

Mr. Mayor, councillors,

I would like to express my opposition to The City of Vancouver's strategy to preserve pre-1940's houses. While I do not object to the preservation of such houses that have legitimate historic or architectural value, I do not believe that houses deemed to have 'character' alone should be the object of a civic retention effort.

The visual aspect of a home is the preference of the owner and, while third parties may admire the owner's taste, this admiration does not give them the right to demand that the home be preserved indefinitely. If the City wishes to promote character, it has the tools at hand in the form of design guidelines which can assure characterless homes are not built.

The premise that pre-1940's homes can be retro-fitted economically to today's standards of energy efficiency and safety is simply not true. Nor is the contention that the materials used in their construction are superior to today's materials. In the course of restoring and renovating a pre-1940's home, significant amounts of asbestos contaminated insulation, plaster and paint must be dealt with. Old 'knob and tube' wiring must be replaced, collapsed clay perimeter drains must be replaced, copper and lead plumbing components must be replaced, and insulation placed in the walls (all of which necessitate the removal of most of the interior walls).

While some of the pre-1940's housing stock has been properly restored, most of it has had primarily cosmetic attention.

Those asserting that 'character' elements have to be preserved conveniently forget that those elements are subject to wear and routine replacement i.e. Hardwood floors, door hardware and other fittings, windows, cladding, etc. They also deny the reality that most 'character' features can be duplicated in new construction. The truth is that almost any 'character' feature can be copied at a price.

Having restored and renovated several pre-1940's homes, I am well aware of the costs and limitations involved. I would only recommend to those with a passion for old houses and very deep pockets. The idea that such projects are affordable for those who cannot afford new homes is wishful thinking. The reality is that people may buy pre-1940's homes but such buyers will not be able to afford to preserve them properly.

The idea that discouraging new construction of homes so that people can buy 'affordable' old houses ignores market preferences and prevents current owners of older homes from realizing the full value of their homes. This 'Robin Hood' approach ignores the fact that current home owners have had nothing to do with promoting market demand - throwing them 'under the bus' in response to the influx of pressures exerted from foreign buyers is nothing short of ludicrous.

I would ask you to re-examine the rationales that have been put forward for this initiative. I have discussed this issue with a great many property owners and precious few support it. These few, however, seemed to have captured your collective ear by claiming to represent communities which they did not consult prior to enlisting your efforts for preservation. Significant numbers of property owners were diametrically opposed to preservation and resent being 'sold down the river' by a small group of retention activists.

Respectfully,

Mik Ball