline or the mountains from just about everywhere in the neighbourhood, including looking north from the Commercial Drive high street. If mid- or high-rises are permitted on the north edge of Grandview, this View will be blocked. There should be a neighbourhood-wide height limitation on buildings to preserve our grand views.

The City should work with the homeowners who want to retain their heritage houses or, failing retention, to build their own new houses, rather than with developers who are tearing down heritage homes and building spec houses and who do not live in Grandview or know about the special quality of life here. Reward homeowners for retaining their heritage houses rather than rewarding developers for demolishing them!

### **Achieve Density in Grandview while Retaining Heritage and without Introducing any High- or Mid-Rise Buildings:**

Good human-scale density can be achieved by retaining our heritage housing stock and by expanding on it.

Density can also be achieved while maintaining character and affordability. The City needs to provide a range of incentives that will encourage the retention of heritage houses through building extensions or additions allowing for more suites through increased FSR as has been done elsewhere. Flexibility through more small suites and lock-off suites would make heritage houses with these mortgage helpers more affordable for young buyers and provide neighbourhood resiliency through less need for moving as economic circumstances change.

If retention of an old house fails and someone is allowed to demolish and build a new house, the City should increase the allowable FSR to make it feasible to include basements and attics in new houses. Most new duplexes, condos, and row housing provide neither attics nor basements. People who live in those units tend to use the required garage (off-street parking) for storage of skis, bikes, baby strollers, BBQs, etc. and consequently don't have room to park cars off the street.

Once appropriate zoning is in place to protect our heritage assets, spot rezoning of any pre-1940s building should be prohibited.

# The RT-5 Zone in Grandview – It Should Be Improved

Regarding the Demolition of Miss Anderson's Multi-Unit Home and its Replacement With Two Half Duplexes

Some people in the market for a \$750,000 home may take the view that two new half duplexes being built at on Napier Street near Commercial Drive are far preferable to the old rooming house that was just torn down at that site. This attitude discounts the value of the diversity so prized in this neighbourhood, including the presence of the tenants who lived there because it provided affordable housing. These people probably did not have cars and did not need parking spaces. This works well because Grandview is a circa 1910 Edwardian village that developed around a few streetcar stops in the days before the automobile. The result is a community with almost everything within walking distance of peoples' homes including public transit.

What else makes Grandview so special and different from the rest of the Lower Mainland?

Consider the people in the census tract that forms the heart of Commercial Drive, the area between 1st Avenue and Venables, between Clark Drive and Nanaimo Street. The 2006 census showed this area to be almost 70% rented dwellings, compared to 35% of the dwellings in Greater Vancouver. The people living here tend to be younger, with almost twice as many in their late 20s (13%, compared to 7% in Greater Vancouver), living in one person households (47%, compared to 28% in Greater Vancouver) and almost 5 times as many of them are employed in the visual and performing arts, communications and the humanities (10%, compared to 2% in Greater Vancouver).

These young, artistic people, many of them single and renters, help to create the uniqueness and the appeal of Commercial Drive. Where will the people go who used to live on Napier and worked in Commercial Drive's restaurants and coffee shops while they pursued their artistic ambitions? These people could afford \$500 a month for a room, but certainly not \$750,000 for a new half-duplex.

As a former tenant recently posted on Facebook, Miss Anderson's house on Napier "... *had a folk-singer in one room, a playwright in another, and a Vancouver Sun editor in another. And me there, a so-so poet... The editor was... a Brit with coke-bottle glasses and a hilarious wit. The playwright... wrote plays/musicals about Jack Miner and other BC subjects for the horse-drawn Caravan Theatre, and rehearsed his fiddle-work... Often performers on the folk-song circuit would stay in the house, and there were some nice impromptu jams in the backyard and kitchen.*"

Last summer a special meeting of the Grandview Woodland Local Area Council on the planning process in Grandview was attended by hundreds of local residents. The speaker that got the most enthusiastic response from the audience stated, "... *We already have that social mix... everybody in the city aspires to elsewhere. We already have a sustainable community with a good balance of cultures and heritage... This is the model—don't come here to fix it, export it to other places!*

It may seem that desire to leave most of Grandview alone was partly addressed by the city in 2013 when the proposed new community plan for Grandview left unchanged the RT-5 area of Edwardian homes east of Commercial Drive. Yet this "unchanged" area where the current zoning only allows new homes to have two suites is actually undergoing change because houses with multiple affordable units like the one on Napier are being torn down and replaced with expensive duplexes. This is certainly a radical change for the renters who lived there, and a big inevitable change to the character and demographics of the neighbourhood.

What to do? Our RT-5 duplex zoning could be updated to better encourage the retention of our 100-year old historic homes, as has been done in Kitsilano with RT-8 zoning. These heritage homes that comprise the majority of the homes of Grandview are greener, they are more affordable, they are more resilient and they maintain the cherished character of the neighbourhood better.

Another problem that needs addressing is the increasing unaffordability of houses for the majority of young people in Grandview. And for these young people starting out in a rental suite, it is often necessary for them to move every few years as their circumstances change. On average, 60% of Vancouverites move every 5 years.

In my own experience in Grandview's RT-5 area I have gone through major life changes without having to move—because my 1910 heritage home had been converted into a Multiple Conversion Dwelling in the 1950s. It had a variety of units with sundecks on 4 floors because of small extensions at the rear of the house. The other floors that I didn't occupy served as mortgage helpers as needed as I went through the following significant changes in my life:

Situation 1 - with my wife and I move into level #2

Situation 2 - after a divorce I move upstairs to level #3

Situation 3 - my new wife and I occupy level #2 and #3

Situation 4 - my wife's daughter moves into level #4 and we occupy level #2

Situation 5 - my wife's daughter moves in with her cousin to level #3

Situation 6 - my wife and I occupy level #1 and level #2

Situation 7 – my wife and I move into level #2 and my aged mother in law moves into level #1, the easy access ground level suite

Situation 8 - As we get very old, ideally one of our grandchildren or one of the tenants may assist us, and may eventually take over ownership of the house when the last of us, living on level 1, passes away.

Multiple Conversion Dwellings give a homeowner more flexibility, often provide a variety of more affordable rental units, and they give a neighbourhood more resiliency. This resiliency allows more people to stay longer in their homes, and it gives the neighbourhood more value through the greater historic depth and experience of its long-term residents. This resiliency also better serves the neighbourhood through economic upturns and downturns. In the 1930s most of the grand single-family Edwardian homes of the West End and around False Creek and into Shaughnessy were converted into suites in order to stay viable. At the same time 10,000s of single-family houses in the rest of the city, unable to draw on support from rental suites, were taken over by the city for non-payment of taxes.

The city could also change the zoning laws to encourage more multiple conversions by allowing the addition of 10, 15 or 20 feet to the back of a house, and small attic and basement suites. Allowing more flexibility through adding small lock-off suites that can be joined together or separated depending on the needs of the homeowner is another good idea. Allowing more mortgage helper suites will also allow a larger demographic of people to stay in this neighbourhood known for its diversity.

In recent years the city seems to be addressing the unaffordability issue by radically changing zoning over much of Vancouver to allow all the RS-1 single-family areas to have secondary suites or lane houses. Meanwhile, the RT-5 zone of Grandview was left untouched.

The current laws for creating Multiple Conversion Dwellings are very restrictive and should allow for more suites and floor area and more flexibility. There should be more effort to provide Alternative Compliance Methods for Heritage Buildings in the building code. It is a complicated business but it needs direction from the top to make it all work.

— Bruce Macdonald, for Grandview Heritage Group