

LOWER MAINLAND

NELSON PARK

West Ender faces loss of heritage home

JOHN MACKIE
Vancouver Sun

Blair Petrie's apartment will never be featured in *Architectural Digest*. It's small and a bit run down. He shares a bathroom with the tenants downstairs.

But his Vancouver neighborhood is one of the most charming in the West End. Petrie has the good luck to have a place in the middle of the last stand of old houses in the area. Directly across the street sits Nelson Park.

Unfortunately for Petrie, the Vancouver park board has plans to extend Nelson Park on to his block, and has been buying up property in the area since 1951. In the search for more green space, the park board would disrupt one of the premier blocks of heritage houses in the city.

A consultant was recently hired by the city to develop different plans for the site. The consultant's report will be discussed at a public hearing at the Lord Roberts school annex, 1150 Nelson, at 7:30 p.m. today.

The report by Christopher Phillips and Associates lays down three options. One stresses heritage buildings and retaining the current streetscape. It would retain 20 heritage houses, and add .8 hectares (two acres) of park space, largely by closing off Comox Street. It would also allow some redevelopment — six- to eight-storey buildings — on Thurlow and in the lane between Pendrell and Comox.

The second option stresses "new park opportunities" and features the most park space, 1.04 hectares (2.575 acres). Some additional park space would be created by reducing the number of her-

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BLAIR PETRIE

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itage houses down to 17. There would be six- to eight-storey redevelopment on Thurlow and Bute, as well as in the lane.

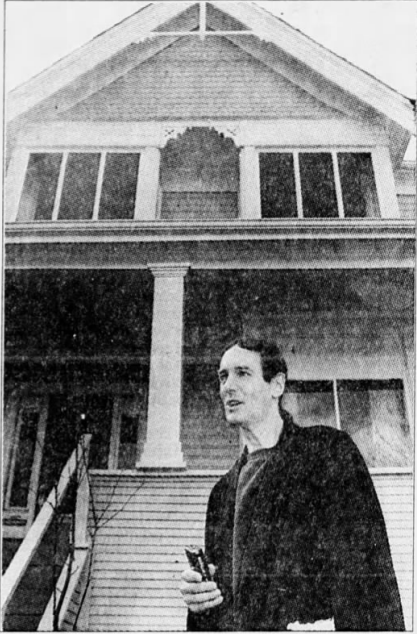
The third option puts the onus on redevelopment. Seventeen heritage houses would be saved, there would be 1.01 hectares (2.5 acres) of park, and redevelopment on Thurlow, Pendrell and the lane, including a 20-storey building.

Petrie finds the report confusing. "The whole process is unnecessarily complex," he says. "All people want is the houses saved or not. [The different options] are completely confusing."

He also takes issue with the terms of reference the city gave to the consultant for the report. The plans had to provide for extra park space, which he says is not supported by the local community.

None of the options allows for all 33 old houses currently on the site to be retained.

He notes that the "heritage" option would still result in 13 buildings being torn down; 16 would be knocked down in the park and redevelop-



PETER BATTISTONI/Vancouver Sun

BLAIR PETRIE: wants to see all the threatened houses preserved

ment options.

Some of the houses don't have heritage status, although most date to the turn of the century. The oldest house on the block was built in 1888.

Petrie co-founded a group, the Friends of Mole Hill (named after early resident Henry Mole), which has collected 4,000 signatures calling for the preservation of the houses.

He would like all the houses retained as affordable housing. The monthly rent for his bachelor suite at 1140 Comox is \$400.

mole hill activism 1995-06-22

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qwright

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