

**ZONING AND THE SINGLE-FAMILY LANDSCAPE:  
LARGE NEW HOUSES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE IN VANCOUVER**

**By**

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**We accept this thesis as conforming  
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**February 16, 1993**

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# **Abstract**

**Zoning and the Single-Family Landscape:**

**Large New Houses and Neighbourhood Change in Vancouver, Canada**

**by**

**Barbara Ann Pettit**

In the 1980s, very large houses began to replace smaller homes in older single-family zones in Canada's major cities. Protests by residents resulted in more restrictive single-family zoning schedules. In Vancouver, however, houses built as large as zoning permitted had appeared in the late 1960s. This case study traces Vancouver's single-family land use from 1900 to 1990.

The intent of Vancouver's original single-family zoning (1930) was to create a suburban landscape. To appeal to European immigrants of the 1950s and Asian immigrants of the 1970s, Vancouver's east-side builders developed a distinctive large house easily converted to include one or more illegal suites. By encouraging this design, zoning amendments in 1974 destroyed the suburban pattern intended by the original zoning. In response to affluent Asian immigrants of the 1980s, westside builders constructed larger, more elaborate homes. The city reacted to complaints about the size and design of these houses by amending its schedule in the 1980s to legalize suites, to reduce the bulkiness of new construction and to re-establish the suburban pattern.

Local residents do not like the new homes, and many neither need nor can afford them. The research indicates that Asian buyers are outbidding locals for these homes, and locals are dispersing to peripheral areas where homes are more affordable and styles support their cultural traditions. The research suggests that the more compact land use pattern of the 1900s may be

more appropriate than land use patterns that have resulted from the city's original and amended single-family schedule.

The research concludes that Vancouver addressed symptoms of the problem but not its cause: a zoning practice that continues to exclude the less affluent from single-family zones. Vancouver needs to espouse a more inclusionary zoning schedule that adopts the compact land use and mixed tenures typical before zoning and preserves the traditions of local residents. Otherwise, the zoning changes may preserve single-family areas for affluent immigrants as the Vancouver market aligns itself with the global market.



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## Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a journey which had to confront ethnic values directly to understand that cultural traditions, not ethnicity, lay at the root of Vancouver's large house controversy. As a result, the research has been a conscious effort to balance ways of thinking that characterize modern society with an older way of thinking which supports many of these cultural traditions. Foremost in shaping my approach to the large house problem have been the writings of the late George Parkin Grant who, in *English-Speaking Justice*, so elegantly critiques our modern liberalism. I am also indebted to my mentors, Henry Hightower, David Hulchanski, Shelagh Lindsey and Brahm Wiesman, who each increased my understanding of the problem in a unique way. Their efforts to help me bring structure to a multi-faceted and often confusing problem were invaluable. I am equally indebted to Ann McAfee, Associate Director of City Plans, City of Vancouver, who encouraged me to undertake this research and has given generously of her time and experience over the past five years. The research would not have been possible without the contributions of local residents, planners, aldermen, builders, architects, designers and realtors whose experience grounded the research in the reality of Vancouver's changing single-family neighbourhoods. Finally, I should like to thank Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for its financial assistance during the research period, and my husband for his patience and consistent encouragement.

Among the issues facing planners today are the apparently discrete issues of housing affordability and neighbourhood change. In Canada's largest cities, providing housing for the middle-class has been added to the perennial problem of housing the poor. At the same time that middle-class families have had difficulty finding affordable housing in or near large cities, single-family neighbourhoods in these cities have been changing. Smaller, more affordable homes are being demolished and replaced by larger more expensive homes which select out families affluent enough to afford them. These physical, social and economic changes—and the reasons for them—are not clearly understood and have become a new challenge for planners.

The issues of affordability and neighbourhood change occur within the broader context of urban planning. While housing planners focus on these issues, other planners deal with the equally important issues of transportation, commercial development, environmental degradation and so forth. Too often, the energy focused on specific issues leaves few resources left to examine relationships between them. As this thesis will illustrate, planners may not recognize how policies within different departments interact or how policy changes may affect other municipalities.

There are also broader forces that impinge on the urban fabric. Modern technology is not only reshaping the world but also reshaping the way people think and act. As computers process information ever faster, they impose a different structure on users' thoughts and actions, and set up new relationships between those who can access data banks and those who cannot. Advances in communications made possible by technology have affected the



movement of ideas, money and people to the extent that the global village has become a reality in a very short space of time.

In Canada, the social, economic and political upheavals of the latter half of the twentieth century have transformed immigration policy to favour extended families and economic refugees over applicants seeking entrance on the basis of their skills and talents.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this policy shift and the stability of western Europe, the proportion of immigrants from traditional European sources began decreasing in the mid-1960s as the proportion from Asia rose. The clustering of visible minorities in Canada's largest cities is changing the ethnic composition of these cities and stretching the tolerance of Canadians who identify with a culture that traces its roots to Europe.

How large our cities become and whom they will house remains unclear. Urban critics are of two minds about urban growth: those who believe that no time should be wasted rebuilding neighbourhoods to higher densities and those who advocate limiting growth at some still undetermined density.<sup>2</sup> In either case, the forces unleashed by growth and technology may alter these neighbourhoods much as they have altered the downtown cores of major cities. Given the pressures for growth and the confusion about density, it makes sense to look not only at neighbourhoods undergoing change but also at neighbourhoods built before zoning where the use of dwellings may have changed but the physical fabric remains intact. That such neighbourhoods have survived suggests that they can offer insights for planners confronting the changes occurring in single-family neighbourhoods today.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Campbell, *A Time Bomb Ticking: Canadian Immigration in Crisis* (Toronto: Mackenzie Institute, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, "City urged to plan growth", *Vancouver Sun*, 12 Feb. 1990.

## Urban Planning and the Single-Family Landscape

Urban planning attempts to realize the goals of a society. These goals arise from a set of beliefs accepted by that society or by the dominant group within that society. In Canada, this set of beliefs is a variant of liberal capitalism in which the protection of individual freedoms and the ability of the market to allocate resources are seen to provide a reasonable quality of life for most citizens. The tools and techniques of planning are the mechanisms used to translate the goals of a liberal capitalist society into reality in a rational, organized fashion.

In Canada, planning was introduced as a formal discipline for organizing the urban landscape in the early 1900s. Since its inception, zoning has been one of its most powerful tools. Simply stated, zoning is the legal regulation of building form and use. Today, most Canadian cities have a comprehensive plan to designate discrete zones of land use, and each zone is governed by a zoning schedule which dictates the uses and general form of buildings within that zone. Single-family zones have schedules which regulate, in varying degrees, the form of dwellings and their use as single-family homes. Single-family districts, then, are landscapes with particular physical, social, and economic attributes that derive from zoning. In other words, planners have formulated what they believed to be the best setting for family life, and have tried to translate this belief into reality through zoning.

Because the urban planning function is set within the broader context of a liberal capitalist society, planning and the market sustain and constrain each other.<sup>3</sup> The intent of government policy at all levels has been to let the

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<sup>3</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (Cambridge: Wheatsheaf, 1984).

market distribute housing services with as little interference as possible. But because history has shown that the unrestrained market does not always result in housing of acceptable quality, governments intervene in the market in various ways. In Canada, for example, the federal government intervenes in the normal function of the market through housing programs that range from cooperative housing to developer subsidies and through monetary policies that include insuring mortgages and adjusting interest rates. The provinces empower local governments to regulate the market through zoning schedules and building codes to ensure owners do not build in a manner that infringes upon the health and safety of others. This interdependence between planning and the market means that zoning becomes a filter for market forces while at the same time the market restricts planning goals.

With the help of government programs introduced after Second World War, Canada has housed most of the middle class adequately in suburbs built in and around cities.<sup>4</sup> Because of the apparent success of these suburbs, planners and residents believed that single-family zoning worked. As a result, planners focussed their attention elsewhere—often adopting fashionable solutions to win promotion and esteem among their peers.<sup>5</sup> Enthusiasm for high-rises in the 1960s, for example, shifted to similar enthusiasm for low-rise high density development in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Well into the 1970s, the single-family

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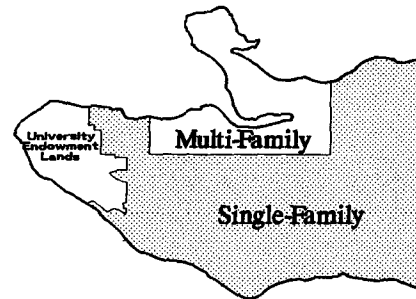
<sup>4</sup>J. David Hulchanski, "The 1933 Dominion Housing Act: Setting the Stage for a Permanent Federal Presence in Canada's Housing Sector", *Urban History Review* 25 (June 1986): 19–38; "The Evolution of Property Rights and Housing Tenure in Post War Canada: Implications for Housing Policy", *Urban Law and Policy* 9 (1988): 135–156.

<sup>5</sup>Richard S. Bolan, "The Practitioner as Theorist: The Phenomenology of the Professional Episode", *Journal of the American Planning Association* (July 1980): 268.

<sup>6</sup>Comay and Associates, *Livability at Medium Densities* (Toronto, 1972).

zones were ignored even though underutilization of single-family districts was causing pressure for redevelopment.

In Vancouver as elsewhere, as Figure 1 shows, single-family zones are the **largest** land use. They are also an **exclusionary** use. By excluding all non-residential uses except those that support family life (parks, churches, schools) and all other residential uses



**Figure 1.** The size of Vancouver's single and multi-family zones.

except the single-family home, they exclude those who want to work at home, those who cannot afford a detached home and those who, for various reasons, want to share their home with tenants.

Beyond the occasional critic, the fundamental assumption that large tracts of land should be developed at low densities to cater to specific groups of people on the basis of age, stage in the life cycle, household size, income and, implicitly, ethnic origin has not been seriously questioned. Between 1940 and 1970, the size of single-family zones and the cloning of new single-family areas increasingly distant from city centre enabled most middle-class families to buy a detached house within their means. For this reason, single-family zones did not appear to be exclusionary. But as suburbs sprawled beyond a practical commute, the extent and the exclusionary nature of single-family zones began to work against the middle-class. The extent of these zones left cities with little space for affordable housing alternatives and their exclusionary nature began to attract more affluent purchasers. By the late 1960s, established single-family districts in Canadian cities had begun to change. As Jacqueline Vischer describes in her study of these changes in

Burnaby, elderly owners began to sell their homes and new families began to move in.<sup>7</sup> As houses were renovated to meet the needs of new owners or torn down and replaced by larger homes, the single-family landscape began to take on a different character.

The aging of established suburbs in and around cities was a change occurring **within** single-family zones. Other changes exerted pressure from **outside**. Since the turn of the century, the forces of urbanization had brought people from rural areas to the cities and larger towns. As well, the waves of immigration that followed the first settlers included many who initially could not afford detached homes but were able to accumulate enough wealth to buy housing of their choice.<sup>8</sup> More recent additions to urban populations have included affluent immigrants, often from Asia, who can buy fairly expensive new homes upon arrival. Finally, the "baby boomers"—the children of those who created the demand for suburban housing after the Second World War—began to buy first and second homes for their own families.

In the largest cities, population growth outpaced the supply of residential land. Families who previously would have bought in single-family areas were forced to commute from distant suburbs or seek multi-family

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<sup>7</sup>Jacqueline C. Vischer, "The Changing Canadian Suburb: A Case Study of Burnaby, British Columbia", *Plan Canada* (June 1987): 130–140.

<sup>8</sup>The Loyalists, the first large group of settlers in English Canada, varied in wealth, but because of land grants and other assistance, became the dominant social force. The Irish, economic refugees fleeing the great potato famine, were the first to carve out culturally differentiated working class neighbourhoods. They were followed by Ukrainians and other ethnic groups who came to farm the prairies. After each World War, other European immigrants fled devastation and political realignment to satisfy the need for cheap labour in Canada's industrializing economy. Like the Ukrainians and Irish, these groups differed from the mainstream of Canadian society, and were treated with similar suspicion. Earlier, Canada had sought cheap Chinese manpower to build the western section of its trans-continental railway, but other Asian immigration was essentially prohibited until the 1960s.

accommodation intended to house urban residents of more modest means. In response, planners began to improve transportation systems in and out of cities and to include loosely developed single and multi-family districts in their search for land for housing. The Canadian experience in urban renewal and freeway building had barely begun, however, when homeowners saw the intrusion of freeways and highrises as a threat to the stability of their neighbourhoods.<sup>9</sup> Concern about the wisdom of destroying neighbourhoods for questionable new development began to surface in the late 1960s. By the 1970s, "Not-In-My-Back-Yard" (NIMBY) had become a rallying cry in Canada's largest cities.

As the NIMBY movement gathered force, voters replaced pro-development councils with councils dedicated to neighbourhood preservation. Much of the planning energy that had gone to new development shifted to preserving the stability of inner-city neighbourhoods and older single-family areas adjacent to them. Other single-family districts, simply because they were farther from city centre, remained neglected in the planning process through the mistaken belief that single-family by-laws protected these areas from undesirable change. Although planners recognized that these neighbourhoods were rejuvenating as older families moved out, they did not recognize that these areas were ripe for physical change until the 1980s when builders began to replace suburban bungalows and ranchers in the more affluent suburbs with very large homes.

Residents saw that these imposing new homes were changing their neighbourhoods and began to complain. In response, councils in large cities

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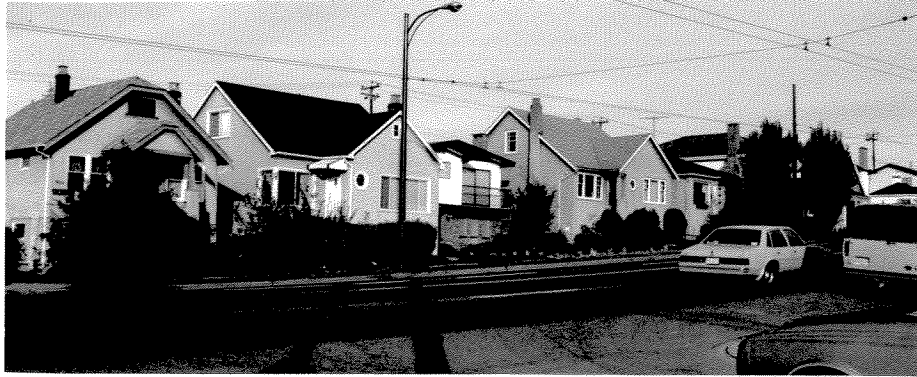
<sup>9</sup>Michael A. Goldberg and Michael Y. Seelig, *Canadian Cities: The Right Deed for the Wrong Reason*, Urban Land Economics Publications no. 29 (Vancouver, 1975).

began to redirect planning resources to moderate the pace of change in single-family neighbourhoods. Because of the inherent tendency to treat land use zones independently, the planning process focussed on analyzing changes occurring within these neighbourhoods rather than querying the fundamental assumptions that led to the creation of these zones. This restricted focus resulted in technical amendments to single-family by-laws to improve the way in which new construction fitted into the single-family landscape. Because adjustments to the size and siting of new construction had little impact on the physical, social and economic changes that continued to alter the single-family landscape, residents remained concerned.

### **Vancouver as an Example of Neighbourhood Change**

The introduction to the problem of change in single-family neighbourhoods has touched lightly on housing affordability, the global movement of people and investment capital, and the hard choices regarding density that cities may have to make in response to urban growth and change. The brief discussion of urban planning described the interdependency between government policy and market forces that produced the exclusionary single-family zone, the sprawl that such low-density development has engendered, and the contemporary pressures on older single-family districts. The large house is, in short, a "messy" planning problem that brings together a number of serious issues and defies neat and tidy solutions. At the same time, there has been little research on the large house issue simply because it was not seen as a

problem until the mid-1980s.<sup>10</sup> That large houses have resulted in a massive public outcry in Vancouver and extensive policy debate wherever they have occurred in any number makes them a worthy research subject.



**Photo 1.** An early Vancouver Special (third house from left) in an older eastside neighbourhood (top) and an eastside street comprised primarily of Vancouver Specials (bottom).

Vancouver offers a unique opportunity to explore the phenomenon of change in established single-family districts. Photo 1 shows that long before planners saw the large house as a problem, the city's eastside had begun to change in character. In the 1960s, large houses called "Vancouver Specials"

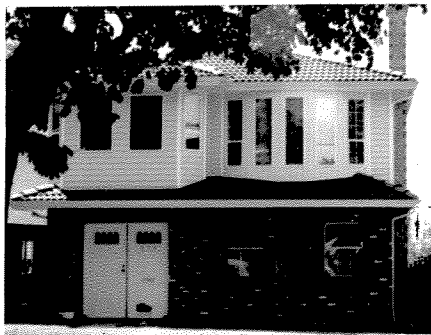
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<sup>10</sup>The construction of large houses was not researched systematically until 1990. See W. T. Stanbury and John D. Todd, *The Housing Crisis: The Effects of Local Government* (Vancouver: Laurier Institute, 1990).



began to replace smaller older homes. The photograph shows that these Vancouver Specials substantially changed neighbourhoods wherever they were built in any number.

The Special evolved over the years to become larger and more elaborate. This more elaborate variant, known as the "Monster House", has its counterparts in Toronto and elsewhere. Many planners and residents saw the Special and Monster House as distinct types but they are two faces of a single phenomenon. Both are as large as zoning regulations permit, both differ from smaller neighbours in form and detail, and both contain space that converts easily to a secondary suite. The differences between the two arise from their location in a city divided into an eastside working class district and a westside district for more affluent families.



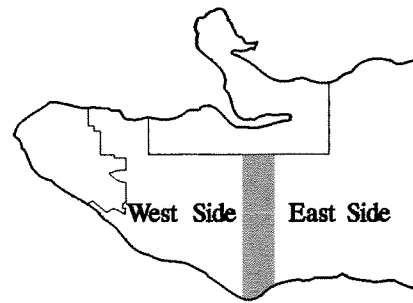
**Photo 2.** A Vancouver Special



**Photo 3.** A Monster House

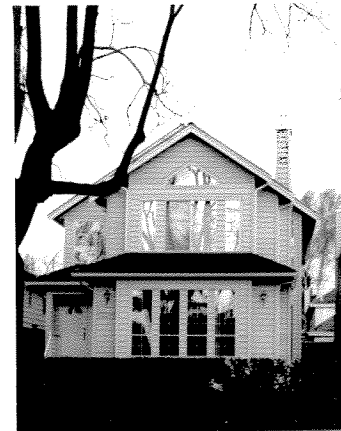
The Special, with its red tile roof, red brickwork and white or buff vinyl siding, first appeared on the east side and, for the most part, has stayed there. Because eastside lots are smaller and cheaper than westside lots, the Special is more modest in size and detail, and owners often rent the suite to help pay the mortgage. The more imposing Monster House first appeared on the city's larger westside lots in the 1980s. Its colours are more muted, its materials and detailing are often more expensive, and its buyers seldom need

the income provided by a suite. The shift from Specials to Monster Houses occurs quite abruptly along a central corridor defined by Cambie Street. The division of the city into two residential areas and the corridor which marks the transition in house type between the east and west side is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Vancouver's east and west sides are divided by a "central corridor" which marks the change in type from the Special to the Monster House.

Even though most houses are now built as large as permitted by zoning, not all new homes are Specials or Monster Houses. Some are built in traditional styles (Photo 4), some fit their neighbourhood context and some do not convert easily to provide a suite. The Special and the Monster House, on the other hand, are neither contextual nor traditional in style, and usually can convert to two or more units by simply closing interior doors. It is these houses that have caused residents to complain.

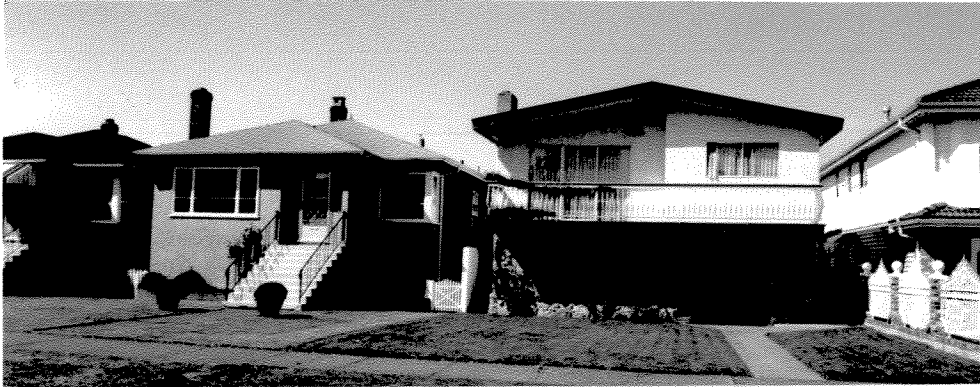


**Photo 4.** This new westside house is more contextual and more in keeping with Vancouver's vernacular tradition than many new large homes.

## The Large House Issue

Early forms of the Special suggest that it derives from ranch-style homes popular in the 1950s. Built initially to appeal to young post-war families, builders began to adapt it to appeal to European immigrants who, by the early 1960s, had saved enough money to buy an inexpensive new house on the east side. Over the years, builders increased the dwelling to the

limits permitted by zoning, refined its plan to maximize interior living space, and added details that they believed would appeal to immigrant tastes.



**Photo 5.** An early Vancouver Special with similarities to 1950s ranchers is flanked by an older bungalow, left, and a 1980s Vancouver Special, right.

By the 1970s, the Special had a distinctive style and was spreading throughout the east side as the "popular plan."<sup>11</sup> Neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, and residents began complaining about its size, its appearance and its use as a multi-family dwelling. It is important to note that the zoning schedule permitted the Special—along with many other styles—to be built, and its illegal use for two or more families occurred **after** it was built and approved by the city. Builders recognized that owners could use the basement space illegally, but pointed to many instances where families used this area legally as additional living space. The city, for its part, vacillated about the use of the Special, alternating between shutting down illegal suites because of public pressure and ignoring them because of the need for affordable rental housing. But it was not until the 1980s, when Monster Houses began to spread across Vancouver's more affluent west side, that the city

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<sup>11</sup>For plans and perspectives of typical Specials of the period, see Appendix B.

made a concerted effort to respond to complaints about size, use and design. Between 1986 and 1990, the city changed its single-family zoning three times to selectively legalize suites and to reduce the apparent size of new homes.

As the Special began to emerge as a distinctive style in Vancouver, ranch bungalows were being repeated across suburban landscapes elsewhere in fulfilment of the single-family dream. By the 1970s, when more costly materials began to characterize the Special, homebuilders in other cities had turned to Georgian, Tudor and other traditional styles.<sup>12</sup> The development of a vernacular disliked by neighbours simply did not occur in other cities until the mid-1980s.<sup>13</sup> Those knowledgeable about the Special have put forward many explanations for its emergence and spread. Some have blamed land costs, the zoning by-law and the building code. Others have blamed the city's inability to stimulate construction of more rental accommodation in other zones. Still others have suggested that it is easier to demolish and replace existing homes than to renovate them. And occasionally, usually by implication, it has been suggested that the Special is the direct result of immigrant tastes in housing. These reasons only partially explain the new large houses. They do not adequately explain the distinctive style of the Special or the replacement of large, high quality homes by Specials and Monster Houses of lesser quality. The explanations for the Special also leave other questions unanswered.

- Why did builders build a style that residents disliked? Why did they not repeat the ranchers that they were building on the west side?

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<sup>12</sup>Norbert Schoenauer, "House", *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed.

<sup>13</sup>A 1987 field trip showed Monster Houses just beginning to appear in any number in suburban Toronto municipalities. Some planners could not state with any accuracy where these homes were.

- Why did builders demolish and replace existing homes? Why did so few new owners come on stream to renovate existing eastside homes built in the interwar and post-war years.
- Why did builders build hybrids that included elements of the Special when they began building larger westside homes? Why did they not repeat traditional styles that Photo 6 shows were prevalent on the west side?



**Photo 6.** A large westside house in one of several traditional styles.

Specials and Monster Houses have changed the single-family landscape profoundly. They have contradicted the expressed intent of Vancouver's single-family schedule,<sup>14</sup> and they have contradicted the residents' vision of what a single-family neighbourhood should be. The research demonstrates the thesis that a direct relationship exists between zoning and the market which has resulted in a residential landscape that contradicts land use patterns intended by the single-family zoning schedule. In describing this relationship, the research does not attempt to provide an economic analysis of market

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<sup>14</sup>See Appendix A, RS-1 District Schedule, Section 1, *City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law 1985*: "The intent of this Schedule is to maintain the single-family residential character of the District". This intent changed as the RS-1 Schedule changed.

forces but rather to analyze the evolving forces of public sector planning and the response by the market as can be observed in built form.<sup>15</sup>

All research is shaped consciously or otherwise by the values of the researcher. This research began with several assumptions which directed the methods chosen and the final conclusions. The first assumption is a long-standing belief in "walking gently on the land" which was sharpened in the 1970s by exposure to the critical literature on environmental conservation.<sup>16</sup> It was not clear during the early stages of the research that a review of more current literature on what is now called sustainability would be useful. Only during the final stages of analysis was it apparent that sustainability could be linked to the findings in a concrete manner. Thus, although environmental considerations shaped the research, and particularly the choice of looking backwards to house form and land use patterns prior to zoning, these concerns are not introduced until the concluding chapters.

Public interest in sustainability is a "window of opportunity" for planners that opens and closes depending upon the economic environment. The emphasis on sustainability in the final chapters, therefore, is neither optimistic nor naive. It is simply an attempt to use public concern about the environment that was evident during the research period as a framework for debate about single-family neighbourhoods and thus deflect debate away from more volatile cultural issues which are, in any event, less useful over the long term in guiding policy decisions.

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<sup>15</sup>For a thorough economic analysis of the large house in Vancouver, see Stanbury and Todd.

<sup>16</sup>For example, Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962); Donella H. Meadows et al., *Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

The research also began with the conviction that single-family zoning was inherently unjust. Because choices in unit size and tenure in single-family zones do not reflect the general need, many people have not been able to choose to stay in place or to move to locations close to their family, their friends or their work. Before the research, builders and realtors had suggested that the exclusivity of single-family zones had taken on a new dimension, that zoning that once excluded immigrants by virtue of income requirements was now, for reasons described in the thesis, excluding almost everyone who was not an immigrant from buying the large new homes. As the research data began to substantiate buying patterns described by builders and realtors, the conviction grew that zoning must not only provide more opportunities for people to stay in place but must also be slanted towards the needs of local purchasers in order to retain a modicum of choice for them in a market that may now be global in scope.

Despite these biases, the findings of the research rest on the empirical evidence. To demonstrate that the relationship between zoning and the market ultimately contradicted the intent of single-family zoning, the thesis describes, in chronological order, the pressures of growth and change that resulted first in the introduction of zoning in 1930 and then in critical changes to the single-family schedule in 1938, 1974 and 1988. As the empirical evidence is introduced, the physical and socio-economic results of the zoning changes are analyzed with particular attention to house form and land use as these are affected by technical adjustments to the zoning schedule. In keeping with this chronology, the thesis first establishes house form and land use patterns that were typical of Vancouver in the early 1900s, well before zoning was introduced. At the conclusion of the analyses of the 1938, 1974

and 1988 zoning changes, a comparison of each of these zoning changes with the pre-zoning pattern illustrates the cumulative effect of zoning changes on the city's single-family landscape.

The final analysis moves from conclusions that can be supported by the empirical evidence to conclusions based on reflections about broader issues. These reflections, while not empirically supported, present the large house as an issue requiring much more than simple technical adjustments to the zoning schedule. This analysis contends that the problem was not the large house, but the **density** that single-family use permitted and the **design** of large houses as these designs relate to the traditional values of prospective buyers and neighbouring homeowners. The analysis argues that unless the issues of density and design are addressed coherently, racially based population shifts could occur simply because new large houses select out immigrant buyers who can afford these homes.

The analysis offers sustainability as a concept that can bring coherence to zoning decisions which, as the evidence will show, consistently produced results that were unintended and ultimately began to work against residents who could still afford to live or buy in single-family zones. If other cities mimic Vancouver's approach the large house issue, as the evidence suggests they are doing, then zoning changes in these cities may result ultimately in the displacement of their own residents by those who have left larger cities to find housing that is congruent with their traditions. The paper concludes with the need for more **inclusionary** zoning that is accomplished not only by increasing density and broadening the choice of unit size and tenure but also by using mechanisms that preserve the traditions or roots of the host community which are encoded in house forms and land use patterns of the past.



## The Research Design

The thesis is presented as a narrative that explains the emergence of the Vancouver Special in the 1960s and its transformation to the Monster House in the 1980s. The lack of a clearly defined problem at the outset led to various methods that were used first to understand the problem and then to test conclusions that began to emerge. Essentially, the research design uses methods common to both the case study and historical analysis.

The ability to quantify and compare the results of zoning amendments suggests an experimental research design. But zoning is first and foremost a policy that reflects interactions between people and their environment, and research into zoning should focus on methods that have been used to explore, describe and explain such interactions. Furthermore, little is known about contemporary problems associated with single-family zones. These problems have only recently become legitimate subjects for academic inquiry and much of the available literature is limited to particular municipalities and their specific zoning schedules. Research that "casts a wide net" and attempts nothing more than loose hypotheses is preferable at this time to a more structured approach. The cyclical approach advocated by Anselm Strauss, moving from stabs at forming, testing and proving concepts to formal verification, seems to best fit the characteristics of the research subject.<sup>17</sup> Multiple methods act as a check on assumptions and conclusions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Anselm Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup>Peter S. Li, *Social Research Methods* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1981); Royce Singleton et al., *Approaches to Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Eugene J. Webb et al., *Unobtrusive Measures: Non-Reactive Research in the Social Sciences* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).

Both the case study and historical analysis are suited to this method of inquiry. The literature on research methods shows that researchers in the humanities and the social sciences, who were convinced that quantitative analysis could bring the same rigour to their research that it brought to the natural sciences, became disillusioned with its limitations and with the predictive power of the scientific approach for their disciplines.<sup>19</sup> For planners, problems became evident in the late 1960s, and by the 1980s, many viewed practical applications of social science research with suspicion.<sup>20</sup> The case study, much maligned during the period of positivistic inquiry, regained favour as a means of exploring, describing and explaining historical and contemporary phenomena, and historians moved away from defining history as a kind of "scientific inquiry concerned with interpreting purposeful thought".<sup>21</sup> Both historians and social scientists began to recognize that quantitative data, used qualitatively, could improve their arguments. The shift from positivism resulted in a more realistic appraisal of the methods of

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<sup>19</sup>Hubert Blalock Jr., *Basic Dilemmas in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984); Constance Perin, *With Man in Mind: An Interdisciplinary Prospectus for Environmental Design* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1970); M. Lal Goel, *Political Science Research* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1988); Stephen Akroyd and John Hughes, *Data Collection in Context* (London: Longman, 1981).

<sup>20</sup>Lee Rainwater, "Fear and the House-as-Haven in the Lower Class", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 32, no. 1 (January 1966): 23–31; Douglas Blake Jr., "Requiem for Large Scale Models, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (May 1973):163–177.

<sup>21</sup>R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946). See also Richard Beringer, *Historical Analysis: Contemporary Approaches to Clio's Craft* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978).

natural science for research in the humanities and social sciences, and has aligned the social sciences more closely with the humanities.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, as social scientists and historians have reevaluated their research techniques, a merging of methods has occurred.<sup>23</sup> The case study is once more perceived as a legitimate way to explore "messy" problems while history, once locked into its museum of the past, has taken the methods of social science to interpret contemporary events and link them to similar "cases" in the past. Both have become elastic, and this elasticity enables each to address current phenomena in similar ways.

In comparing research strategies, Robert Yin notes that experimental research, surveys, archival analysis, case studies and historical analysis can be positioned on two continuums: one moves from the controlled conditions of the experiment to the uncontrollable events of history, and the other moves from a focus on the immediate present to a focus on the past.<sup>24</sup> The case study and historical research, then, are most appropriate to the exploratory nature of this research, while the ability to quantify zoning regulations and the availability of documentation surrounding these changes suggest that surveys and archival analysis are useful for supporting evidence.

The scope of the research is the City of Vancouver. The period described in the research spans almost a century, from about 1900 to 1990. The

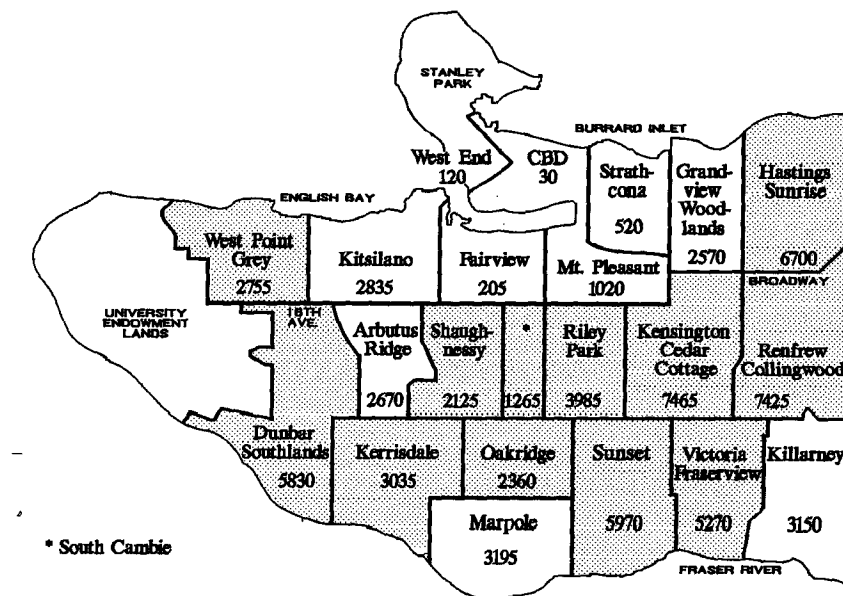
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<sup>22</sup>Michael A. Simon, *Understanding Human Action: Social Explanation and the Vision of Social Science* (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1982); Edward Shorter, *The Historian and the Computer: A Practical Guide* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

<sup>23</sup>Robert Jones Shafer ed., *Guide to Historical Method* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1974); Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup>Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Newberry Park, Cal.: Sage, 1989).

narrative, therefore, describes an urban process that produced Vancouver's single-family neighbourhoods and the changes to them. Because this historical description of process is limited to Vancouver, it is unique and the findings cannot be generalized to other cities. The research, however, points to apparent commonalities in both the definition of and solutions to the large house problem and it may be that research on the problem elsewhere may produce generalizable findings.



**Figure 3.** Vancouver Local Areas are shaded where over 50 percent of houses are detached. The number of homes—shown for each area—gives some sense of the lower densities on the west side. Source: Vancouver Planning Department, Local Areas, 1986.

In the City of Vancouver, approximately 70 percent of the land is zoned for single-family use (RS-1). The single-family areas used for analyzing local area statistics are twelve local areas, shown shaded in Figure 3, where more than 50 percent of the housing stock is comprised of detached houses. Six of these local areas are on the east side of the city where lots are

generally smaller and incomes more modest than on the west side. The figure shows the number of detached homes for each local area, thus indicating the distribution of detached houses across the city and giving some sense of the lower densities on the west side.<sup>25</sup>

Within these local areas are most of the single-family neighbourhoods of Vancouver. The research uses documentation on specific neighbourhoods within Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale, for example, to strengthen the arguments presented, but the analysis of local area statistics and field observations showed that the consistency of neighbourhood change was such that the only real differences were **when** these neighbourhoods changed and **how** the physical changes varied from east to west side.

At the start of the research, Vancouver had **one** schedule that governed single-family land use for the entire city. Most cities, in contrast, have a number of single-family zones governed by schedules that differ somewhat in regulating lot size, lot width, building height and so forth. Because of the number of homes in Vancouver with suites, describing any area as "single-family" is questionable. Nevertheless, the term "single-family" best describes the physical character of the local areas chosen. The focus of the research is on new construction because it is new construction that is changing the single-family landscape. Where large new homes are described, they conform to the single-family RS-1 District Schedule unless otherwise noted.

Document analysis and comments by key informants are introduced throughout the narrative. Documents consisted of zoning schedules plus reports, letters and internal correspondence generously provided by the Vancouver Planning Department, as well as newspaper and magazine articles

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<sup>25</sup>See Table 14, Appendix D.

collected during the research period. Letters to the editor and quotes in the media by planners, builders, designers, realtors and residents supplement interviews with key informants. These interviews were conducted informally throughout the research period and formally after the 1990 zoning changes. Surveys are described at appropriate stages in the narrative. The major survey, of new houses constructed after the 1986 and 1988 amendments, is described in three sections: the survey of 76 plans and permits of houses built after the 1986 zoning changes is described in Chapter 4; the replication of this survey for 76 new houses built after the 1988 zoning changes is described in Chapter 5; and the gathering of ethnic data on the total sample of 152 new houses is described in Chapter 6. Because census data for the 1986–1991 period was not available, the research relies on this survey and on media reports and interviews to describe changing demographics after 1986.

For the most part, terms are defined when they are introduced, but terms such as "density", "local" and "vernacular" require special attention at the outset. Density is usually defined precisely to mean the amount of built space or the number of units, households or people per acre. In this paper, the term is used more loosely to describe the potential for a building site to accommodate people. "Low" density refers to sites with small dwellings that can only accommodate a few people comfortably. "Higher" density may mean more units or more households or more built space but invariably means the potential for more people. Thus when the paper refers to higher density, it is referring to the capacity for a building site to hold more people either by larger households or by more households in smaller units—usually achieved by adding more built space but also, in the case of large existing homes, by converting existing space into more units.

Cities have used single-family zoning, often in combination with floor space ratio, to control density because single-family zoning limits the use of a dwelling to one family and floor space ratio controls the amount of space that can be built on a given site.<sup>26</sup> In the early years of zoning, houses were seldom built as large as the zoning permitted and both apparent and potential densities were quite low. Until recently, therefore, use combined with lot size loosely controlled the number of people per acre, and floor space ratio controlled the size of homes. Now that most houses are built to maximum floor space, both the apparent density and the potential population density of single-family neighbourhoods has increased. The new large houses do not necessarily increase the number of people living in a neighbourhood because the families living in them may be no larger than the families of the 1950s and 1960s who inhabited the smaller houses that these large houses have replaced. At the same time, limiting the use of the dwelling to one family can no longer control population density because families living in large houses can be multi-generational extended families.<sup>27</sup> Because of the wide variation in family size, both use and floor space have become irrelevant to describe, quantify or control population density. In this paper, therefore, the use of such quantifiers as "single-family" and "floor space ratio" do not imply a specific population density or density range, although comparisons of floor area in the text imply different potential densities and are used as such.

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<sup>26</sup>In Vancouver's single-family zone, the floor space ratio is 0.60. This means that the total floor space permitted in a single family dwelling is 60 percent of lot area, or 2400 square feet on a 4000 square-foot lot.

<sup>27</sup>Andrew Scott, "Be It Never So Humble," *Vancouver* (Dec. 1988): 118–124 describes an East Indian family of four generations and 22 members living in a new eastside home of 8000 square feet. A small number of houses range between 10,000 and 20,000 square feet, and may contain much smaller families.

"Local" is used to describe residents who have sunk deep roots into their community. Local residents can be of any ethnic group and are usually Canadian-born, but among those defined as locals may be new arrivals who have assimilated quickly or who are so sensitive to local custom that they are indistinguishable from those who have assimilated the local culture. Residents who are not born in Canada are described as "immigrants" even though they may be Canadian citizens. Both "local" and "immigrant", although not precise terms, are words that Vancouverites use to distinguish residents on the basis of their attitudes toward neighbourhood change. Immigrants are divided into "new arrivals" who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years and "established immigrants" who have lived here 10 years or more. To avoid confusion with quoted material, the thesis adopts the unfortunate local usage of "Caucasian" and "Asian" to distinguish residents of British and European origin from those of Chinese and East Indian origin. East Indians are, of course, Caucasian, but like the Chinese trace their origins to Asia.

In the text, the term "vernacular" refers to a house type that has been built in large enough numbers to define the physical character of a residential area. In exploring vernacular house form and settlement patterns, Amos Rapoport concludes that, despite physical constraints of climate, materials and technology, the dominant factors that decide form and settlement patterns are the socio-cultural forces operant in a given society—"the vision people have of the ideal life".<sup>28</sup> The "vernacular", then, is the physical response to a set of forces that are primarily, but not entirely, social in nature. Rapoport distinguishes between primitive and vernacular settlement patterns and further

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<sup>28</sup>Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 47.



divides the vernacular into pre-industrial and modern. By primitive, he means form and settlement patterns that exhibit little specialization. People build their own houses and over time a satisfactory form and grouping emerges that suits the society in question. The pre-industrial vernacular is similar in that everyone knows the building types and how to build them. But while users participate in the design process, tradesmen take over the actual building. Houses show more differentiation in the use of space and the house itself—although not the type—may vary according to family size and wealth and the dictates of the site. According to Rapoport, the pre-industrial vernacular lacks theoretical or artistic pretension, it works well with its site and micro-climate, and it shows respect for other people, their dwellings and the environment as a whole. It has a given order, but permits addition without destroying the aesthetic of the design. Relationships between elements in the design rather than the elements themselves are significant, and the outcome of the process is the result of a collaborative effort between builders and users that spans generations. Turn-of-the-century houses, although properly belonging to the industrial era, tend to follow these principles whereas Vancouver Specials and Monster Houses do not.

Rapoport admits to difficulty in defining characteristics of the modern vernacular that emerged during the industrial era and questions whether it exists at all. He suggests that there is a modern folk idiom "designed for the popular taste, not by it"<sup>29</sup> which represents the values of ordinary people more clearly than does the design subculture. Despite this concern about the existence of a modern vernacular, the research uses "vernacular" to refer to both turn-of-the-century homes and Vancouver Specials and Monster Houses. If,

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<sup>29</sup>Rapoport, 7.

as Rapoport claims, the "vernacular matrix" represents the values of a given society and forms the context for understanding high-style buildings of the period, then any house type built in large enough numbers to form a context might be legitimately considered the vernacular of that place. A major difference between turn-of-the-century homes and Specials and Monster Houses is that the former resulted from a relatively homogeneous society's vision of the ideal whereas the latter ostensibly have been built for the popular taste and have been selected by a particular segment of society as the best available approximation of the ideal. In this sense, the thesis is about two vernacular traditions, one that existed before zoning and one that emerged from a specific relationship between zoning and the market.

The chapters that follow develop the contemporary issue of new large houses in Vancouver in a historical sequence from early settlement patterns to the current single-family landscape. In reviewing the relevant literature, Chapter 2 traces the development of the exclusionary single-family pattern from its possible beginnings in the seventeenth century through to legal challenges to single-family use in the 1980s. The chapter also discusses invasion and succession as a possible theoretical explanation for the large house, and the globalization of the real estate market as an external force contributing to neighbourhood change.

Chapter 3 briefly describes Canadian settlement patterns up to the introduction of zoning with particular emphasis on the relationship between these patterns and the belief systems that shaped them. It concludes by comparing an example of the Vancouver's turn-of-the-century residential pattern to the residential pattern typical after the 1938 zoning amendments.

Chapter 4 traces the emergence of the Vancouver Special from its innocuous beginnings in the 1950s to its demise in the mid-1980s. The chapter links changes in form and detailing between 1938 and 1980 to critical zoning amendments of the period and to changes in the ethnic composition of the east side. The chapter concludes by comparing land use patterns of the early 1900s with land use patterns typical after the 1974 zoning amendments.

Chapter 5 describes the spread of Monster Houses through the city in the 1980s, a period marked by high migration to the city and rising house prices. It examines the effects of the 1986 and 1988 zoning changes on house form and use, and completes the comparative analysis of land use patterns.

Chapter 6 analyzes discrete factors in housing demand and provides evidence that most new houses built after the 1986 and 1988 zoning changes were purchased by Asian immigrants. The chapter also describes the "fine-tuning" of the zoning schedule in 1990 and suggests that the cumulative results of the zoning changes between 1986 and 1990 may serve only to protect single-family zones for global wealth.

Chapter 7 evaluates the implications of Vancouver's response to its large houses and concludes that the fundamental issues were density and design.

In summarizing the research, Chapter 8 argues that cities should encourage more large houses, more suites and more restoration of existing homes if they wish to preserve local traditions encoded in the residential landscape. The chapter concludes with a vision for an inclusionary residential landscape that requires, for its implementation, a planning practice that borrows from residential patterns that evolved around the turn of the century.

Although considerable literature exists on zoning, very little describes how contemporary forces act upon zoning to produce large houses. Documentation on large houses is limited to attempts by specific municipalities to control size through zoning amendments,<sup>1</sup> and not enough time has elapsed to develop a literature that addresses contemporary change in single-family neighbourhoods more comprehensively. In consequence, the literature search became a search for literature that bore peripherally on the problem. It addressed three areas of inquiry: how single-family zoning evolved, why it evolved, and why single-family neighbourhoods were changing. The literature describing the "vision" that produced the exclusionary single-family zone addresses the first two questions and provides the context for the empirical analysis of Vancouver's single-family schedule as it changed in response to market demand. The literature on neighbourhood change through the processes of aging and invasion of one social group's "turf" by another group provides insights into the process of change but does not adequately explain the physical aspects of this process.

The inability of theory based on local movement of populations to explain neighbourhood change in Vancouver suggested that globalization of the real estate market might be a critical factor in explaining physical change. But the impact of global activity on local markets is not yet clearly understood, and the documentation relating this activity to the Vancouver market is sparse and impressionistic. However tenuous, this documentation

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 7.

suggests that globalization may bring a new dimension to invasion-succession theory and begins to explain why the contemporary large house has proven less than amenable to planning intervention.

## **The Suburban Pattern and Single-Family Zoning**

Vancouver's single-family neighbourhoods are suburban in form—small to large lots with small to mid-sized houses surrounded by green grass and trees.<sup>2</sup> After fire destroyed the city in 1886, its inner neighbourhoods rebuilt in a compact fashion that had many commonalities with the pre-industrial pattern described by Rapoport. But the pattern that describes most neighbourhoods today is the result of construction in the twentieth century which in turn produced the streetcar and the automobile suburb and a central core of highrises which eradicated much of the old city. Most residential areas are typical of suburban development before and after the Second World War.

A precondition for the contemporary suburb is the concept of the small, single-family dwelling housing an independent two-generation family, but where this concept arose is unclear. Witold Rybczynski, while aware of the danger of ascribing this concept to any single place, suggests that the emergence in seventeenth-century Netherlands of rowhouses just large enough for a couple and their children may be a partial explanation. In medieval Europe, it had been customary for families and their servants to live together in

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<sup>2</sup>The most common lot size in the City of Vancouver is about 4000 square feet. Older houses, particularly on the east side, are often quite small—about 800 to 1000 square feet not including basements. Larger houses, usually located on the west side, range from about 1500 to 3000 square feet not including basements. Very large houses are atypical and are located primarily in the elite areas of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale. Very few houses built after the First World War and before the 1960s approached the maximum size permitted by the RS-1 zoning schedule.

undifferentiated spaces within large town or manor houses. As the period progressed, interior space became more differentiated, but the custom of large numbers of people living together remained. A set of social forces that congealed first in the Netherlands, then in England and finally on the continent, changed this pattern.

In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands lacked a landless peasantry and a powerful nobility. Society consisted mainly of merchants and land-owners living in small to mid-sized towns. The Calvinist religion and the bourgeois ethos of the upper-middle class produced a simplicity in manners, dress and housing. In comparison to Parisian houses of the period, which held up to 25 people, the small Dutch rowhouse held only four or five. There were no tenants because most people could afford a small home, and no servants because society discouraged the practice. The result was a more private family life than experienced elsewhere in Europe. Given the influence that the prosperous Dutch had on English taste during the seventeenth century, argues Rybczynski, it is reasonable to assume that the English proclivity for a private family life originated in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

According to Robert Fishman, the direct precursor of the contemporary suburb in England was the spontaneous creation of a commercial elite who sought to separate themselves from the disorder of industrial London. The idea of a residential district that excluded commerce and industry was without precedent. Crucial to its success was the nuclear family and the values that this concept of family life expressed in built form.

From its origins, the suburban world of leisure, family life, and union with nature was based on the principle of exclusion. Work was excluded from the family residence;

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<sup>3</sup>Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking, 1986).

middle class villas were segregated from working class housing; the greenery of suburbia stood in contrast to a gray, polluted urban environment . . . Suburbia, therefore, represents more than bourgeois utopia, the triumphant assertion of middle class values. It also reflects the alienation of the middle classes from the urban-industrial world they themselves were creating.<sup>4</sup>

The first houses of the new utopia were weekend homes built as family retreats in the countryside, and the transition to permanent homes came slowly. It was John Nash who transformed the discrete elements of these new suburbs into a reproducible market commodity. By the mid-1800s, the idea of grouping houses in a park beyond the grime of the city was fully developed. Shortly afterwards, immigration and industrialization brought rapid change to American cities and, around 1900, American suburbs built after the English pattern became an escape for the wealthy from cities increasingly populated by immigrants. The Canadian pattern differed because most elites remained relatively close to city centre in suburbs built in the late 1800s and early 1900s,<sup>5</sup> while the middle class emulated the English suburb further out.

Fishman explains the power of the suburban vision as a setting for family life. He shows how exclusion motivated the creation of the affluent suburb and suggests why politicians, planners and residents, fearing the

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 4.

<sup>5</sup>Elite suburbs of the 1850s persist in cities that did not experience rapid growth in the industrial era. Elsewhere, elite garden suburbs (e.g. Rosedale in Toronto) often developed after the 1900s at the end of stately avenues which were the locus for the very wealthy until commercial development overtook these avenues. Migration of Vancouver elites from the West End to Shaughnessy between 1911 and 1922 was a "leap" rather than a simple progression to adjacent territory. Like other elite suburbs, it persists close to city centre. See, for example, A. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth 1874–1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975); *Residential and Neighbourhood Studies in Victoria*, C. N. Forward ed. (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1973); Donald MacKay, *The Square Mile: Merchant Princes of Montreal* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987).

return of conditions that gave rise to the suburbs, promoted single-family zoning as an exclusionary device. Although single-family zoning is new, zoning itself is an ancient technique for controlling built form that can be either hierarchical or egalitarian depending on the social system it reflects.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary practice in liberal democracies has been hierarchical, and the literature seldom fails to mention the exclusionary aspects of this practice.

In tracing the development of zoning in the United States and Europe, Anthony Sutcliffe suggests that zoning originated not only to promote safer, healthier cities but also to "keep the poor in their place".<sup>7</sup> He notes that divergent approaches to zoning and planning controls respectively produced flats and tenements in Germany and monotonous rowhousing in Britain. By the 1900s, other than reducing crowding and creating basic conditions for health and safety, it was clear that planning had not improved housing for the poor in any significant way. At this point, observes Sutcliffe, Germany looked to the "piecemeal" planning practices that had enabled single-family and rowhousing in Britain to reach a broader spectrum of middle and working class families, and Britain looked to the "extension planning" that had allowed Germany to develop a more efficient urban infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> North

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Adams, *The Design of Residential Areas*, Harvard City Planning Series no. 6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934) gives examples dating back 5000 years.

<sup>7</sup>Anthony Sutcliffe, *Toward the Planned City: Germany, Britain, The United States and France 1780 – 1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 115.

<sup>8</sup>Extension planning, where areas were carved into large blocks with wide streets, was devised by James Hobrecht as a development plan for Berlin in 1862. He probably saw it as a conceptual plan, with the large blocks subdivided by minor streets and lanes, but speculators built large apartments surrounding an open court for light and air. The cheapness and efficiency of the plan made it a model for other German towns and cities after 1875.



America was the beneficiary of both the English suburb and a comprehensive planning approach that Britain imported from Germany.

While Britain and Germany sought solutions from each other, Ebenezer Howard published a concept for complete new "garden cities" separated by open country from each other and from older cities that no longer housed people adequately. In trying to design a system that combined the best of capitalism and socialism, he was far ahead of his time.<sup>9</sup> Although two garden cities were built in his lifetime, the end result was the antithesis of his work, the controlled garden suburb. Zoning has propagated both impoverished and elegant variations of the garden suburb throughout North America.

Sutcliffe traces zoning until the outbreak of the First World War. Others carry this history through the 1960s. Robert Katz notes that the same concerns that led to planning controls in Britain and Europe motivated American zoning. Here, the exclusion of poor families, who were often immigrants, remained a basis for zoning practice.

The earliest regulations were passed to correct some of the worst conditions of tenement houses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. . . Providing at least a minimum guarantee of health and safety of multi-family housing was perhaps the main, but not the sole, motive for the earliest regulations. These laws had the effect of isolating the people who lived in these buildings from the rest of society. If multi-family structures were equated with slums and second-class housing, then occupants—often poor immigrants—were regarded as second-class citizens.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965). Peter Hall, "Ebenezer Howard: Has His Time Come At Last", *Town and Country Planning* 52, (1983): 42-47; Eugenie Ladner Birch, "Radburn and the American Planning Movement: Persistence of an Idea", *Journal of the American Planning Association* 46, no. 4 (October, 1980): 424-439.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Katz, *Design of the Housing Site: A Critique of American Practice*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1966), 169.

To this end, single-family regulations often defined lot sizes and open spaces around the dwelling that were more generous than necessary for livability. Such practices, argues Katz, hid a whole range of prejudices under the guise of sound planning and protection of property values. Katz also predicted that single-family suburbs would be future "renewal sites" because densities were low, buildings were less durable and the lack of rootedness among residents reduced relocation problems. He cites Wolf von Eckhardt in defence of his argument for more intense development of residential land.

In most larger communities and cities today . . . especially in the suburbanized cities of America, the problem is no longer that densities are too high but that they are, overall, too low. Yet the notion that lowering density will *per se* heighten livability, morality and virtue still obsesses most of our planners and their zoning codes. They substitute compulsory open space and setbacks for creative urban design.<sup>11</sup>

Writing a decade after Katz, Constance Perin also describes zoning as a moral statement. Perin points to early ordinances against Chinese laundries and Jewish garment workers and to the coincidence of the introduction of zoning in American cities with the Immigration Act of 1924. She also cites the critical case of the *Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas* (1974) in which the Supreme Court of the United States found in favour of exclusionary zoning.<sup>12</sup> Canadian courts have brought in mixed judgments on residential uses of single-family zones, and there would seem to be some evidence that over time the courts have broadened their interpretation of use in single and two-

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<sup>11</sup>Wolf von Eckhardt, "The Case for Building New Towns", *Harper's Magazine* (Dec. 1965): 91 in Katz, 75.

<sup>12</sup>Constance Perin, *Everything in its Place: Social Order and Land Use in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 48.

family districts.<sup>13</sup> While some municipalities interpret their by-laws generously, judgments in several instances have found against a narrow, technical interpretation of single-family use by municipal staff. An important aspect of Perin's critique, which applies to these Canadian cases as well, is that planners often do not realize that zoning is anything more than the technical administration of land use.

What has been thought of as singularly technical concerns in land-use matters, I take to be value-laden, that is, moral. American land-use classifications, definitions and standards, alongside all other concrete tasks, name cultural

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<sup>13</sup>R. v. Brown Camps, 2 O.R. 461 (1969) and R. v. Brown Camps, 1 O.R. 388 (1969). The Ontario Court of Appeal upheld municipal zoning which did not permit a commercial home for children with emotional problems in Scarborough and Mississauga respectively.

City of Barrie v. Brown Camps Residential and Day Schools, 2 O.R. (2d) 337, 344 (1973). The Ontario Court of Appeal found in favour of Brown Camps on the grounds that "the premises are being used in the same manner as if they were being used by parents with special expertise to deal with their children who had similar emotional problems."

R.v. Bell, 2 M.P.L.R. 39 (1977); Bell v. The Queen, 2 S.C.R. 212 (1979). In 1977, the Ontario Supreme Court (Court of Appeal) found against three unrelated persons living in a semi-detached dwelling unit restricted by zoning to use by an individual or a single family. In 1979, the Supreme Court of Canada overturned this decision on the grounds that determining *who* might live in a building rather than the *use* of the building was "people zoning" and *ultra vires* the powers of municipal council.

Charlottetown v. Association for Residential Services, 9 M.P.L.R. 91 (1979). Prince Edward Island Supreme Court found for the association on the grounds that the residential character of the area was not compromised by retarded adults living together in a dwelling unit.

Benyon et al. v. Corporation of the City of Victoria, B. C., 16 M.P.L.R. 1 (1981). The Supreme Court of British Columbia found against single-family residents who appealed against zoning that permitted a detoxification centre in their neighbourhood.

Ottawa Zoning By-Law 307-84, 30 M.P.L.R. 22 (1985). The Ontario Municipal Board found that Ottawa discriminated in excluding roomers and boarders from its R1 (single-family) zone when they were allowed in R2 and R3 (single-family) zones.

and social categories and define what are believed to be the correct relationships among them.<sup>14</sup>

Other critics also had difficulty with the morality of single-family zoning. Lawyer Richard Babcock has queried whether health, safety, morals and the public welfare were advanced by requiring that every housing unit be on a separate lot,<sup>15</sup> and Peter Marcuse has condemned zoning as a problem rather than a solution in improving conditions for the less affluent.

One would expect that zoning, perhaps the first and still most important contribution of the city planning process . . . would be designed and used to improve the conditions of housing . . . Yet, contrary to all expectations, neither the city planning movement as it moved from intellectual crusade to practical influence, nor zoning . . . contributed much to the solution of housing problems of the ill-housed, and arguably each worsened it.<sup>16</sup>

According to these critics, exclusion derives from single-family use and from regulations that stipulate generous and thus expensive open space. But older elite areas can include large and small houses on small lots, purpose-built duplexes and houses converted to duplexes. These areas exclude not by single-family use but by the **quality** of the neighbourhood, its **proximity** to city centre, and the resulting **cost** of accommodation. Often well defined before zoning was introduced, the persistence of such areas is due to value orientations that newcomers can decipher from the residential landscape.<sup>17</sup>

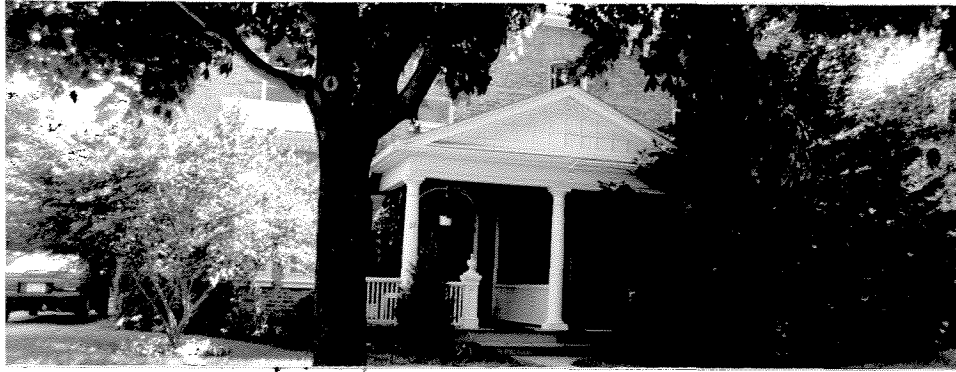
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<sup>14</sup>Perin, *Everything in its Place*, 3.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Babcock, "The Egregious Invalidity of the Exclusive Single-Family Zone", paper delivered at Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the University of Southern California Law Centre Conference, Los Angeles, Feb. 1983, 193.

<sup>16</sup>Peter Marcuse, "Housing Policy and City Planning", *Shaping an Urban World*, ed. Gordon Cherry (London: Mansell, 1980), 23.

<sup>17</sup>William Michelson, *Man and His Urban Environment: A Sociological Approach* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1970), 111–130.



**Photo 7.** Purpose-built duplex in an elite nineteenth-century Ontario suburb.

The nineteenth-century Ontario duplex shown in Photo 7 shows that real exclusion derives from quality and location. Even with its large lots and fine homes, Vancouver's elite garden suburb of Shaughnessy would not remain exclusive if it were built beside a stockyard. Nor would a collection of single-family shacks acquire prestige on the Shaughnessy site. The myth behind the suburban vision is that single-familyness and open space create quality neighbourhoods which exclude. But the ability to exclude by regulating use is reserved for neighbourhoods of a lesser sort, the suburbs built in and around cities for the broad middle range of society, where location and quality are more variable. Here, as Katz and Perin suggest, single-family use and minimum lot sizes increased the cost of houses and erected barriers to poorer families, many of whom were immigrants.

It is in such areas that neighbourhood intensification is so strongly resisted, perhaps because these residents have a stronger need for the single-family house as status symbol than residents of either elite or working class areas.<sup>18</sup> In examining intensification in Vancouver, Janet Lee describes theo-

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<sup>18</sup>Michelson, 114.

retical and emotional reasons for its rejection.<sup>19</sup> She points out that the single-family neighbourhood is a theoretical ideal that is not compatible with changing family structures and that the "stability" residents prize is actually a continuing movement of people, money and materials that retains the character of their neighbourhoods. Emotional fears of intensification, primarily increased traffic and declining property values, are not substantiated by research conducted after intensification has occurred.<sup>20</sup> The only legitimate reasons for resident resistance are that intensification violates the single-family by-law and that unplanned intensification in the form of illegal suites results in the potential for hazardous (uninspected) dwellings and unfair distribution of taxes. Except for these legitimate reasons, the unsubstantiated fear that change will bring declining property values, deterioration of neighbourhoods and an accompanying loss of status seems to underscore residents' desire to retain exclusionary single-family zoning.

## **Invasion and Succession**

Both Perin and Katz establish a relationship between immigration and exclusionary zoning. But the exclusion of immigrants did not last. As they acquired wealth, they left inner-city reception areas and "invaded" other

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<sup>19</sup>Janet Mai-Lan Lee, "Responding to Future Housing Needs: Residential Intensification in Single-Family Neighbourhoods" (M. A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989), 20–27. See also Klein and Sears et al., *Detailed Summary of Findings and Recommendations*, Part 1 of *Study of Residential Intensification and Rental Housing Conservation*, Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (Toronto, 1983), 30–35.

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Ekos Research Associates, *The Impact of Conversions on Neighbourhoods: Property Values and Perceptions*, Ontario Ministry of Housing (Toronto, 1987).

areas. Some clustered farther out and others dispersed throughout the city. David Ley cites several studies to show that dispersal and clustering relate to social distance or the degree of difference between individuals or groups in terms of racial, cultural or status variables.

. . . minority groups pass thorough variable assimilation histories. Some minorities rapidly abandon their cultural roots, and their identity merges with that of the majority group, whereas others voluntarily maintain their separate-ness. For a third category, for whom ethnic differences are often compounded by racial diversity, segregation is enforced not only voluntarily but also by the hostility of the host culture.<sup>21</sup>

Where differences between newcomers and existing residents are profound, says Ley, the invaded population leaves and the community restructures around the needs of the invading group. In most examples of invasion and succession, a lower status group takes over the territory of a higher status group, and the physical landscape either deteriorates or acquires a "cultural layer" that alters the **appearance** but not the **structure** of the physical landscape. With gentrification, a variant of invasion and succession, the reverse is true. Here, a higher status group moves into a neighbourhood occupied by a lower status group, upgrades existing buildings and removes ethnic layering applied by previous groups.<sup>22</sup> The large new houses of Vancouver are a different phenomenon in that they **permanently** alter the physical structure of the neighbourhood as well as changing its social and economic fabric.

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<sup>21</sup>David Ley, *A Social Geography of the City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 267.

<sup>22</sup>David Ley, "Gentrification: A Ten Year Overview", *City Magazine* 9 (Winter 1986/87): 12–19. An example of layering by successive immigrant waves and the removal of these layers by "gentrifiers" is discussed in Liz Weier, "Whose House is Home?", *Canadian Heritage* 12, no. 3 (Aug.-Sept. 1986): 29–35.

Geographer Ali Modarres notes that invasion and succession theory does not consider differences between and within ethnic groups. Because immigrant characteristics have changed, affluent immigrants are less likely to experience the formation or intensification of an ethnic consciousness brought on by discrimination, and theories developed by studying less affluent immigrants may have little validity today. Using factor analysis, Modarres mapped the spatial distribution of eight ethnic groups in Los Angeles and Orange Counties in California. He found that spatial distribution of groups with high socio-economic status differed significantly from the distribution of other ethnic groups and reflected more locational options for the higher status groups. Because socio-economic status differed among and within groups, recent immigrants had settled in various locations throughout the study area rather than invading areas settled by traditional immigrants. Any clustering by ethnicity among high-status groups is by choice.

In contrast to the invasion-succession theory, the first elite group never tried to invade an ethnic area of the city . . . [It] can choose to locate anywhere. Any concentration among these groups is driven more by ethnicity than by economic necessity. Since later groups do not have equal access to the housing market, they are located in the lower socioeconomic areas, where they may form a residential concentration and co-occupy an area with other ethnic groups.<sup>23</sup>

. Simple succession can also result from the aging of the resident population. Many older residential areas have developed a physical structure that supports different stages in the life cycle through a mix of large and small houses and the conversion of large houses to multi-family dwellings. The post-war suburbs, in contrast, are more homogeneous in house size and the

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<sup>23</sup>Ali Modarres, "Ethnic Community Development: A Theoretical and Methodological Re-examination", paper delivered at the Urban Affairs Association Annual Meeting, Vancouver, 17 April 1991, 21.



legal conversion of existing homes has not been permitted. These suburbs, extensively researched in their formative years,<sup>24</sup> have become candidates for social, economic and physical change as they have aged.

In her study of four suburban developments in Burnaby, Vischer found that planning principles used to guide the development of these suburbs have not stood the test of time. Because these principles were based on the needs of young families, they have left suburbs open to "pressures for redevelopment that affect *the traditional design appearance* of suburban subdivisions".<sup>25</sup> Vischer found that a more affluent second-generation population was replacing the middle income households who first moved to the suburb, and that many empty-nesters who previously had resisted higher densities wanted to move into higher density housing in their own neighbourhoods. The collective aging of suburban populations and their outmigration for want of suitable housing is widespread.

These theories of neighbourhood change, although not directly applicable to the large house, describe variables that combine in a different way to produce the large house and consequent neighbourhood change. Figure 4 suggests how the large house phenomenon may differ from other theories of neighbourhood change. In the figure, the heading "aging" refers to simple succession by younger buyers and the "O" under each heading represents the acting variables with the exception of the common variable of aging. The aging of residents in established neighbourhoods is clearly the cause of simple

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<sup>24</sup>Herbert Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967); William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); S. D. Clark, *Suburban Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

<sup>25</sup>Vischer, 130. Emphasis mine.

succession and contributes to invasion/succession and gentrification. In Vancouver, the aging of residents and their homes led to the sale and replacement of these homes by new large dwellings purchased by immigrants.

	Invasion	Gentrification	Aging	Large House
Income	○	○	○	○
Status	○	○		
Ethnicity	○			○
Physical Change			○	○

**Figure 4.** Variables active in theories of neighbourhood change and in change involving large houses in Vancouver.

Other than the variable of aging, each theory of neighbourhood change turns on a different set of variables. Invasion and succession brings together ethnicity and (lower) income and status; gentrification brings together (higher) income and status; and the aging of residents or simple succession brings together (higher) income and possible permanent change to the physical landscape by extensive renovation or new construction. Neighbourhood change initiated by large houses differs because it brings together all variables except status. The status of buyers of large new houses may be quite different in their country of origin than in the communities to which they move. But, although the income and ethnicity of potential buyers affects the speculative builders' choice of location and design, the evidence suggests that actual buyers may be higher, lower or equal in status to surrounding neighbours. Thus, the large house phenomenon turns around the variables of income, ethnicity and physical change.

Social-economic changes that threaten the *status quo* make many residents of affected neighbourhoods anxious. Yet planners cannot draw upon a body of literature that supports either social mix or segregation, and no evidence exists to show that social mix is successful.<sup>26</sup> Modarres' findings—that affluent immigrants make locational choices commensurate with income—has a parallel in the Vancouver situation. If his research and Vancouver's experience have more general application, the clustering by affluent immigrants in preferred residential locations is a new phenomenon for planners.

## The Global Economy

Although little literature on the global economy relates to planning and zoning at the local level, two themes highlighted by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene repeat through the literature. The Pacific Rim will reshape the world culturally and economically, and the need to preserve cultural identity will offset the homogenizing forces of communication and the marketplace.

The more humanity sees itself as inhabiting a single planet, the greater the need for each culture on that globe to own a unique heritage. It is desirable to taste each others' cuisine, fun to dress in blue denim, to enjoy some of the same entertainment. But if that outer process begins to erode the sphere of deeper cultural values, people will return to stressing their differences, a sort of cultural backlash . . . in a curiously paradoxical way, the more alike we become, the more we will stress our uniqueness.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Wendy Sarkissian, "The Idea of Social Mix—Town Planning: A Historical Review", *Urban Studies* 3 (1976): 231–244; Christopher Silver, "Neighbourhood Planning—A Historical Perspective", *Journal of the American Planning Association* (Spring 1985): 161–174.

<sup>27</sup>John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990s* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 156.

Several Canadian writers have explored the influence of the Pacific Rim and its impact on Vancouver and Toronto streetscapes. In describing a large new house in Vancouver's elite Shaughnessy area, Margaret Cannon captures the way in which these houses anger residents by breaking with the cultural traditions of local neighbourhoods.

Around the corner, Old Vancouver sits well back from the road, daffodil and tulip beds ablaze, its windows decently shrouded behind firs, cedars and flowering magnolia. But defiantly next door to it stands New Vancouver, two-storey stucco-and-brick front, center-hall plan. It fills the entire lot. There is an infinitesimal strip of green between house and sidewalk. Two miniscule pollarded holly bushes in stucco pots sit resignedly on either side of the front door. No doubt it is supposed to be impressive, but compared with the quiet elegance of the rest of the street, it's a tacky fraud.<sup>28</sup>

Cannon's exploration came from a concern for the cultural identity of her adopted country. Others who provide similar descriptions of neighbourhood change were more concerned with economic impacts that may influence cultural life. John Demont and Thomas Fennel predict a revitalized economy through the entrepreneurial talents of Asian immigrants and their links to the awakening market of mainland China, while Donald Gutstein argues that Asian wealth will translate to a new power base.<sup>29</sup> But even the optimistic analysis by DeMont and Fennel alludes to shifts in power and regional economic disparity as a result of the tendency of business immigrants to cluster in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. "Chinese emigrés dominate the economy

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<sup>28</sup>Margaret Cannon, *China Tide: The Revealing Story of the Hong Kong Exodus to Canada* (Toronto: Harper & Collins, 1989), 200.

<sup>29</sup>John DeMont and Thomas Fennel, *Hong Kong Money: How Chinese Families and Fortunes are Changing Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1989); Donald Gutstein, *The New Landlords: Asian Investment in Canadian Real Estate* (Victoria: Porcépic Books, 1990).

of almost every Asian country they call home," they note. "Canadian businessmen should realize that they will likely do the same in Canada."<sup>30</sup>

The dispersal of people to towns and villages in Canada since the 1960s could accelerate this power shift. Gerald Hodge and Mohammad Qadeer note that, although smaller centres have gained population more rapidly than urban centres since 1971, their social structure discourages immigrants from moving to these communities.<sup>31</sup> The tendency for politicians to defer to the wealth and power in large cities at the expense of peripheral areas could have significant implications for society if wealth is not evenly distributed among ethnic groups. It is entirely possible, as Gutstein suggests, that the power base will shift to Asians who operate in the global market.

Michael Goldberg also describes the potential benefits to Canada from links with the Nanyang (overseas) Chinese, who he estimates number around 40 million.<sup>32</sup> His study of their investment behaviour in Pacific Rim countries outside China emphasizes the strong ties within the Chinese culture to family and the land, and the links between land, family, business enterprise and education which has enabled many of them to prosper in the Pacific Rim. Goldberg also describes the emergence of "global cities" as the critical conduits in a new global economy in which the Pacific Rim and the Nanyang Chinese will play a major role. He concludes:

. . . the continued ascendancy of a relatively limited number of key urban areas around the world implies that

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<sup>30</sup>DeMont and Fennel, 176.

<sup>31</sup>Gerald Hodge and Mohammad A. Qadeer, *Towns and Villages in Canada: The Importance of Being Unimportant* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1983), 134.

<sup>32</sup>Michael A. Goldberg, *The Chinese Connection: Getting Plugged in to Pacific Rim Real Estate, Trade and Capital Markets* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975).

much of the international real estate investment of the future will be directed toward these centres . . . existing Chinese populations in these cities, the presence of world-class educational institutions and access to Asia by air . . . suggest that the Nanyang Chinese will continue to seek sound real estate investment in such world cities.<sup>33</sup>

It is probable that the global economy is the next phase of liberal capitalism, and it is probable that global cities will become increasingly important in this economy. Goldberg's analysis shows why Vancouver is favoured by overseas Chinese as a city in which to live and to invest. Vancouver already has a large Chinese population and, in terms of location, education facilities, climate and political stability, it has the potential to become a global city. Goldberg and DeMont and Fennel make a convincing case that Canada has much to gain by welcoming these immigrants and much to lose if it does not. The question for planners is how to accommodate the influx of new ideas, new people and new wealth to benefit both newcomers and local residents.

The literature review has moved from "hard" generally accepted interpretations of single-family zoning to more conjectural reflections on the implications of the global economy for Vancouver's single-family neighbourhoods. It would seem that single-family zoning flowed from a vision of the ideal life that had its roots in the industrial era. The reality that planners attempted to pattern after this vision was shaped by regulations that excluded those who did not fit this vision of the ideal. The low-density single-family pattern, shaped partly by regulation and partly by the vision itself, was inherently unstable. Its instability will be shown through the empirical analysis of amendments to the single-family schedule that, in combination

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<sup>33</sup>Goldberg, 95.

with market forces, produced a new residential pattern. The generally accepted theories of neighbourhood change do not explain the changes to the single-family pattern that began in the 1960s. Of the variables that apply to the large house, the only variable not easily observable or supported by existing documentation is ethnicity. The introduction of evidence to support ethnicity as a variable in neighbourhood change in Vancouver completes the empirical analysis of the large house issue.

The ethnic variable firms up, at least for Vancouver, the notion that the global market has become a factor in neighbourhood change. The global movement of people and wealth, therefore, may set up new conditions for invasion that are based on the purchasing patterns of newcomers. These patterns have cultural repercussions that bring community rights—a non-issue in the homogeneous single-family zones of the past—to centre stage.

The issue of individual and community rights raises difficult questions. Do individuals have the right to use land as they wish as long as this use conforms to the zoning schedule? Or do communities have the right to retain cultural values that are expressed in the residential landscape? Should a city, however inadvertently, use zoning to destroy places where people feel rooted? Or should it try to preserve symbols of the local culture so that people feel less uprooted when neighbourhood change occurs? Should a city use zoning to exclude by ethnicity, even if this exclusion may be unintentional? If a city ought not to use zoning to exclude on the basis of ethnicity, what legitimate reasons remain to use zoning to exclude by age, by lifestyle and by income?

In thinking about inclusion, it seemed that the fundamental planning problem was **scale**. At what scale should land use encourage segregation or mix by age, income or ethnicity? Should the scale be the block, the neigh-

bourhood or the municipality? By setting aside large areas for highrises and even larger areas for single-family use, Canadians have chosen large-scale segregation by age and family type and, as exemplified by elite communities in Vancouver and elsewhere, a similar large-scale segregation by income. Encouraging mix or segregation by age and income is basically a regulatory choice—to separate or mix unit sizes and tenures in any given area. Mix or segregation by ethnicity is more complex. Ethnic mix at the scale of the block confers a real sense of cultural diversity but a very limited sense of rootedness, especially if individual houses reflect the ethnic origin of their owners. Conversely, entire neighbourhoods or municipalities that are ethnically homogeneous confer a strong sense of rootedness and a limited sense of cultural diversity. Because the tendency has been to large-scale segregation by age and income, it is reasonable to assume that large-scale segregation by ethnicity will occur either by intent or otherwise.



The replacement of small homes by larger ones is part of a transition between early settlement and a more compact urban form. This transitional phase can be seen in North American cities wherever older areas remain intact. In Vancouver, large new houses are the market's attempt to replace the "first settlement pattern" of bungalows and ranchers with a more mature urban form. In this sense, Thomas More's description of Utopia—possibly taken from London in the 1500s—could easily apply to Vancouver today.

The original houses were merely small huts or cottages, built hurriedly with the first timber that came to hand . . . But nowadays every house is an imposing three-storey structure. The walls are faced with bricks, and lined with roughcast. The sloping roofs have been raised to the horizontal, and covered with a special sort of concrete which costs next to nothing, but is better than lead for resisting bad weather conditions, and is also fireproof.<sup>1</sup>

Large houses have been built throughout history as symbols of the prosperity of individuals, groups and communities. In Ontario, they were appearing regularly by the mid-1800s as replacements for the first homes of early settlers.<sup>2</sup> Urban variations were often as wide as the lot permitted, as tall as was comfortable for living, and crafted for durability over time. Wherever they have been not been replaced by higher density forms, they improve their surrounds by their quality, their scale, and their attention to the public-private interface. Many have adapted to new uses as community

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Thomas More, *Utopia* (Penguin, 1965), 73.

<sup>2</sup>In Ontario, this replacement reached its peak between 1845 and 1865. Verschoyle Benson Blake and Ralph Greenhill, *Rural Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 3.

needs changed, and the best examples are links to our heritage and a source of stability in a changing world.

Because space was not at a premium in early cities and towns, the first large houses in Canadian cities and towns were built broadside to the street. As population grew, lots were subdivided and large houses turned to present a narrow face to the street. Finally, the houses were joined together as double-houses, rowhouses and lowrise apartments. All these forms were often built at the same time, and older areas in eastern Canada show a mix of multi-family housing and large single-family dwellings with commercial enterprises often found at important residential junctions. At that time, no one equated this mix of uses with neighbourhoods of inferior quality. It was the quality of the dwellings and their proximity to industry and to city centre which determined the social class of a neighbourhood.

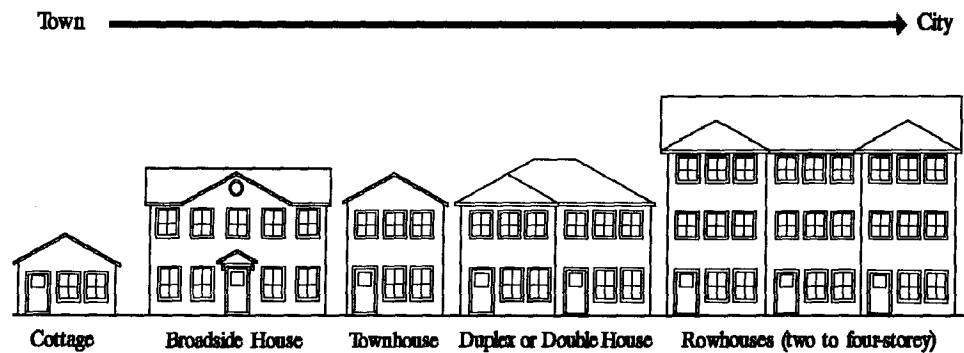


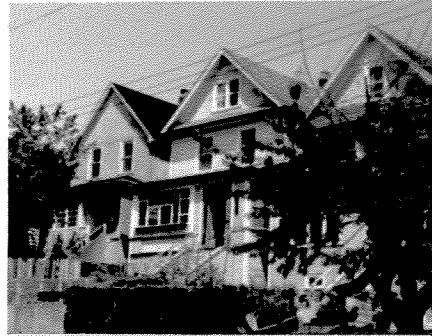
Figure 5. The transition from small houses to rowhouses and lowrise apartments.

Vancouver in the early 1900s was a mix of small and large dwellings.<sup>3</sup> As the city grew, larger two-and-a-half storey dwellings were turned to pre-

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<sup>3</sup>Michael Kluckner, *Vancouver The Way It Was* (North Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1984) graphically illustrates typical residential patterns in the city.

sent narrow faces to the street. The result, shown in Photo 8, was a tight urban fabric of tall frame houses—each with large front porches and steeply pitched roofs. Along with other cities, Vancouver rejected this compact use of urban land, and chose a looser pattern for its residential development.



**Photo 8.** Tightly packed houses in an older, neighbourhood on Vancouver's east side.

### **The Disappearance of Early Residential Patterns**

When the first large houses were built in Canada, community values were as instrumental as climate and availability of materials in shaping urban form. At that time, the population of English Canada was primarily British, politically conservative, and drew its elite from farming communities and the market towns that served them. The urban pattern that developed was much like the pre-industrial pattern in Europe with the rich living in large houses near the centre of town, the poor living at the periphery, and the middle-class living in a muddle in between.<sup>4</sup> Zoning and planning existed informally in these early cities. Zoning emerged in local ordinances to protect citizens from a variety of hazards. Planning, beyond the original survey that laid out the urban grid, combined the visions of the elite and the unarticulated rules of the community in the form, detailing and siting of buildings. "In spite of the lack of any centralized planning or official controls," writes Gilbert Stelter of the mid-1800s, "there was a remarkable semblance of order and regularity

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<sup>4</sup>Ley, *A Social Geography*, 57, 58.

to cities of this era."<sup>5</sup> This unselfconscious ordering of built form resulted in an urban landscape where even early factories built along river banks formed part of a unified visual composition that mirrored community values.

These early cities of North America had more in common with the medieval city than with cities that emerged during the industrial era. Lewis Mumford, for example, argues that medieval cities supported complex social relationships in a healthful physical setting. Until the change from an organic to a technical society brought overcrowding and overbuilding, says Mumford, the medieval city offered the vitality of the city within it and the natural world of the countryside beyond its gates. Its design, scale and vitality, argues Murray Bookchin, came from the social relationships between individuals and small groups. In turn, the resulting physical form protected the central values of that society.<sup>6</sup> Although early North American cities lacked the complexity that time has given to mature pre-industrial cities, they had similar attributes that derived from community values. Adams believed that early New England towns, built to sustain common needs rather than the profit motive, could serve as models for early twentieth century planners.

In the layout of early New England towns, consideration was given to utilitarian purposes from the point of view of the happiness and welfare of the community rather than of the gain of the few at the expense of the many . . . Where some of their best qualities still exist, they shame modern methods in supplying modern needs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Gilbert Stelter, "The City-Building Process in Canada" in *Shaping the Urban Landscape: Aspects of the Canadian City-Building Process*, Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan Artibise ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 16.

<sup>6</sup>Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938); Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Adams, *The Design of Residential Areas*, 104.

Suzanne Keller notes that in small towns, villages and cultural enclaves in large cities, where a high dependence on neighbours exists, social rules are rigidly defined, and that this interdependence and order weakens as cities grow in size.<sup>8</sup> Although the communal obligations that shaped early cities have lingered longer in Canada than in the United States,<sup>9</sup> the foundation for these obligations was largely swept away by *laissez-faire* capitalism that took hold in the late 1800s and ushered in rapid urban growth. Industry replaced agriculture as the basis for local economies and, increasingly, a commercial elite governed decisions affecting urban change.<sup>10</sup> In a perceptive passage describing the city of "Elgin", Sara Jeannette Duncan catches this transition from community to individual values at the end of the nineteenth century.

They were all hardworking folk together . . . fundamentally occupied with the amount of capital invested, and profoundly aware of how hard it was to come by. The valuable part of it all was a certain bright freedom and this was the essence. There was a decent communal way of making a living, rooted in independence and the general need; it had none of the meaner aspects.<sup>11</sup>

The industrial era brought rural populations to work in the cities and attracted immigrants from Britain and Europe. Industries sprang up near town centres and, by the mid 1800s, elite suburbs such as the one shown in

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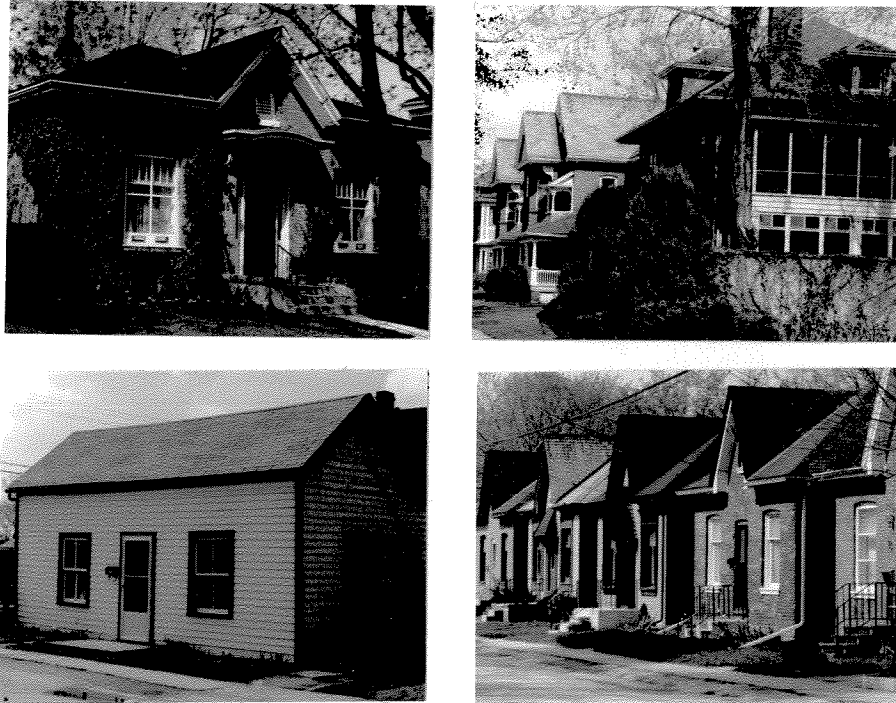
<sup>8</sup>Suzanne Keller, *The Urban Neighbourhood: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Random House, 1968), 23.

<sup>9</sup>Michael Goldberg and John Mercer, *The Myth of the North American City: Continentalism Challenged* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 18; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 155.

<sup>10</sup>John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965); Wallace Clement, *The Canadian Corporate Elite: An Analysis of Economic Power* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

<sup>11</sup>Sara Jeannette Duncan, *The Imperialists* (New York: Appleton, 1904).

the top two pictures in Photo 9 came into existence as the upper classes moved from large houses built near the centre of town to equally large houses further removed from the smoke and grime of factories.



**Photo 10.** An elite suburb developed around 1850 in "Elgin". Clockwise from upper left: a retirement cottage built among very large homes of the elite; on the same street, mid-sized single-family homes and a duplex belonging to the upper-middle class; working-class rowhouses adjacent to the suburb but "below the hill"; a crude cottage circa 1800 in a poor area at the edge of town.

As the industrial economy shifted from local firms to national and multinational enterprises after the Second World War, suburban expansion provided the workforce for corporate capitalism. Established wealth stayed in elite suburbs, and the middle class became the driving force behind outward expansion.<sup>12</sup> New immigrants, on the other hand, clustered in low-rent dis-

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<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Peter Smith, ed., *The Emerging Metropolitan Pattern*, (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1978).

tricts close to the factories employing them and then moved to housing vacated by the middle-class.

As immigrants grew in number, local ordinances were used with greater frequency to discriminate against them. In one of several examples, John Weaver describes the bending of otherwise legitimate by-laws to protect Vancouver residents from the city's Chinese population.

It was only natural that to the clerks, managers and professionals who flocked toward the security, status and greenery of the suburbs, the Chinatown blight was pathogenic. Its first symptoms came in the guise of a Chinese laundry. Those suburban petitions, which called for a building inspector to refuse laundry permits in the suburbs, ultimately prompted a by-law restricting their location on the pretext that the dirty laundry presented a health problem.<sup>13</sup>

Along with social upheaval, liberal capitalism brought disorderly development to towns and cities that benefitted from the industrial economy. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the commercial elite began to look closely at comprehensive planning as a way to reintroduce orderly growth that would enhance profits and use land more efficiently. After a period of relative inactivity in the 1930s and 1940s, planning gathered strength again in the 1950s, and by the late 1970s most cities of any size had planning departments to coordinate growth in a comprehensive manner.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the pattern of settlement had fundamentally changed from cohesion to fragmentation. Stelter notes that changes in the social landscape paralleled city growth during the industrial era; there was more

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<sup>13</sup>John C. Weaver, "The Property Industry and Land Use Controls: The Vancouver Experience, 1910–1945", *Plan Canada* 19, no. 3 (September 1979): 214.

<sup>14</sup>Kent Gerecke, "The History of Canadian City Planning", *City Magazine* (Summer 1974): 14, notes that there were only six local planning departments up to 1950, but by 1960, there were 30 planning departments, and by 1976, all cities over 10,000 had a planning department of some sort.

differentiation in land use, more separation between home and work, and more segregation by ethnicity and social class.<sup>15</sup> Bookchin argues that the shift to a market-driven society destroyed the complex social relationships that had given vitality and scale to early cities. Capitalism stripped individuals of power and destroyed the richness of the urban experience by segregating its various facets. Planning was a response to the problems of this market society, but because it was also a segregated function of urban life, it could rarely transcend these problems and ultimately added to the fracturing of the social structure.<sup>16</sup>

Planning changed the way cities were built. Before the Second World War, urban form was a direct, local response to broad political, social and economic forces sweeping the country. After the war, zoning became the filter through which these forces shaped built form. Just as advocates of the market believed that free, rational choices by individuals in an unfettered market would improve the quality of life for all, advocates of zoning believed that regulating the individual site would improve the quality of the common space. Like their market counterparts, planners copied freely from each other rather than responding directly to local conditions. But unlike the corporate sector, planners were less able to respond quickly to changing social and economic conditions with the result that critical amendments to zoning occurred infrequently and well after unintended patterns had emerged. To a large extent, single-family neighbourhoods have been governed by slowly changing regulations devised in an era of *laissez-faire* liberal capitalism.

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<sup>15</sup>Stelter, 28; Rapoport, 6–9.

<sup>16</sup>Bookchin, 80–101.



Liberal capitalism had other impacts on the urban landscape. In the early 1800s, climatic variables and the availability of local materials and skills constrained the built form of cities and towns, producing identifiable vernaculars despite the larger forces which shaped development. The coming of the railroad increased standardization and, with the shift to national and multi-national corporations, materials became widely available and mass production replaced hand-craftsmanship.<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, the standardization of single-family houses as the century has progressed is the result of the forces unleashed by liberal capitalism.

### **The Introduction of Planning in Vancouver**

To understand the particular forces that shaped Vancouver's single-family landscape, it is necessary to go back to the introduction of zoning in the city. Between 1900 and 1912, the city's population grew from 27,000 to 122,000. Frenzied building was followed by a market collapse in 1913 and a resurgence in population growth and construction activity during the 1920s. These boom cycles convinced Vancouver's leading citizens that the city had grown beyond the point where its officials could manage change on an *ad hoc* basis. They saw its future as a world port, and wanted a plan to promote efficient, orderly, and profitable growth.

John Bottomley's analysis of early documents shows that American practice and the beliefs of Vancouver's commercial elites influenced the city's zoning. These elites recognized that liberalism had brought both growth and haphazard development to cities and towns and, as in other North American

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<sup>17</sup>Blake and Greenhill, 36–37, date the shift to standardization in Ontario around 1850.

cities, they believed that capitalism could be saved by reforming liberalism. The reform movement which took hold in the United States and Eastern Canada between 1880 and 1914 offered a solution to the social and environmental problems that had accompanied rapid urban growth.

Planning took the form of an expert bureaucracy whose role it was to advise the city government of the "correct" procedures to attain the desired end result. The primary advocates of reform in Canada as in the United States were the commercial elites who dominated the social and political life of their respective cities. These elites saw "reform" as the way to establish their control of the "public" environment. Drawing their ideas both directly and indirectly from American sources, they implemented programs of reform that were only marginally Canadian in origin.<sup>18</sup>

An early consequence of reform ideology had been the introduction of planning at the federal level through the establishment of the Commission of Conservation under Thomas Adams. Adams, who went to the United States after the commission disbanded in 1921, urged the Vancouver Town Planning Commission to hire a Canadian to draw up a plan for the city. Instead, the Commission hired Harland Bartholomew, an American whose urban vision was restricted to his experience of the north-eastern and mid-western United States.

Influencing the Commission was the fact that Bartholomew's beliefs meshed with those of Vancouver's commercial elites.<sup>19</sup> Among these beliefs were a fear of slums and the conviction that single-family use provided the

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<sup>18</sup>John Bottomley, "Ideology, Planning and the Landscape: The Business Community, Urban Reform and the Establishment of Town Planning in Vancouver, British Columbia 1900-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, September 1977), 154. See also Paul Rutherford, "Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada 1880-1920," *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan J. Artibise, eds. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979).

<sup>19</sup>Bottomley, 230.

best setting for family life. Fear of slums derived from American and European experience. Adams, for example, argued that haphazard growth was responsible for blighted conditions, and that North America was more prone to intractable slums because its cities had developed at higher densities.<sup>20</sup> He advocated the separation of uses, segregation of traffic and pedestrian routes, and ample provision of public and private space, but he also cautioned against legislating uniformity into residential areas.

That houses should conform to a certain uniformity of price and quality . . . is not productive of the best civic and social conditions. Both [rich and poor neighbourhoods] suffer from the separation . . . In early New England towns there was an agreeable blending of large and small houses and a resulting opportunity for intercourse between richer and poorer families. The same has been and even now is true of many of the old villages and towns of Europe.<sup>21</sup>

In most Canadian cities, there was little basis for the fear that infected Vancouver's elites. Even though tenements existed in Toronto and Montreal, Schoenauer points out that neither the tenement nor the apartment "constituted a large proportion of the Canadian housing stock and consequently the dire housing conditions experienced in Great Britain and in many large American cities never existed in Canada".<sup>22</sup> Even so, Vancouver's elite believed that apartments were precursors of slums. When Bartholomew asked what abuses he should consider in the interim zoning by-law of 1927 he was preparing, the chairman replied that "the only serious abuse . . . is the intrusion of undesirable apartment houses into residential districts". Another Commission member brought memories of slums and the Garden City ideal

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<sup>20</sup>Thomas Adams, *Outline of Town and City Planning: A Review of Past Efforts and Modern Aims* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1936), 174.

<sup>21</sup>Adams, *The Design of Residential Areas*, 104.

<sup>22</sup>Schoenauer, "House".

from his native England. "Any deviation from the Garden City ideal of a single-family home for all citizens," writes Bottomley, "he regarded with horror."<sup>23</sup> Despite duplexes and apartment buildings that co-existed with single-family homes in elite neighbourhoods elsewhere, the faith in single-family zoning as a deterrent against slums largely explains Vancouver's zoning schedule.

Vancouver was the first major Canadian city to adopt a comprehensive zoning schedule. This schedule, adopted in 1930, was the only part of the Bartholomew Plan legislated, although Vancouver has used elements of the plan to guide development over the years.<sup>24</sup> The schedule provided concentric rings of apartments, two-family dwellings and single-family homes around a commercial downtown. In keeping with prevalent views of the time, most of the city was zoned for single-family homes with duplexes and apartments buffering them from commercial zones. Bartholomew was clear about the principles that shaped the city's zoning. Uppermost, of course, were health, safety and convenience, but also important were prevention of overcrowding, preservation of amenity and protection of property values. In the end, argues Weaver, the by-law "reflected the clash of realty interests rather than any certain principles of land use or any precise guidance from the Associated Property Owners."<sup>25</sup>

Although Bartholomew believed that zoning would bring more unity to residential neighbourhoods, he recognized its limitations in this regard. Other

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<sup>23</sup>Bottomley, 235 and 132.

<sup>24</sup>Weaver, 212. It is important to note that while Vancouver had a comprehensive zoning schedule early on, it has never had a comprehensive plan.

<sup>25</sup>Weaver, 219.

than a recommendation to educate the public, nothing in the by-law controlled for unity of design.

The mixture of architectural types and styles, and the haphazard placing of buildings of all sizes along the same street is responsible for the disturbing effect found in some streets of Vancouver . . . Through education a gradual improvement of public taste should be sought. What Vancouver needs is an agreement as to a style of building that is at once aesthetically pleasing and adapted to local climatic conditions. The half-timber house should be studied and advocated by architects, for it seems appropriate to these surroundings.<sup>26</sup>

The schedule took its cues from the schedule for the wealthy westside suburb of Point Grey which Bartholomew admired as a "first-class residential district". Point Grey developed its first by-law when it separated temporarily from Vancouver in 1908, and in 1926, it was one of the first Canadian municipalities to adopt a zoning ordinance as part of a town planning policy.<sup>27</sup> But aspects of Point Grey that he admired may have had more to do with the suburb's affluence. Both Point Grey and the eastside working-class suburb of Vancouver South amalgamated with Vancouver as part of Bartholomew's projected comprehensive plan for the city. Although both areas became more ordered after zoning, the dichotomy in the appearance and the socio-economic structure of the two areas has remained.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the adoption of one schedule for all single-family areas ultimately led to the

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<sup>26</sup>Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver, British Columbia: Including a General Plan of the Region*, 1929, 254.

<sup>27</sup>It should be noted that Thomas Adams and Horace Seymour prepared a plan for Kitchener-Waterloo in 1923 and that the first Canadian zoning by-law, formulated by them for these cities, was enacted in 1924. Seymour was resident planner under Bartholomew for the Vancouver Plan. Gerald Hodge, *Planning Canadian Communities: An Introduction to the Principles, Practice and Participants*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1991), 124 and 222.

<sup>28</sup>Bottomley, 198.

replication of Specials and Monster Houses. One designer noted that "a blanket policy discriminates against uniqueness, against different character in different neighbourhoods. We cannot escape that some neighbourhoods are richer than others but that does not mean that each neighbourhood cannot be unique whether it has modest or expensive housing".<sup>29</sup>

### **Vancouver's Single-Family Zoning Schedule**

Early zoning schedules were simple documents easily understood by residents and builders. As amendments were added, usually to prohibit flagrant abuses of the by-law, the complexity of schedules increased. A floor space ratio was introduced to the single-family schedule in 1938 to regulate the maximum floor area allowed in new and renovated dwellings. Later, site coverage began to regulate the percentage of the lot that house, garage and other outbuildings could cover. As time progressed, both actual and hypothetical ground levels or "grades" from which building height was measured became precisely defined in the schedule. The complexity of the schedule today makes it difficult for the public to negotiate as equals with technical staff who administer the by-law.<sup>30</sup>

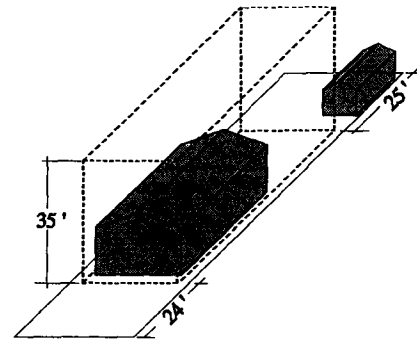
Vancouver's first single-family schedule regulated only height and the distance the house must be "set back" from each property line. Height and setbacks described a simple three-dimensional box or building envelope within which the house could be built. As shown in Figure 6, the front set-

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<sup>29</sup>Designer Linda Valter, interview with author, 15 May 1990.

<sup>30</sup>For a summary of the single-family schedule and a sample schedule (1985), see Appendix A. The 1985 schedule is somewhat more complex than the 1930 schedule but is less than half the length of the 1990 schedule.

back was 24 feet or the average depth of adjacent front yards, the side setback was 10 percent of lot width, and the rear setback was 25 feet. The maximum height was 35 feet. Little was built during the depression and war years and after the war, material shortages and household income meant that houses



**Figure 6.** The 1930 building envelope and a typical small house of the period.

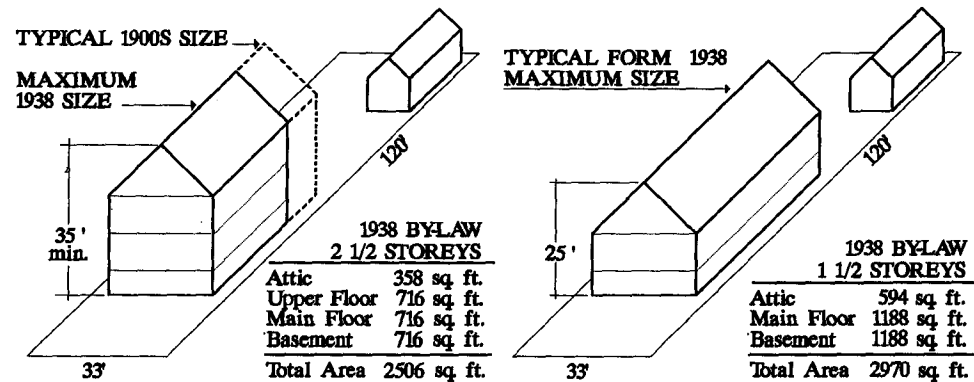
were modest in size, cheaply built, and sparing of detail. Because most new homes were small relative to the envelope, there was no way of knowing whether single-family zoning actually worked in practice.

The city made few changes to the single-family by-law in the early years of zoning. In 1938, council introduced a floor space ratio that limited finished space within the dwelling to 45 percent of the area of the lot. Basements were not included in this calculation. On a standard lot, building a two-and-a-half storey unarticulated box-shaped house to the maximum space permitted by the zoning schedule meant a smaller main floor (716 square feet) and fewer total square (2506 square feet) feet than typical for this house form.<sup>31</sup> Building a one-and-a-half storey box to maximum size on the same lot provided a much larger living spaces on the ground floor (1188 square feet) and more total floor space (2970 square feet). From 1938 onward, it made no sense to build vertically. Although developments consisting of low-slung suburban bungalows would have occurred in any event, the 1938 by-law was the first of several major regulatory changes which reduced options

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<sup>31</sup>See Table 1, page 71 for typical floor areas on a 4000 square-foot lot.

for house form and the distribution of space per floor.<sup>32</sup> Figure 7 is the first of a series of schematics that show the results of these regulatory changes.



**Figure 7.** The 1938 by-law results on a 33' by 120' lot. The introduction of a floor space ratio in 1938 made the two-and-a-half-storey home (left) impractical.

Rapoport notes that "the creation of the ideal environment is expressed through the specific organization of space, which is more fundamental than the architectural form."<sup>33</sup> After 1930, the height restriction of 35 feet discouraged tall, turn-of-the-century vernacular homes, and after 1938 it made little sense to build a two-and-a-half-storey dwelling which had its main floor space so restricted by floor space ratio. Thus, regulating height and floor area marked the beginning of construction that devoured open space. The loss of the two-and-a-half-storey vernacular type was not apparent at the time because the one-and-a-half-storey dwelling had become popular between the First and Second World Wars. Nevertheless, the 1930 height restriction and

<sup>32</sup>These changes are summarized graphically in Appendix A.

<sup>33</sup>Rapoport, 49.



the 1938 amendments removed the option to return to a more compact form by discouraging taller houses of a reasonable size.

In his comprehensive plan, Bartholomew saw single-family zones as an interim measure in managing urban growth, and wrote that conversion to two-family zones might be necessary.

At present, Vancouver is largely a city of one-family homes and large areas for one-family dwellings have been provided. Whether or not these will remain one-family or become two-family can safely be left to the wishes of the owners or the by-law amended accordingly when occasion arises.<sup>34</sup>

Bartholomew acknowledged that owners of large homes in areas zoned for single and two-family use had exerted pressure to have these areas changed to three-storey multiple-dwelling districts so that they could convert their property to apartments. Vancouver Town Planning Commission reports of the 1930s confirm that pressure for conversion and redevelopment continued into the war years. In 1940, the city relaxed the by-law to permit owners to create suites in single-family areas to relieve wartime housing shortages. By 1944, the number of duplexes in single-family districts had increased to the point where one alderman accused the Zoning By-Law Board of Appeal of failing its responsibility to homeowners.

We do not like to see the nice districts slipping into what might be termed depressed areas; we do not like to see our home districts being exploited, mostly by newcomers, by having certain houses in them used for commercial purposes.<sup>35</sup>

In 1956, council decided to close all suites except those installed before 1956 and, in 1959, council ordered all suites in RS-1 areas closed. In 1961, it

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<sup>34</sup>Bartholomew and Associates, 277

<sup>35</sup>Weaver, 221.

chose not to close those occupied by parents and grandparents. Vacillation over suite closure continued into the 1980s.

### **The Legitimacy of Large Houses Built Before Zoning**

While the legitimacy of the large new homes that comprise the current landscape is being questioned, the legitimacy of older large homes remains intact. In Vancouver's inner-city districts, large turn-of-the-century homes stand close enough together to give the impression of rowhousing. Many residents cherish this older vernacular. Some restore these homes and others petition the city when demolition threatens particularly appealing examples. This desire to retain the city's heritage is not ethnically based. In one instance, over half the petitioners opposing the demolition of a heritage cottage in Strathcona were from visible minority groups.<sup>36</sup>

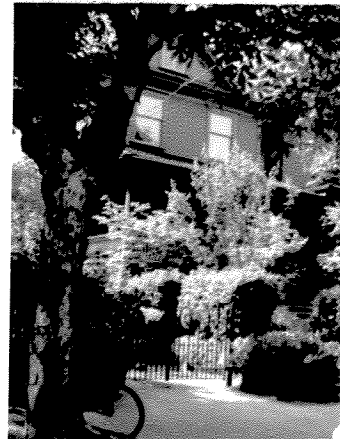
Many heritage homes in single-family zones are prone to demolition. Buyers who can afford large old houses may replace them with new large homes because they do not appreciate their links with the past. The buyer of a house on Minto Crescent, for example, wanted to relax the front setback to build a new house set closer to the street. The proposed house, as large as permitted, was **smaller** than the combined floor area of the existing heritage house and coach house. The planning department refused the request to relax the setback because a relaxation to demolish a heritage home contradicted the intent of city's heritage policy. The zoning department overturned this decision, the house was replaced, and other new homes on either side have

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<sup>36</sup>Petition to Heritage Planner re: 711 Prior Street, 29 Aug. 1989. The heritage planner confirmed that the desire for heritage preservation cuts across ethnic origins.

compounded the change in the character of the street. Other owners who want to restore their homes often cannot afford to do so without creating suites to cover the high costs of sensitive restoration. In 1986, the owner of a heritage house in Dunbar requested a relaxation to create a legal triplex to defray restoration costs. When his request was refused, he demolished the house and built two new houses on the subdivided lots.<sup>37</sup>

Four large turn-of-the-century homes on West 10th Avenue in the local area of Mount Pleasant presented an opportunity to compare large houses built before and after zoning. Blueprints of the homes provided information on structure, details and siting that could be contrasted with plans and elevations of new large homes. Calculating the amount of built and open space for the cluster provided a hypothetical zoning that could be compared to Vancouver's zoning schedule as it changed over time.



**Photo 10.** An older home on West 10th hidden behind greenery.

The four houses, one of which is shown in Photo 10, are part of an intact streetscape of similar large homes. Built as single-family homes in the early 1900s, they are typical of larger homes built throughout the city by and for its affluent middle class. They are the result of both individual affluence and a community prosperity that unleashed an economic boom shortly after

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<sup>37</sup> RS-1 Monitoring Notes. The Vancouver Heritage Advisory Commission minutes record cases of owners wanting to demolish heritage homes. An example, 1037 Matthews, is also described in Robin Ward, "Heritage conservation a matter of respect," *Vancouver Sun*, 16 Feb. 1991 and Michael Kluckner, *Paving Paradise: Is British Columbia Losing its Heritage?* (North Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1991), 61–63.

they were built. As city centre moved westward, this area declined. Three-storey walk-up apartments replaced some older homes, and others were divided into suites or became rooming houses. In the 1970s, commercial interests shifted eastward again, and the area took on new life. During this period, the Davis family acquired these homes, restored them and converted their interiors to fifteen suites. In 1985, the Davis houses were included in the city's Heritage Inventory, and the street itself became the city's first designated heritage streetscape. Not only are these houses recognized as urban treasures but they have also encouraged the rehabilitation of other houses in the neighbourhood.

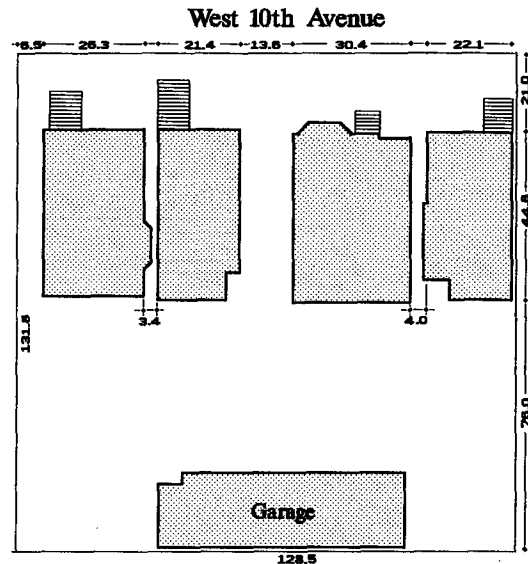


**Figure 8.** This cluster of four large turn-of-the-century homes has encouraged the renovation of other homes in the Mount Pleasant area. The illustration was traced and composed from blueprints of original drawings loaned by Patricia Davis.

The Davis cluster, illustrated in Figure 8 shows the flexibility of the large house over time. Conversion to fifteen suites caused little change to the street, although parking and fire regulations have changed rear yards extensively. Two houses have three suites, one has four suites and one has five suites. Suites not only vary in number per dwelling but also in size, and each has a character and occasional awkwardness of plan that derives from differences in each house. Thus, while the street has a unity of form and detail, each suite provides a unique space which is part of a larger whole. Moreover,

the basic structure permits conversion back to single-family homes.<sup>38</sup> This variety and flexibility is lacking in most new multi-family projects.

There are several differences between regulated and unregulated development. Maps of the area show that lots vary considerably in size (from under 3000 to over 6000 square feet) and that owners almost always maximized built space at the front of the lot. Houses were often over 40 feet in height and as wide as possible with some side yards almost too narrow to



**Figure 9.** The site plan for the Davis cluster. Adapted from December 9, 1977 survey, courtesy of Patricia Davis.

allow passage. Front yards are only somewhat shallower than the 24-foot depth permitted by single-family zoning, but front verandah steps came within 8 to 13 feet of front property lines. The shallow front yards combined with the height and width of the old houses resulted in intimate streets and generous backyards. Figure 9 shows that the practice of minimal front yards and larger rear yards, along with the size of the houses themselves, led to a particular balance of built and open space.

This balance between built and open space may be appropriate for cities of the future because of the need for built space and the value placed on open space. Using the Davis homes as typical for larger houses of the period,

<sup>38</sup>See Appendix C for the conversion of one of the Davis homes into suites.

Chapters 3 to 5 compare land use before zoning with land use that emerged after the 1938, 1974 and 1988 zoning changes. The variables considered are: total built space, above-grade built space and open space.<sup>39</sup> The comparison shows that if a city values open space but needs built space, then the balance of built and open space achieved before zoning more closely approximates these goals than forms and land use resulting from zoning.

Table 1:—A Comparison of Built and Open Space – 1900 and 1938  
in Square Feet as a Percentage of 4000 Square-Foot Lot

	<u>1900s Typical</u>		<u>1938 Maximums</u>	
	Sq. Ft	%	Sq. Ft.	%
Total Built Space	3120	78	3000	75
Above-Grade Space	2600	65	1800	45
Main Floor Excluding Verandah	834	21	1200	30
Open Space	2766	69	2400	60

Source: Davis blueprints and 1938 Zoning By-Law.

Table 1 compares the "zoning" derived from the Davis houses with a one-and-a-half storey house built to maximum floor area on a 4000 square-foot lot. To make this comparison, the total space and the above-grade floor space (including verandahs) for all four Davis houses was divided by the site area to arrive at a total floor space ratio of 0.78 and an above-grade floor space ratio of 0.65. If these floor space ratios are applied to a 4000 square-foot lot (the average lot size on the Davis site is 4235 square feet), the total floor space would be 3120 square feet and the above-grade space would be

<sup>39</sup>Other variables, which would appear to favour older houses in terms of sustainability, were discarded because of the complexity of analysis. These were: the amount of surface space exposed to the elements, the materials of construction, and the amount of sunlight penetrating the dwelling.

2600 square feet. To calculate the main floor area, 200 square feet for a typical 8' by 25' verandah was subtracted from the total floor space, leaving 2920 square feet of total space, and a main floor of approximately 834 square feet.<sup>40</sup> To compare actual open space with open space after later zoning changes, a single garage and verandah of 200 square feet each are added to the main floor space of 834 square feet, leaving 2766 square feet in open space. Using the 1938 schedule to calculate maximums for a one-and-a-half storey house, total space is 3000 square feet, above-grade space is 1800 square feet and main floor space is 1200 square feet. Assuming a typical verandah and single garage of 200 square feet each, the remaining open space is 2400 square feet. These calculations show that houses similar to the Davis houses had more open space and more space above grade than houses built to maximums after 1938.

The Davis cluster illustrates floor areas and building heights typical of two-and-a-half storey homes of the period. Total floor areas ranged from 2787 to 3760 square feet, and main floor areas (excluding verandahs) ranged from 770 to 953 square feet. House height ranged from 29 feet (for the one-and-a-half-storey dwelling shown) to 41 feet, and the average height for the cluster was slightly over 36 feet. Whether the 35-foot height maximum chosen for the 1930 single-family schedule was determined by averaging the heights of typical larger homes or simply by pulling a figure out of the air is

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<sup>40</sup>The main floor of a boxlike 2 1/2 storey form is 2/7 of the total 3 1/2 floors (basement, main floor, second floor and attic). Typical basements were not set deeply into the ground, and averaged heights for each dwelling ranged from about 3.5 to almost 7 feet between ground level and the bottom of the main floor joists. The above-grade floor space calculation assumes that space more than five feet out of the ground is above-grade space. In keeping with zoning to April 1990, verandahs that exceed 4 by 6 feet in size are included in above-grade and total floor space calculations.

immaterial. The result was that two-and-a-half-storey houses with well lit and well ventilated basement space could no longer be built. In the long run, as the empirical analysis will show, the attempt to bring order to development through zoning reduced the potential for both built and open space by discouraging the organization of space typical of two-and-a-half-storey homes.



**Photo 11.** Speculative single-family homes built around 1912 are very large relative to lot area. All have minimal front yards (not shown) and rear yards barely large enough for a garage.

The Davis cluster is typical of the balance between built and open space that owners would choose for themselves in building a relatively large home. But during the period, many smaller homes were also built,<sup>41</sup> and field observations showed that speculative builders of the period took advantage of the lack of regulation to build houses much larger than the Davis houses. These "spec" houses, as Photo 11 shows, left little open space around the dwelling, and this kind of development was one of the reasons zoning was introduced in the city. It is important to note that most of the smaller homes have been demolished while many of the large speculative homes survive.

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<sup>41</sup>Harold Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver: Ten Tours of the City and its Buildings* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1974) Figures B34, B36, E5 and E7.





**Photo 12.** View down West 10th Avenue.

Although multiple conversion is often the only way to make sensitive rehabilitation of large old homes economic, single-family zoning usually does not permit conversion, and links to the past continue to disappear.<sup>42</sup> In the case of the Davis homes, rehabilitation has retained both the ambiance of the street and links to the city's past. The Davis homes are a complex and coherent part of an equally complex and coherent streetscape. Plans showed an order to the structure, facades were richly detailed without being chaotic, and interiors showed the idiosyncracies of the original and subsequent owners. This balance of complexity and coherence, which people seem to need in their everyday lives,<sup>43</sup> is lacking in most new construction where designs are either repeated monotonously or differ dramatically from their neighbours. One reason that people complain may be that they miss, perhaps at a subconscious level, the complexity and coherence exhibited so strongly in the Davis cluster. As a result they find their neighbourhoods impoverished rather than enriched by the new large houses that are replacing older, smaller homes.

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<sup>42</sup>Since 1990, Vancouver has permitted infill on single-family lots where homes listed in the Heritage Inventory have been threatened with demolition.

<sup>43</sup>Perin, *With Man in Mind*, 155–158.

The Davis houses suggest that early land use patterns may be equally appropriate today. Some planners and architects are listening to the voices from the past. At McGill University architects have designed livable and affordable versions of older compact housing that await only changes to zoning regulations to permit construction. Architect Avi Friedman notes that the traditional appearance of these homes was deliberate.

Classicism . . . offers the architect a canon as a guide, but it is a liberal and tolerant one . . . It does not require the use of unusual shapes and odd materials (which are inevitably expensive) and it is content with according a measure of esthetic refinement and elaboration within the framework of sensible construction.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, in the United States, a transportation planning firm has found that reintroducing the grid street pattern helps to diffuse traffic flow bogged down by modern hierarchical road systems and, by making the trip more visually pleasing, also perceptually shortens the journey to work.<sup>45</sup> Several American firms commissioned to plan new residential developments are reproducing early residential patterns as a solution to urban sprawl. Their goal is not to copy or romanticize the past, but to find the patterns beneath the surface that made these urban spaces succeed.

It seems incredible that such a simple, even obvious premise—that America's 18th and 19th century towns remain marvelous models for creating new suburbs—had been neglected for half a century.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Witold Rybczynski, "The Home of the 90s—1: Designing for Affordability" and Avi Friedman, "The Home of the 90s—2: An Urban Starter", *Canadian Architect* (Apr. 1990): 26–33.

<sup>45</sup>Walter Kulash, "Examining the Quality of the Trip, paper delivered at The Emerging City Conference, Bellingham, Wash., 25 Sept. 1991.

<sup>46</sup>Kurt Andersen, "Oldfangled New Towns", *Time*, 20 May 1991.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the city moved farther away from the land use patterns that had shaped Vancouver's residential areas before zoning. It is curious that planners, guided as they were by the concept of rationality,<sup>1</sup> would promote a less compact use of land, but it is entirely understandable in light of the increasing use of automobiles, the apparent abundance of land, and the desire by all levels of government to extend single-family ownership as widely as possible. Given public support for single-family zoning, it is also curious that post-war builders would try to replicate aspects of the pre-zoning pattern in single-family areas. But this is precisely what they did. In response to very specific market demands, Vancouver's eastside builders began to build larger homes with floor plans that could convert easily to two-family use. Although early Vancouver Specials were similar in size to houses built before zoning, their design was quite different.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For a critique on rational planning, see Charles Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through", *Public Administration Review* 19 (Spring 1959):70–99; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961); John Turner and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build* (New York: MacMillan, 1972); Robert Fishman, "The Anti-Planners: The Contemporary Revolt Against Planning and its Significance for Planning History", *Shaping an Urban World*, ed. Gordon Cherry (London: Mansell, 1980); Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983); John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); John Raulston Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>The average total floor area of the Davis houses was about 3300 square feet on an average lot size of 4235 square feet. On a standard 33 by 120-foot lot (3960 square feet), Specials spread over much of the site. Specials could—and some did—have a total floor area of 3550 square feet.

Vancouver's council and planners resisted the builders' attempts to increase the number of potential units and to provide more built space. Influencing this resistance were demands by residents to preserve their neighbourhoods from change. In 1974, pressure from homeowners to eliminate suites and pressure from builders for larger homes on standard 33-foot lots resulted in critical zoning changes. These changes **increased** the floor space permitted above-grade but **reduced** the total floor space permitted in a dwelling. The ability to build more space above-grade made houses bulkier but had no effect on the spread of illegal suites.



**Photo 13.** An eastside street of Vancouver Specials.

As Specials spread through the east side of the city during the 1960s and 1970s, neighbourhoods took on a new pattern. This pattern had little similarity to the suburban pattern envisioned by Bartholemew. Photo 13 shows that the new large houses stood cheek-by-jowl like houses built before zoning. But unlike the old homes, they left little open space for green grass and trees. This chapter suggests that the size, style, and use of the Special—and the residential pattern it created—was the builders' response to the immigrant market. This response was accommodated by changes to the zoning schedule that consolidated the Special as the popular plan.

## **The Emergence of the Vancouver Special**

The large houses built at the turn of the century had been well suited to the large families of the period but, by the 1950s, families were smaller and small single-family homes that supported this lifestyle had become the norm. The post-war period brought a halt to the construction of storey-and-a-half houses and introduced styles attuned to new technology and modern sensitivities. Although styles influenced by older traditions and styles influenced by Modernists occasionally appeared in residential neighbourhoods during the 1940s, ranch-style houses dominated construction of the 1950s.

The popularity of ranchers followed the federal government's intervention in the housing market. This intervention, designed to produce needed housing quickly after the war, was successful in bringing ownership of single-family homes to the majority of Canadians. But federal intervention also strengthened the role of land developers and large construction firms. This relationship between government and industry had unintended consequences. Residential, commercial and industrial developments, described collectively by James Lorimer as the "corporate city", ultimately served real estate interests at the expense of community needs.<sup>3</sup>

Until the late 1940s, observes Lorimer, most homes were built on narrow lots within walking distance of low density commercial strips and street-car lines. By the 1950s, the garden suburb had become the pattern for new developments designed for the automobile. In new suburbs, developers abandoned the grid for winding streets, lot widths doubled, and more compact storey-and-a-half homes were replaced by ubiquitous single-storey ranchers

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<sup>3</sup>James Lorimer, *The Developers* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1978).

set broadside to the street (Figure 10).

Councils supported the growth of the corporate city through zoning and an infrastructure of roads and services that fitted the needs of the industry. By the 1960s, the only alternatives available in



**Figure 10.** The suburban vision as computer "clip-art". Dover Publications.

any number were rented highrise apartments and purchased single-family homes. Unlike the pre-zoning pattern, which had some mix of residential and commercial uses, people were not only separated from commercial activities which sustained their everyday lives but also segregated by age and income according to the form of housing they chose or could afford. The orderliness of comprehensive planning and zoning provided efficiencies for planners and developers but carried with it a set of social and economic consequences that the pre-zoning pattern had avoided because it took its cues from the social order of the community.

Many westside areas developed according to the suburban vision. In response to post-war families who wanted affordable homes larger than those of the 1930s and 1940s, builders produced a simple rancher on an unfinished basement set well below ground. On the east side, where 33-foot lots prevailed, they turned the rancher so that its narrow side faced the street. By setting the basement only slightly below grade to save excavation costs, they could produce a relatively large house at low cost. According to builder Ben Frith, acknowledged by builders to be "the father of the Vancouver Special", the changes that resulted in the Vancouver Special occurred gradually.

We had been building two-bedroom houses like those we built in the 1940s, but the realtors told us that people wanted three bedrooms. So we built them and they sold. And then we put in one-and-a-half baths and roughed in

the basement for more space. The houses at this time were not full FSR [floor space ratio].<sup>4</sup>

The need for housing grew rapidly after the war. Population in the Greater Vancouver Regional District almost doubled from 1921 to 1941 to roughly 400,000 and grew by about 200,000 every decade thereafter to reach 1.38 million by 1986.<sup>5</sup> As population grew, the search for affordable housing leapfrogged the city's boundaries to adjacent suburbs. In his analysis of Toronto suburbs of the period, S. D. Clark describes the consequent sorting out of the population as a search for space by those least tied to an urban lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> Those who moved outward were Canadian born, usually of British origin, generally Protestant, and pervasively middle-class. Poor and immigrant families were seldom part of this dispersal. For them, the suburb was a frightening world which detached them from friends, relatives and community support.<sup>7</sup> In describing the American experience, Nelson Foote similarly attributes the exodus to the suburbs to a search for housing space. But he also notes that immigrants were highly motivated toward home ownership in the city and particularly attracted to investment properties.<sup>8</sup> Decisions by immigrants to stay in the city affected the choices of local residents. Although Clark is clear that the need for housing propelled people to the suburbs, he also notes that some residents left because of "foreigners" in their

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<sup>4</sup>Ben Frith, telephone interview with the author, 12 Oct. 1990.

<sup>5</sup>Michele Lioy, *Social Trends in Greater Vancouver* (Vancouver: United Way, 1975), 15.

<sup>6</sup>Clark, 80-81.

<sup>7</sup>Clark, 98.

<sup>8</sup>Nelson Foote et al., *Housing Choices and Housing Constraints* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), 129.

neighbourhoods.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Vancouverites were probably no different from Torontonians in wanting to distance themselves from immigrants.

Although rapid growth led to unsatisfied demand in Vancouver's post-war market, there were a number of discrete groups who were not in the market for new homes. The rich, well-housed in Vancouver's elite areas had no need of their services, the less affluent who remained in the city stayed put in their homes, and the poor could not afford to buy. The builders were left with young post-war families who could afford small, new single-family homes. As these families moved to the suburbs in their quest for space, the builders' market changed. According to Frith, the builders turned their attention to families who had emigrated from post-war Europe to improve the quality of their lives, and were now in a position to afford inexpensive new housing on cheaper eastside lots.

We built for young families and immigrants in the 1950s. First the Germans, and then the Italians . . . I was surprised that working-class people could afford the space . . . but real estate firms helped out . . . with financing and trade-up policies.

The simple rancher turned with its narrow face to the street suited immigrant needs. They could use the basement for family members or rent it out to help pay the mortgage. Illegal conversion of the basement to a family or rental unit, therefore, was often a necessary step in owning a home of their own. Although builders built these houses for easy conversion, they were acting within the law, and could point to many examples where families had finished this space for their own use.

As builders transferred their attention to the immigrant market, the minimal rancher took on details that appealed to immigrant buyers. And as

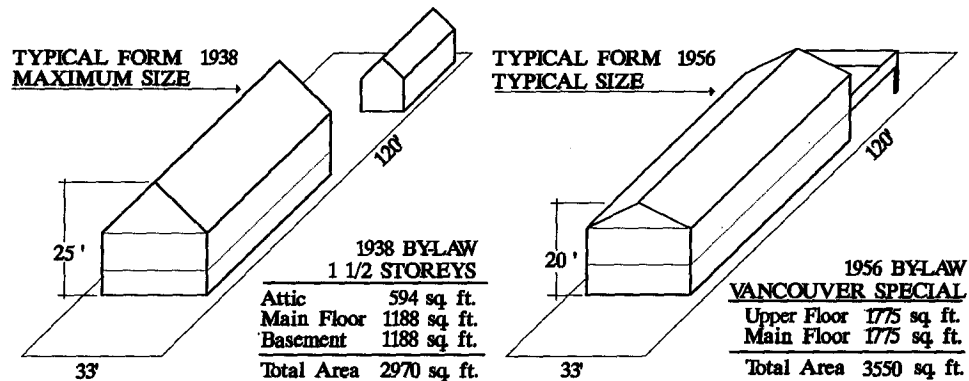
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<sup>9</sup>Clark, 60.



vacant land became scarce, builders began to demolish smaller, older homes that they could purchase for lot value to free up land for construction. Buyers continued to demand more space, recalled Frith, and builders competed with each other to provide it.

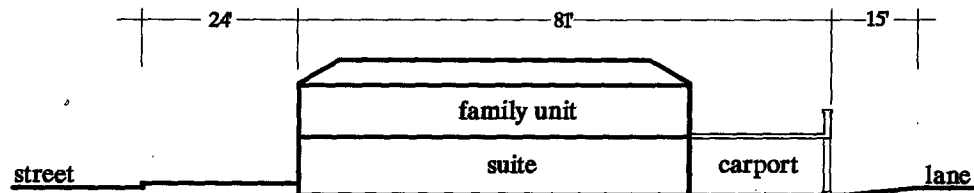
If one guy built 58 feet long, the next would build 60 feet. But there was also demand from the public. The Italians, who were probably responsible initially for shaping the Vancouver Special, liked the upstairs to be formal and to live and cook downstairs. . . The builders also added extra space if they were caught in a downturn in the market to give themselves an edge.



**Figure 11.** The 1938 by-law and a typical Special of the 1960s compared on a 33' by 120' lot. Floor areas show maximums of 2970 and 3550 square feet that could be achieved after 1938 and 1956 respectively. The illustration of the Special (right) shows the typical Special with a length of about 60 feet and a total of about 3000 square feet on two floors.

By the 1960s, builders were pushing the single-family schedule to its limits. By building the maximum floor area permitted in a storey-and-a-half dwelling, builders could obtain only 2970 square feet of floor space on a standard 33' by 120' lot. But by building a single-storey house on the same sized lot, they could obtain a house over 70 feet long and about 3550 square feet in area including the basement. In 1956, the city standardized development by increasing the rear yard setback from 25 to 35 feet measured from the centre line of the lane and by discontinuing front yard averaging which

had been implemented in 1930. Figure 11 compares the maximum floor areas that could be achieved after 1938 and after 1956, but the right hand drawing in Figure 11 and the section in Figure 12 illustrates the typical, somewhat smaller Special that was built through the 1960s.



**Figure 12.** Section of typical Special built after the 1956 amendments to the single-family schedule. It is about 10 feet shorter than the zoning permitted.

The longitudinal section shows important aspects of these houses. The "basement" was only several feet below grade, comparable to basement depths before and during the early years of zoning but not to basements of typical 1950s ranchers which were set more deeply into the ground. Where houses were built at or close to maximum size, the carport filled most of the rear yard and an asphalt drive leading to the carport covered much of the remaining open space. This pattern, which dispensed with rear gardens, continued into the 1980s.

## **Explanations for the Vancouver Special**

To understand why the Special departed from familiar styles, it is useful to examine the explanations for the style provided by designers, builders, realtors and planners. The *Vancouver Special* study, conducted in 1981 by Vancouver's planning department, contains most of the conventional

explanations for the emergence and spread of this style. This study was undertaken in response to complaints about the Special which surfaced in the late 1970s. These complaints, according to the report, included concerns that affordable housing was being "demolished and replaced by inferior 'boxes', that Specials caused "excessive density", and that Specials disturbed "the intricate scale and character of the older residential neighbourhood while creating instead, monotony and mediocrity".<sup>10</sup>

The study team interviewed realtors, builders and designers to elicit reasons for the Special's popularity, and sent out over 4700 questionnaires to probe residents' attitudes towards the Special in the eastside local area of Hastings-Sunrise and the westside local area of Marpole. Despite the attempt to represent the population accurately, the 1173 questionnaires returned were skewed in favour of westside residents and residents who did not live in Specials. Because planners conducted the study after the Special became popular, it emphasizes the reasons for its proliferation. The explanations below, however, are analyzed as they apply to both the emergence and spread of the Special.

1. According to the report, realtors, builders and designers argued that lower eastside land costs contributed to the design of the Special. Cheaper land allowed builders to build large houses with inexpensive materials and minimal details for those who wanted space at low cost. The report contended that this logic explained why so few Specials occurred on the west side. But higher land costs during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in more affluent buyers who continued to demand Specials, but with more expensive materials and detail-

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<sup>10</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, *The Vancouver Special*, report prepared by Planning Department (June 1981), 5.

ing.<sup>11</sup> Thus, although cheap land may have influenced the initial design and spread of the Special, this logic cannot explain the persistence of a more expensive version aimed at more affluent buyers.

2. The report concluded that the zoning schedule accommodated the size and design of the Special, particularly after 1974 when the city introduced a maximum site coverage and increased the floor space from 0.45 to 0.60 FSR. Basements were now included in floor space calculations and site coverage further restricted the size of dwelling. The amendments, argued the report, eliminated those homes that were excessive in size and site coverage but, at the same time, encouraged all builders to build to the maximums stipulated to satisfy a market now used to buying larger homes.<sup>12</sup> Although the generosity of the envelope allowed other designs, the 1974 amendments consolidated the form of the Vancouver Special for reasons that are described in the analysis of these amendments at the end of this chapter. The argument that zoning accommodated the Special holds for the form of the Special but not for its size (which was reduced) or for its style and detailing.

3. The report concluded that the city's approval process encouraged the Special at the expense of other styles. As the Special became popular, staff learned to check it more quickly than other designs. Because any delay in processing cost money, builders eliminated other styles in favour of the Special. But the Special is not inherently easier to check than other straightforward designs, and the approval process would have facilitated the repro-

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<sup>11</sup>Allied Builders Association members, informal conversations with author, 1986 and 1987.

<sup>12</sup>*The Vancouver Special*, 14

duction of **any** popular style at the expense of others. The approval process, then, influenced the spread of the Special once it became popular, but does not explain why it became the popular style.

4. The report suggested that the small-scale nature of the industry influenced the Special's style. Unlike other cities which tend to medium and large firms,<sup>13</sup> Vancouver builders work alone or with a partner, and hire people from the subtrades rather than having full-time employees. By using the same tradesmen and the same design, they can approximate the economies of scale of larger firms. But the building process was no different than the process historically used by Vancouver builders to reproduce earlier styles. Thus, the small-scale nature of the industry helps to explain the spread of the Special but not its style.

5. According to the report, the style evolved because it was more cost-efficient and marketable than other designs. The higher cost of custom plans plus the unforeseen delays they can incur turned builders toward the Special. Cost savings included a low-pitched tar-and-gravel roof and, after 1974, a slab-on-grade foundation. But these elements were used with similar cost efficiency in other styles of the period,<sup>14</sup> and cost does not explain more

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<sup>13</sup>Clayton Research Associates and Scanada Consultants, *The Evolution of the Housing Industry in Canada: 1946–1986* (Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing), 1989.

<sup>14</sup>The West Coast Style often incorporated a slab-on-grade foundation and a flat tar-and-gravel roof. According to one owner, architect Ron Thom estimated the post-and-beam construction of these houses to be two-thirds the cost of stud-wall construction in general use at the time. The popularity of the West Coast Style with young families in North and West Vancouver in the 1950s attests to the cost efficiency of the design. Dr. D. H. Copp, telephone conversation with author, 14 June 1991.

expensive design elements that were used. Brick veneer on the front facade, although an incidental cost, has long been an important facade detail, and before the study, builders had begun to accommodate a demand for more expensive concrete tile roofs. Shortly afterwards, they began finishing the main floor suite space to attract sales in a depressed market. Because builders did not hesitate to use such features to attract buyers, cost efficiency only partly explains the design and the continued marketability of the Special.

6. The report noted that, when the study was conducted, builders already had a fixed design which they believed they could sell on the east side. The interviews with the industry and questionnaire responses suggested that the Special satisfied consumers because of size, cost and style. Buyers also liked the potential for a rental suite, and found obtaining a mortgage easier than for other designs. Because the financial community's familiarity with the Special made them more willing to authorize loans for it, lenders "indirectly entrenched consumer demand for the Vancouver Special".<sup>15</sup> But builders could have achieved maximum space, low cost and rentable suites with other designs which, if they became popular, would have gained the financial community's approval. Thus, the reason for the design of the Special and its reproduction would seem to be that consumers found it attractive.

7. According to the report, design firms interviewed confirmed the popularity of the Special. Clients who were shown other designs first usually preferred the Special design, and those who were shown plans similar to the Special asked for modifications to make the design identical to the Special. But although residents and non-residents disagreed markedly on most aspects of

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<sup>15</sup>*The Vancouver Special*, 24.

the Special, the study's questionnaire showed that the aspect least liked by both groups was the Special's uniformity of design. Fully 85 percent of Special residents and 88 percent of non-residents believed that the city should be more involved in house design. Confronted with survey figures, planners concluded that the Special's popularity was largely due to the desire by buyers to conform to the tastes of their peers.

The study concluded that the dominance of the Special over other designs was the result of a set of related factors: its form was a response to the single-family zoning schedule; its proliferation especially across the east side was the result of market forces; and its reproduction was the result of inherent tendencies in Vancouver's building industry that were facilitated by the city's own permit approval process. To be sure, these factors contributed to the spread of the Special, but they do not explain adequately why builders initially settled on the Special as their design of choice.

It is important to note that the *Vancouver Special* report was silent in two areas. There was no effort to investigate the revealing comment by industry representatives that Chinese buyers were particularly attracted to these houses, and no discussion of the reaction of designers to the Special. That designers interviewed tried to offer alternatives suggests that they were not fond of the style. The Special became popular **despite** attempts to offer alternative designs. The following sections address the argument that planners did not pursue—that the relationship which developed among the builders, zoning and the immigrant market was responsible for the size, style and use of the Special.

## Changing Immigration Patterns

It has already been noted that builders attributed the size, use and style of the Special to a growing demand by European immigrants for large but inexpensive new homes. As the Special spread, immigrant patterns changed. In 1968, 44 percent of international immigrants to British Columbia came from Europe and 22 percent came from Asia, but by 1988, 66 percent came from Asia and only 17 percent from Europe.<sup>16</sup> Over this period, eastside single-family areas changed their ethnic mix more than did westside areas or multi-family areas. Table 2 measures the increase in Asians by mother tongue, and divides the city into east and westside local areas where most housing is single-family and other areas where most housing is multi-family. In each area, Asian language groups are calculated as a percentage of the total population. The measurement is not precise because ethnicity is not always captured by mother tongue and because the method for classifying responses changed between the 1971 and 1986 census. Nevertheless, the largest Asian language group in 1971 was Chinese, followed by Indo-Pakistani and Japanese. In 1986, the largest Asian language group was also Chinese, followed by Punjabi and Philipino. Japanese was not a separate category in 1986.

Despite the imprecise measurement, Table 2 shows that Asians have clustered in eastside single-family areas. In 1971, Asian language groups comprised 3 percent of the city's westside single-family population and 9 percent of its eastside single-family population. By 1986, they comprised 8 percent of the westside single-family population, and 29 percent of the east-

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<sup>16</sup>Danny Ho, "An Investigation of the Impact and Rationale for Rental Apartment Demolitions in Vancouver's Kerrisdale Neighbourhood, 1989" (M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989), 83.



side population. In multi-family areas, they increased from 8 to 12 percent. In absolute numbers, the city gained almost 40,000 Asians between 1971 and 1981 and lost over 50,000 residents of British and European extraction.

Table 2:—Asian Language Groups as a Percentage of Total Population  
City of Vancouver 1971 – 1986

	% of Total 1971	% of Total 1986	Numerical Increase
Single-Family West	3	8	3,340
Single-Family East	9	29	28,155
Multi-family Areas	8	12	6,230
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>37,725</b>

Source: Derived from City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Vancouver Local Areas* 1976 and 1986.

Construction figures for the period are also revealing. In 1981, Vancouver's east side was characterized by houses built between 1946 and 1970 while its west side was characterized by houses built before 1946. Homes built between 1971 and 1981 represented the smallest segment of the total stock, ranging from 11 to 20 percent on the eastside and 3 to 14 percent on the westside. Figure 13 shows that, between 1971 and 1981, 7219 houses were built on the east side and 1736 houses were built on the west side for a total of 8955 houses. Most eastside homes built after 1971 were Specials while westside homes were of various styles includ-

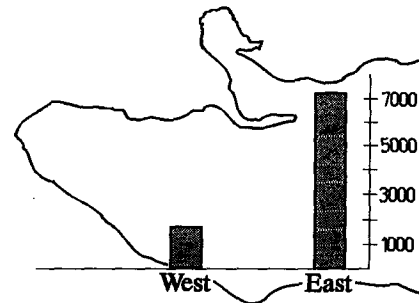


Figure 13. New construction, 1971 to 1981.

ing Specials.<sup>1</sup> This pattern of construction suggests that the spread of the Special on the east side after 1971 coincided with ethnic change.

Before the Second World War, immigration policy discriminated against visible minorities and reflected the still-conservative bias of the country. After the war, immigration policy broadened somewhat to permit entry on the basis of merit and adaptability to Canadian society. Policies which removed barriers to Asians in the 1960s reflected a growing liberalism in the country, but the changing nature of immigration policy also coincided with changing world patterns. The stability engendered by social democracies in western Europe meant that Europeans were less likely to emigrate whereas economic hardship and political instability elsewhere attracted immigrants from countries with cultures significantly different from Canada.

Charles Campbell observes that during this period, visitors could apply for landed immigrant status from within Canada and were given the right to appeal. By 1972, so many were appealing that the Liberal government granted a general amnesty. The New Immigration Act in 1978 still enshrined merit as a principle for selection, but the government gave top priority to refugees and family-class immigrants. After 1978 as well, family relationship to sponsors was broadened so that those most likely to benefit came from countries where social programs were minimal.<sup>2</sup> These factors combined to increase the flow of extended families from Asia to Vancouver. A natural outcome of immigration policy was the reproduction of the Special during the 1960s and 1970s. As Asia became the predominant source of immigrants, both size and use

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<sup>1</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Vancouver Housing Stock 1981".

<sup>2</sup>Campbell, 13. Campbell served from 1973 to 1983 on the Immigration Appeal Board, eight years as vice-chairman.

became essential to house extended family members and sponsored relatives who were often less able to provide for themselves than those selected on the basis of skill and talent.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for the Special's style is more complex. If builders were responding to immigrant tastes, more variation in style should have occurred to respond to each specific group. Instead, a style congealed around unrelated elements that builders found would sell across European and Asian cultures. Why? First, the link between builder and buyer was often through realtors so that the translation of buyer preferences would have been imprecise. Second, as Asians arrived in large numbers, the prevalence of Specials convinced them that the Special was the preferred style. Finally, as the style proved its marketability, immigrants demanded it, not because they liked the style, but because they believed that others liked it. This demand convinced builders that the Special was the popular style.

### **Specials, Suites and Neighbourhood Change**

The 1970s were characterized not only by changing trends in immigration but also by the NIMBY syndrome. Public anger over threats to neighbourhoods from highrises and expressways voted out councils allied with development interests in both Toronto and Vancouver and brought in councils more sympathetic to neighbourhood concerns.<sup>4</sup> Instead of zoning land to higher densities to meet a growing demand for housing, these councils froze

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<sup>3</sup>Campbell, in a letter to the *Vancouver Sun*, April 8, 1991 notes several studies that show that the ability of those from non-traditional sources to provide for themselves has fallen steadily after 1978 to reach, according to one study, a level of 30 percent below the national average.

<sup>4</sup>Ley, *Social Geography of the City*, 318, 331.

or reduced densities to preserve neighbourhood character. One alderman describes the early 1970s as a "pivotal time" for the city. Reducing permissible density by downzoning eliminated much of the potential for new multi-family housing and reinforced public expectations that there would be no change to existing neighbourhoods. With few opportunities to build reasonably priced multi-family housing, the response of the building industry was to build more expensive housing in single-family and highrise areas.

For the next twenty years, the pressure built. Vancouver Specials replaced bungalows on the East Side, illegal suites proliferated, the Condo came in . . . but higher zoned land did not expand. In fact, in the inner-core neighbourhoods, growth in housing units was offset by the decline in household size . .

By the late 1970s, the lid was on tight. . . and what neighbourhoods wanted was basically the *status quo*. . . . What existed was what you got—and all you would ever get. Some infill could occur, multiple conversion would be encouraged, new houses could replace old, but . . . zoning said that nothing should fundamentally change the character or significantly increase the density of any existing neighbourhood.<sup>5</sup>

Because over 70 percent of Vancouver's residential land was zoned for single-family use, trying to maintain the physical character of neighbourhoods meant social and economic change. In a summary report on secondary suites, the Vancouver Planning Department noted that the number of suites had increased from an estimated 3000 in 1976 to an estimated 26,000 by 1986.<sup>6</sup> Even if the city wanted to enforce closure, the social, financial and political costs had become prohibitive. The alderman argued that the city

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<sup>5</sup>Gordon Price, unpublished document, 6 May 1990.

<sup>6</sup> City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Secondary Suites in RS-1 areas: Summary Report," August 25, 1986. Stanbury and Todd suggest that the estimate of 3000 suites in 1976 is probably low. The increased eastside population and the growth of the Vancouver Special suggest their own estimate of 6000 suites is more accurate.

should have legalized suites early on and allowed the city to evolve. But, despite pressures of migration and natural increase, residents wanted to retain the dream of affordable single-family neighbourhoods, and councils supported them by refusing to increase the legal density in single-family areas.<sup>7</sup> The result was that the dream of an affordable single-family house began to dissolve. Small houses were demolished to make way for larger, more expensive Specials that fit the social and economic needs of immigrants.

The spread of the Special on the east side during the 1970s brought complaints from residents concerned about the size and use of new homes and from builders who wanted more space above grade.<sup>8</sup> In response, the city made two critical changes to the by-law in 1974. Up to this time, building size had been governed by height, setbacks and a floor space ratio of 0.45. To further control building size, the city introduced a site coverage that allowed buildings to cover no more than 45 percent of the lot area, and set the floor space ratio—including basements—at 0.60. The changes had no effect on the spread of illegal suites, but did have other consequences.

Figure 14 shows that houses built on standard lots after 1974 could have only 2376 square feet of floor area. Whereas the typical Special of the 1960s was often built to less than maximums permitted by the 1956 zoning schedule, the typical Special after 1974 was **always** built near or at the maximums of the 1974 schedule. Despite Vancouver's need for built space, this schedule meant that less total space could be built than at any time in the city's history, and builders were forced to build to maximums to satisfy a market now accustomed to larger houses than the 1974 schedule permitted.

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<sup>7</sup>Gordon Price, interview with author, 17 May 1990.

<sup>8</sup>*Vancouver Special*, 5–6.

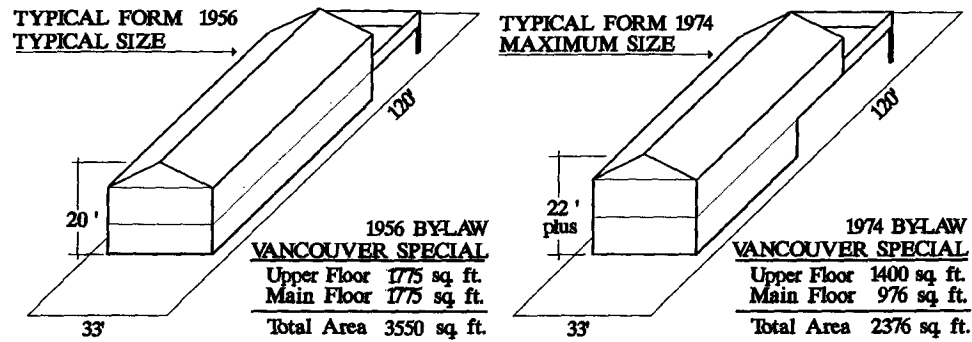


Figure 14. The 1960s Special and 1974 by-law results compared on a 33' by 120' lot.

Figures 14 and 15 show that the Special was now built at grade rather than set several feet into the ground. It appeared larger because all floor space was located above grade and length was not substantially reduced. Houses continued to extend almost as far into the rear yard because builders redistributed floor space so that the upper floor (where the owners lived) had more floor space than the main floor (which contained the potential suite). As with previous Specials, the only open space was in the front yard and in a rear yard covered with asphalt. Because basements, usable or not, were now calculated as floor space, zoning further discouraged construction and renovation of traditional homes with basements.

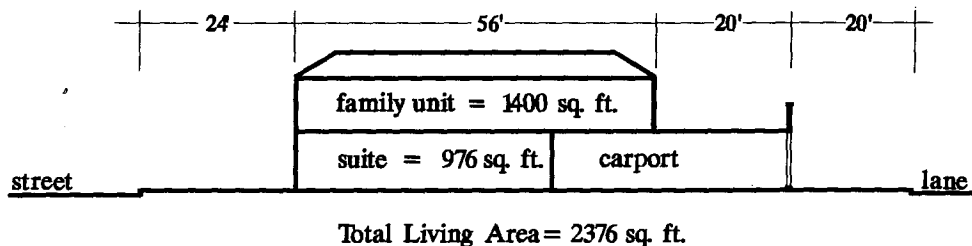
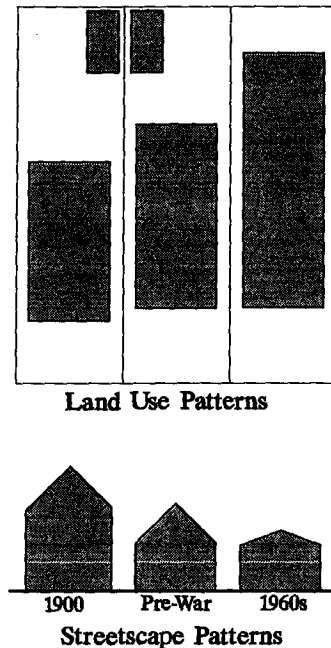


Figure 15. Section of typical Special after 1974 with living space extending over parking area.

This analysis of the Vancouver Special has shown that the building industry and the zoning schedule adapted over time to meet immigrant demand. The movement of post-war families to the suburbs meant that the small bungalows that builders had constructed to attract them evolved into a design to attract immigrants. The influx of Asians after 1971, the disproportionate new construction on the east side between 1971 and 1981, and the rapid spread of illegal suites after 1976 cannot simply be coincidental. Over time, the replacement of small by large homes decreased the availability of small houses for

small families who wanted an affordable house without a suite. Instead, the housing stock began to select extended families and those buyers who were willing to overlook the illegality and loss of privacy that a rental suite entailed. The replacement of existing dwellings by Specials led to a residential pattern completely different in character from previous patterns. Figure 16 contrasts the patterns established before zoning and before the Second World War with the pattern that had evolved by the 1970s. Along with a decrease in total built space, both the height of houses and the amount of usable open space decreased substantially.

In other words, the balance of built and open space changed profoundly between the 1900s and 1974. The pre-zoning pattern had emphasized built and open space. A much looser residential fabric developed between the 1930s and 1950s because bungalows and ranchers of the period were much



**Figure 16.** Land use and street-scape patterns produced by the Vancouver Special. The shaded areas include roofed verandahs and carports.

smaller than maximums permitted. As a result, open space was actually greater than in the pre-zoning and early zoning periods.

Table 3:—A Comparison of Land Use — 1900, 1938 and 1974  
Square-Foot Area as a Percentage of a 4000 Square-Foot Lot

	<u>1900</u>		<u>1938 Max</u>		<u>1940s Typical</u>		<u>1974</u>	
	Area	%	Area	%	Area	%	Area	%
Total Built Space	3120	78	3000	75	1800	45	2400	60
Above-Grade Space	2600	65	1800	45	900	23	2400	60
Open Space	2766	69	2400	60	2700	68	2200	55
Permitted Height	na		35 feet		35 feet		35 feet	
Typical Height	36+ feet		25+ feet		20+ feet		22+ feet	

Source: Davis blueprints, site observations and 1938 and 1974 by-laws. Calculations for typical 1940s one-storey bungalows include 400 square feet for a garage. Calculations for 1974 include 400 square feet for an attached carport to permit comparison with the 1988 amendments in Chapter 5.

After the mid-century, a new residential pattern emerged and the 1974 zoning schedule consolidated this pattern. As shown in Table 3, houses had less total space than houses built before zoning but more space than those built in the 1940s. Above-grade space, which declined consistently until the 1950s, remained at less than pre-zoning levels after 1974. Furthermore, rather than conserving open space, the new large houses of the 1960s and 1970s covered much of the lot. Because the new houses "borrowed" open rear yard space from houses built in earlier periods, neighbours in adjacent smaller homes complained that the large houses overlooked their gardens, compromised their privacy and blocked their sunlight and views. These complaints escalated with the appearance of Monster Houses in the 1980s and led to more amendments to the single-family schedule in 1986, 1988 and 1990.



Permitting more space above grade not only consolidated the Vancouver Special but also paved the way for a new kind of large house. In the 1980s, Monster Houses began to appear regularly on the west side. As shown in Photo 14, these houses were larger and more expensively detailed than the Special. But like the Special, they were as large as zoning permitted and generally had a suite used, in most cases, for nannies, grannies or guests. As new construction escalated, westside residents began to complain about these houses. Eastside residents, whose complaints had been largely ignored, rejoined battle, and in response to this chorus of complaints, Vancouver changed its single-family zoning in an attempt to tame the Monster House.



**Photo 14.** A 1986 Monster House on the west side flanked by smaller ranchers.

During these changes, the media linked the large homes with Asian buyers. Although seldom expressed openly, ethnicity also became an issue among residents who had complained previously only about size, suites and unsympathetic design. Although planners and council suspected that ethnicity was an issue, the city's particular relationship to its Chinese residents precluded debate on cultural traditions that may have influenced design. As a

result, changes to the schedule were purely technical. To deal with the suite issue, the city legalized family suites across the city and permitted legal rental suites where a majority of residents favoured this use. To deal with size, the city decreased height, increased setbacks and, in 1988, decreased above-grade floor space. The market response to these changes was the disappearance of the Special and the emergence of a new vernacular across the city. In making these changes, the city reinstated the suburban pattern that had been envisioned by Bartholomew, although with larger houses than had been built during the early years of zoning.

### **Immigration and the Monster House**

Between 1986 and 1990, British Columbia experienced prosperity and heavy in-migration. Table 4 shows that population growth after 1985 surpassed any other period in the previous 25 years.

**Table 4:—Net Migration and Natural Increase in British Columbia  
Five Year Periods 1966 – 1990**

	1966 - 1970	1971 - 1975	1976 - 1980	1981 - 1985	1986 - 1990
Net Migration	201,176	179,892	161,435	68,762	200,558
From Provinces	120,850	100,289	108,121	22,281	121,066
International	80,326	79,603	53,314	46,561	79,492
Natural Increase	87,647	83,271	93,309	111,799	103,320
Total Increase	288,823	263,163	254,724	180,561	302,878
Internat'l Percent of Net Migration	40	44	33	68	40

Source: Central Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, Province of British Columbia, 1991.

International migration peaked as a proportion of total net migration between 1981 and 1985, and the decline in migration from other provinces during this period reflects a depressed economy just as high migration after 1986 reflects prosperous times. Table 4 shows that migration from the provinces was high both in the 1966 to 1970 period and after 1985. Nevertheless, other data suggests that the spread of the Monster House coincided with high immigration after 1985 just as the spread of the Special had coincided with high immigration between 1966 and 1975.

Table 5:—Asian Immigration to the Vancouver Region 1981 – 1988

	Immigrants To B. C.	Immigrants to Vancouver n	%	Asians to Vancouver n	%
1981	22,007	14,811	67	8,300	56
1982	18,996	12,526	66	6,522	52
1983	14,447	10,015	69	6,144	61
1984	13,190	9,385	71	5,981	64
1985	12,239	8,935	73	5,673	63
1986	12,547	8,914	71	5,458	61
1987	18,913	14,536	77	9,350	64
1988	22,765	18,154	80	12,754	70

Source: Central Statistics Bureau, British Columbia, 1991.

Table 5 shows that the region's share of immigrants to the province rose from 67 to 80 percent between 1981 and 1988, and Asians increased from 56 to 70 percent. Table 6 shows that the most important source was Hong Kong. The Philipines also became prominent, while England and China became less significant. In contrast, India maintained fairly consistent figures throughout the period. Taken together, these tables show the impact of immigrants from Asia on Vancouver and its surrounds during the period in which the Monster House became a planning issue.

Table 6:—Major Sources of Immigration to the Vancouver Region  
1981 – 1990

	Hong Kong	India	Philippines	China	England	Other	Total
1981	1397	1649	961	2216	1888	7075	15186
1982	1424	1529	745	1004	1394	6904	13000
1983	1615	1445	794	645	620	5209	10328
1984	1583	1120	609	580	435	5124	9451
1985	1637	804	529	519	429	6099	9017
1986	1085	1341	713	476	419	4960	8994
1987	3309	1534	1075	623	860	7254	14655
1988	4965	1652	1354	659	1059	8838	18527
1989	4663	1557	1732	974	928	10996	20850
1990	6523	1721	1683	859	850	10094	21730
Total	28201	14352	10195	8555	8882	71553	141758

Source: Central Statistics Bureau, British Columbia, 1991.

The link between large houses and the prosperity of purchasers was not obvious before the 1980s because most earlier immigrants could afford only cheaply built large homes. The link became obvious in the 1980s because the immigrants themselves were different. Many could afford more modestly priced eastside homes on arrival, while others were wealthy enough to buy expensive westside homes.<sup>1</sup> For builders, who had built for each immigrant wave since the 1950s, it made sense to demolish smaller houses on large westside lots to meet demands by these immigrants for large, expensive homes.

The planning department had some evidence that buyers of new houses were primarily European or Asian immigrants. In 1986, it had surveyed 30 large new homes in the Oakridge area to establish data on occupancy. The survey showed that half the owners were European and most of the remainder were Asian. For the majority, English was a second language. The survey also found that households were larger—about 4.5 persons per household compared

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<sup>1</sup> Among those from Hong Kong, some visited Vancouver briefly to buy a house as security against 1997, while others settled their families in Vancouver before returning to Hong Kong to work. DeMont and Fennel, 174.

to 3.2 persons per household in single-family dwellings as a whole—and that 85 percent of families interviewed had children as compared to 35 percent of families in older homes. Half of the families had moved within the neighbourhood, and only one-quarter came from outside the Vancouver area. One-third had demolished their home to build a larger one, and over half of the homes were custom-built. Although the survey established differences from the average Vancouver family, it was not broad enough to draw conclusions for the city at large. It was, however, the only published document that linked the large house to ethnic change.<sup>2</sup>

The refusal to bring ethnicity into the public discourse beyond phrases such as "social change" and "cultural diversity" is understandable. The city's Chinese population is larger in proportion to total population than in any other Canadian city,<sup>3</sup> and it is the proportion rather than absolute numbers that gives the city its flavour and its sensitivity to racial tension.<sup>4</sup> In examining the city's relationship to its Chinese, Kay Anderson concludes that Vancouver has always objectified these residents. From the late 1800s to

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<sup>2</sup>Ann McAfee, "Vancouver's Single-Family Areas", *Quarterly Review* (Vancouver: City Planning Department, July 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Statistics Canada (1986) shows the Chinese as the second largest group in metropolitan Vancouver, comprising 5.7 percent of the total population of 1.38 million. In contrast, they comprise 2.9 percent of the metropolitan Toronto's population of 3.43 million.

<sup>4</sup>Beginning in 1875, British Columbia legislation denied Chinese the right to vote, to work on public projects or to own crown land. In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act restricted entry to Canada to diplomats, merchants, students, and children of Chinese. The act was repealed in 1947, but legislated discrimination against immigrants by race did not end until 1967.

Other Asians have fared no better. Over 20,000 Japanese-Canadians were interned during the Second World War, and in 1914, when the *Komagata Maru* brought 376 East Indians into Vancouver's harbour, authorities quarantined them for two months before sending them back. When the ship docked in Calcutta, police killed 20 passengers in the shooting exchange that ensued.

about 1950, the Chinese were rejected. Exemplifying this rejection is her quote from an alderman supporting a 1941 petition that asked the city to prevent the Chinese from buying in Vancouver's desirable neighbourhoods.

They simply don't comply with our standards. Real estate values are falling. Where one oriental buys, another follows . . . The time has come to do what has been done in other Pacific Coast and eastern cities.<sup>5</sup>

When legal avenues for restricting Chinese entrance into the city's better neighbourhoods failed, residents turned to property covenants until the Real Estate Act abolished this practice in 1956.<sup>6</sup> After the Second World War, residents began to see the Chinese as a positive feature in the social landscape. Chinatown was an "exotic" addition to the city, and the Chinese were described in public statements and media reports in a complimentary but still objectified vein.

In the large house controversy, planners and politicians did not break this "social code". It was, however, broken by the media and occasionally by residents in private conversations with city staff. For newcomers to the city unaware of this social code, the political correctness of the time precluded any discourse on ethnicity. Author William Gairdner accurately depicts the fear of open dialogue that has infused Canadians in recent years.

The entire subject [of immigration] has become so politicized, the average Canadian so frightened of expressing an opinion, and the media so ready to pounce, that all reasonable dialogue has been shut down completely.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Kay Anderson, " 'East as West': Place, State and the Institutionalization of Myth in Vancouver's Chinatown" (Ph. D diss., University of British Columbia, 1986).

<sup>6</sup>Anderson, 284, was unable to confirm the extent of this practice beyond Shaughnessy and Point Grey.

<sup>7</sup>William Gairdner, *The Trouble with Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990) 405.

Paradoxically, the media's attempt to comprehend the Monster House was perceived both as a "witch-hunt" for racists and as breaking the social code. Examples of the latter are found through this text, but a letter to the *Vancouver Sun*, confirms Gairdner's view that media reaction can discourage legitimate discourse.

Who are these racists you search for so diligently under every bed? Scarcely an issue of your paper appears without some such allusion, implying that those who oppose unrestricted foreign investment must be bigots, racists or white supremacists.

Your constant beating of this straw man obviously makes recent and prospective immigrants nervous. It tends to make local victims of the real estate boom keep their heads down. It harms our reputation abroad . . . It does nothing to improve the reputation of the *Vancouver Sun*.<sup>8</sup>

According to business consultant Chin-Ning Chu, Asians do not share the North American preoccupation with race. Each Asian ethnic group, she says, believes it is superior to the others, and it is so normal for them to think this way that "they do not even bother with denial or guilt".

Asians do not have the same sensitivity to racial issues as do Americans. The issue is not so emotionally charged for them. Asians regard it as natural to feel that their race, their nation, their province, their city and their family are better than yours. Westerners exhibit most of these same attitudes and refer to them in mildly pejorative terms such as "chauvinistic", "nationalistic" and "provincial". But "racist" is a very ugly word in English even though it often only expresses the common weakness of mankind to believe that "mine is better than yours".<sup>9</sup>

Most of those who complained were elderly British and European residents and a selective reading of magazines and newspapers could suggest that

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<sup>8</sup>Letter, *Vancouver Sun*, 10 Apr. 1989.

<sup>9</sup>Chin-Ning Chu, *The Asian Mind Game: Unlocking the Hidden Agenda of the Asian Business Culture* (New York: Rawson, 1991), 8.

anger over large houses was racially based.<sup>10</sup> But saying that racism drove complaints ignores legitimate concerns by residents of all ethnic groups. One resident with ties by marriage to the Asian community led a campaign against large houses, and in an adjacent municipality, one of the residents massing resistance was Chinese. In an unprecedented move, the lieutenant-governor of British Columbia, himself Chinese, intervened in an attempt to quell racist allegations. "When a Canadian is concerned about his own way of living," he said, "this concern is not racism".<sup>11</sup> To residents of all ethnic backgrounds, then, the large new houses challenged aspects of their identity as Canadians that were embodied in Vancouver's single-family zones.

In retrospect, the silence of planners and politicians was legitimate. Given Vancouver's social code, attempts to discuss ethnicity may have shut down this debate for most Vancouverites while inflaming the passions of bigots and the politically correct to the point where no progress could have been made. But the refusal to address ethnicity also had practical implications. It precluded dialogue with Asian buyers who may have viewed the issue with more detachment than locals and it prevented planners from examining cultural values that were based on rootedness to place rather than ethnicity. The controversy, therefore, raged around symptoms of the problem that were amenable to technical solution rather than its actual cause.

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<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Howard G. Chua-Eoan, "A Promised Land?" *Time*, 5 Mar. 1990.

<sup>11</sup>Ben Tierney, "[David] Lam advises Hong Kong on Canada," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 Dec. 1989.



## Legalizing Suites

From the outset, residents were concerned about cultural values as well as functional problems arising from size and use. A letter to the mayor from a westside resident opened with "a cultural concern with the aesthetics and values of my community",<sup>12</sup> and a column published the same day described the new houses as "freaks" and "fortresses" that followed their "own territorial imperative". The following week, the same column portrayed a council in disarray: the mayor suggested that large houses were not a serious issue; westside aldermen maintained that no issue had caused as many complaints; and eastside aldermen, playing to an already ravaged east side, insisted it was a westside problem. These columns, perhaps the earliest media analysis of the issue, attributed size and use to high land costs, blamed previous councils for negligence, and treated size and use as aspects of a single problem.<sup>13</sup>

In 1985, council explored the possibility of treating the issues of size and use together. But after a civic election brought a new mayor and shifted a somewhat left-wing council to the liberal centre, the city concluded that separating the issues would lead to a faster resolution of the problem of house size.<sup>14</sup> During this period, illegal suites were identified as the major issue and council showed its intent to preserve some single-family districts by agreeing that "if a particular area wants to remain single-family, everything should be done to try to accomplish this".<sup>15</sup> Concerned about the time and

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<sup>12</sup>Letter to Mayor Harcourt and City Council, 30 Sept. 1985.

<sup>13</sup>Pete McMartin, "The legal desecration of neighbourhoods," *Vancouver Sun*, 12 Oct. 1985 and "Those illegal suites," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Oct. 1985.

<sup>14</sup>City of Vancouver, Minutes of Council Meeting, 25 Apr. 1987.

<sup>15</sup>City of Vancouver, Minutes of Special Council Meeting, 17 Oct. 1985.

cost required to develop area zoning schedules, council chose to resolve the suite issue by local area reviews and the size issue by city-wide adjustments to the zoning schedule. The guiding concept was "neighbourliness".

Analysis by planners had shown the problem to be widespread. Of 825 permits for new houses processed between October 1984 and October 1985: 90 percent could be converted to include a suite; 85 percent required demolition of an existing house; 70 percent were Specials; 85 percent were built to the maximum floor area; and only 16 percent were larger than 3000 square feet. Recognizing that many eastside areas had already changed substantially, planners recommended that the city keep some areas intact to respond to traditional values and let others respond to changing needs.<sup>16</sup>

In dealing with suites, the city had three choices: close suites down; ignore their existence, or legalize them. To legalize suites arbitrarily would incur the wrath of many homeowners, to try to legalize by plebiscite risked city-wide defeat, and to try to legalize by area reviews was expensive and time-consuming with no guarantee of success. If the city ignored the existence of suites, law-abiding citizens would continue to be penalized while suites proliferated, and the city would remain unable to estimate needs for services and amenities. If the city closed suites down, many illegal suites would remain because of the cost, time and ultimate futility of attempting to enforce closure, but affordable housing would still be lost. Closing suites not only discriminated against those who could afford nothing better but also against ethnic minorities who needed large homes with suites to house extended family members. In this regard, a spokesman for the East Indian

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<sup>16</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Vancouver's RS-1 Single-Family Areas", 10 Oct. 1985.

community accused city council of "separating and breaking up our family system."<sup>17</sup> After a prolonged study on the definition of family, council recognized that they had to decide between two "legitimate constituencies", those who wanted to restrict neighbourhoods to "traditional" nuclear families and those who chose to live together for financial need or mutual support.<sup>18</sup> In retrospect, arbitrarily legalizing suites across the city was the most equitable and least costly solution. But because of the power residing in the affluent west side, it was never a real option.

The process used to legalize suites began as a consultative process combined with an opinion survey in which owners and tenants voted either to phase out revenue suites or rezone their sub-area to RS-1S to allow one rental suite per house as a conditional use. To test the process, council chose the eastside area of Joyce Station. Because Joyce had just completed a Local Area Planning process which set the suite issue within a context of other local concerns, the first review concluded successfully. Some neighbourhoods were rezoned for two-family dwellings as a conditional use and others remained single-family in use.<sup>19</sup> During the Joyce review, the city drew up RS-1S regulations for areas where rental suites were legal. To preserve the appearance of a single-family home and permit conversion back to single-family

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<sup>17</sup>Sarah Cox, "Crackdown on suites angers East Indians," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 Mar. 1987; See also Kim Bolan, "East Indians fight for suites," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 Apr. 1987.

<sup>18</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Recommendations on the Family" (Draft), 10 July 1987.

<sup>19</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Joyce Secondary Suite Review," 6 March 1987.

use, new houses were limited to a single front access and no side doors, and each unit was required to have access to the other from within the dwelling.<sup>20</sup>

Riley Park, the second area chosen for review, had not undergone a Local Area Planning process and, after a year of wrangling, residents divided into pro and anti-suite factions.<sup>21</sup> To resolve the impasse, council discontinued the process and used results from the opinion survey to legalize suites through most of Riley Park. This decision created rifts in the neighbourhood and in council. One member of the anti-suite faction felt "manipulated by a process that was orchestrated by the opposition in cooperation with city hall staff and City Council", and an alderman who voted against the rezoning declared, "I have never seen a public hearing where the will of the people was so totally disregarded."<sup>22</sup>

The failure of the Riley Park review led to a plebiscite during the 1988 civic election which asked: "Are you in favour of a neighbourhood review to discuss secondary suites being allowed in single-family areas in your neighbourhood?" All eastside areas voted in favour of suite reviews, and most westside areas, even when polled again, voted against them.<sup>23</sup> After the plebiscite, council legalized family suites in all single-family zones with little fanfare and virtually no public outcry. This zoning change created, as a new

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<sup>20</sup>*City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law #3575, Amendments to the RS-1 District Schedule*, May 1988.

<sup>21</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "East Riley Park Secondary Suite Review: Summary Report". 3 Feb. 1989.

<sup>22</sup>Daphne Bramham, "Riley Park suite decision criticized", *Vancouver Sun*, 26 Sept. 1989; "Riley Park hearing a public mockery", Letter, *Vancouver Sun*, 2 Oct. 1989.

<sup>23</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "RS-1 Secondary Suites—Poll Results and Future Directions", 13 Jan. 1989.

conditional use, a suite that could house only grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren of the owner. Subsequent reviews to legalize rental suites dispensed with area consultation. Instead, planners explained RS-1 and RS-1S zoning differences at public information meetings and used an opinion survey of residents, tenants and absentee owners to decide whether to rezone.

By 1990, council had rezoned most of the east side and a small westside area to allow rental suites which met specific health and safety standards. These standards, although lower than for new units, penalized suites in older houses that could not upgrade without considerable expense. Council allowed these suites to operate legally for up to 10 years depending on the degree of variance from the standards. One alderman believed that legalizing family and rental suites had been one of council's most positive achievements in setting a pattern for the future of Vancouver's single-family zones. She argued that those wanting no enforcement denied the need for safe housing and showed no awareness of the suffering of people who can be manipulated by landlords.<sup>24</sup> Another alderman described the program as a total failure. "After four years and \$1.25 million, city council has issued only 63 permits to upgrade and legalize existing suites out of almost 13,000 secondary suites in the area that the program has affected."<sup>25</sup> By the end of 1990, owners of 77 existing and 11 new houses had legalized their suites, and 415 owners had obtained permission to rent sub-standard suites legally for up to 10 years.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Carole Taylor, interview by author, 5 June 1990.

<sup>25</sup>"NDP hopefuls call for suite changes", *Vancouver Sun*, 3 Nov. 1990.

<sup>26</sup> City of Vancouver Permits and Licenses Department, telephone interview by author, 1991.

During information meetings, eastside residents criticized the process whereas westside residents criticized both the process and the substance of the program. West Point Grey provided an example of an area's ability to organize its neighbourhoods and articulate their concerns. Before the first sub-area review, three neighbourhood associations met to plan their strategy, and at the first meeting, proposed electing a chairman from the crowd so that they could "discuss" the suite issue as promised in the plebiscite. The planners' refusal to turn the meeting over to residents prompted Point Grey's New Democratic MLA to state "You're not employed to tell people how they should think or how they should vote".<sup>27</sup>

Residents argued that the illegal suite was not the issue council claimed it to be. For them, the issue was retaining affordable existing housing for owners, tenants and purchasers. They feared that voting for either RS-1 or RS-1S would bring more demolitions to West Point Grey. Leaflets handed out at meetings declared, "LEAVE WEST POINT GREY ALONE", and comments recorded showed negation of both the process and its substance.

You have given us the option of remaining single-family and getting rid of all affordable housing or going RS-1S which encourages new construction. The choice to retain the affordable housing we have is not an option.

I am in a lose/lose situation. If I vote RS-1, then I cannot afford to pay the mortgage without a suite. If I vote RS-1S, then I cannot afford to upgrade and have to leave.

We are fiddling while Rome burns. The issue is . . . affordable housing.

Without the intervention of any bureaucrat, the city has housed 60,000 to 70,000 people [in suites] by your own estimates. No one tonight has supported Council. We have heard only cynicism and skepticism.

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<sup>27</sup>This comment and those that follow were noted at West Point Grey public information meetings, 14, 21, 28 Nov. and 5 Dec. 1989.

All opposed to this process, raise their hands. [Almost every hand is raised.] Are you, as the messenger, going to take this message back to Council? Planner: Yes.

For many, the suite reviews had been unjust. Legalizing rental suites on the east side meant that eastside residents had to take more than their fair share of population growth to preserve single-family use on the west side. If westside landlords and tenants wanted to obey a law that council was now more determined to enforce, they had to relocate to areas that permitted suites. Moreover, residents had believed that the purpose of the reviews was to "discuss" legalizing suites as stated in the plebiscite, and were dismayed to find that city staff intended only to describe the process by which rental suites would be legalized if a majority voted for them. As well, they saw the process as slanted towards legalizing suites. Houses with no suites (where owners had acted legally) received only one ballot whereas houses with suites (where owners flaunted the law) received one ballot per unit as did absentee landlords. Although tenants and landlords do not always vote in favour of suites, voting patterns showed that they were more likely to do so.<sup>28</sup> Finally, many owners believed that a process designed simply to legalize suites did not address related issues of affordability and neighbourhood change. Many who supported suites in principle feared that regulations controlling suites would attract new duplexes and strata-title homes with the ensuing loss of neighbourhood character and affordable housing.

West Point Grey's criticism that council had erred in separating the issues of size and suites was shared by some council members and staff. One

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<sup>28</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Kensington-Cedar Cottage—Neighbourhood Review on Secondary Suites", 9 Aug. 1987 and "Kitsilano—Neighbourhood Review on Secondary Suites", 23 Aug. 1989.

alderman, who had consistently advocated an integrated approach, concluded that the direction chosen by council had failed.

For four years, we have screwed around with an antiquated by-law. We are no further ahead and we have wasted a great deal of the taxpayers' money. The intent of the RS-1 zoning is to preserve single-family neighbourhoods. The irony is that the RS-1 by-law is destroying neighbourhoods.<sup>29</sup>

Planners in charge of the suite reviews also felt that the process had been inappropriate. To use this process for a single issue on which people held strong views could not help but turn residents against each other and the city. A process similar to a Local Area Planning process, they said, would have been less divisive because residents could explore the suite issue within the wider arena of other neighbourhood concerns.<sup>30</sup> Whether integrated reviews would have produced better results is entirely speculative. It is clear, however, that much could have been accomplished in the four and a half years spent separately on size and suites. Despite council's efforts, the suite issue remains unresolved. As long as the need for affordable housing exists in Vancouver, enforcing closure of suites that are illegal because of location or variance from standards will be financially and politically problematic.

### **Taming the Monster House — The "Quick Fix"**

In contrast to the suite reviews, the large house review began as a top-down decision-making process and, when this approach failed, became a participatory process. The proposed changes to the by-law in 1986, later dubbed the "quick fix", were put together speedily and without public input. Only

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<sup>29</sup>Alderman Libby Davies, interview by author, 12 June 1990.

<sup>30</sup>Planner David Thomsett, interview by author, 22 May 1990.



one planner, whose work included other housing matters, was assigned directly to the task. Council, recognizing the experimental nature of the changes and the lack of staffing, made it clear that they accepted full responsibility for all decisions.

As with suites, public interest in the large houses was high. A public information meeting to explain the proposed amendments drew a capacity crowd of 250 residents and another meeting had to be held to accommodate the overflow. Of 164 letters responding to the proposed by-law changes, most were from the east side, and only 10 percent supported the changes. The Shaughnessy Heights Property Owners' Association wrote that "wholesale changes" to the RS-1 schedule would create "undesirable anomalies" and suggested separate zoning schedules to reflect different development patterns throughout the city. One westside resident wrote that the "delicate wording" of city hall did not reflect the greed, lack of taste, and desire for conspicuous consumption that were the driving forces behind the new large homes.<sup>31</sup> Another, urging a holistic approach, reflected a contempt for the planning process that was to increase throughout the controversy.

[The proposals] do too little, too late. They will not prevent, and perhaps are not intended to prevent, the vanishing of most of Vancouver's residential neighbourhoods within the next decade, sacrificed to much higher densities . . .

The larger questions of illegal suites, of density . . . are recognized but excluded . This is unrealistic because the issues overlap. An approach of piecemeal expediency is more likely to serve the insidious breakdown of any real control than to optimize values and interests sanely.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Letters to Vancouver City Council, 3 Mar. 1986.

<sup>32</sup>W. S. Parker, "A Brief to the City Council of Vancouver Regarding RS-1 Single-Family Regulations," March 1986.

Other criticism focussed on technical adjustments and led to further adjustments before council amended the zoning in April, 1986.<sup>33</sup> The critical changes, shown graphically in Figure 17, were:

- overall height was reduced from 35 to 30 feet.
- projections such as gables and dormers were not permitted beyond a roof plane which angled in at 45 degrees from the maximum sidewall height of 21 feet. Projections such as chimneys and eaves (already allowed by regulation) were permitted.
- rear yards were increased from 35 feet to 45 percent of lot depth measured from the centre line of the lane, but a single-storey space could project 12 feet into the rear yard.
- front yard averaging was reinstated.
- attached garages were discouraged by including any parking area under livable floor space in floor space calculations. Decks over attached carports could extend only 12 feet into the required rear yard.

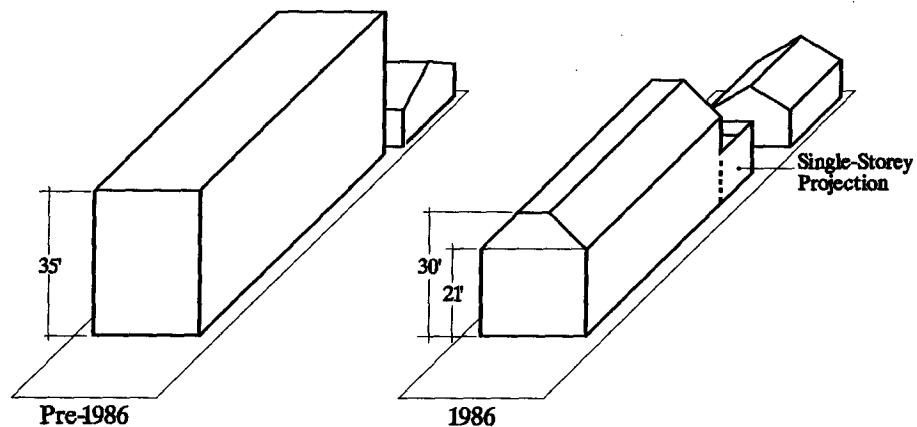


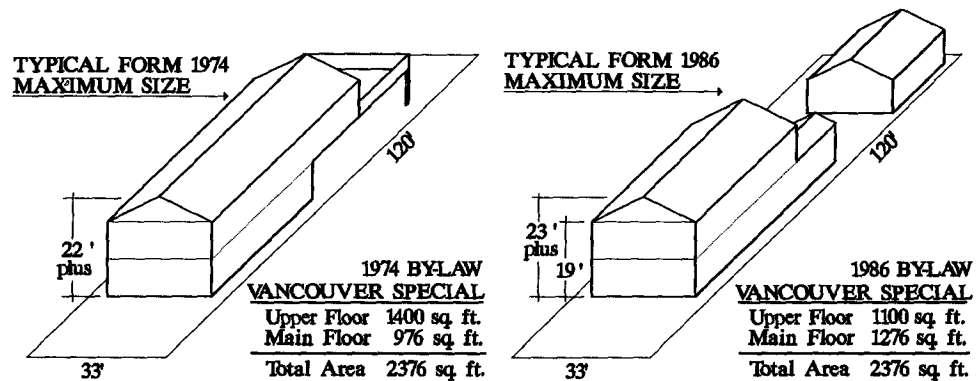
Figure 17. A comparison of the 1985 and 1986 building envelopes.

The amendments eliminated the few excessively large houses being built, but resulted in unintended consequences. The single-storey extension into the rear yard, permitted because planners and council were concerned

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<sup>33</sup>City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law #3575, Amendments to the RS-1 District Schedule, April 1986.

that the deep rear yard might otherwise compromise the spatial organization of the main floor of the dwelling, created a "long wall" which shaded and overlooked adjacent properties. For those wanting to renovate, height restrictions were especially punitive. Gables and dormers were often prohibited and raising older houses to provide inexpensive space also caused problems.



**Figure 18.** The results of the 1974 and 1986 by-laws compared. The detached garage and single-storey extension was one variation of the 1986 amendments. The other variation was an attached carport at the rear of the dwelling.

Although not intended to interfere with the construction of Vancouver Specials,<sup>34</sup> the zoning changes affected these houses severely. As shown in Figure 18, the amendments reversed the amount of space per floor for houses built on standard lots. Because of deeper rear yards, the upper floor was no longer large enough for family living, particularly for extended families with strong traditions of privacy. Builders also noted that the ground floor was considered inferior space because it was often rented to tenants. Families who wanted the large upper floor permitted before 1986 either had to buy a larger lot or buy in another municipality. Builders tried to meet the needs of

<sup>34</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Vancouver's RS-1 Single-Family Areas: A Response", 5 Dec. 1985.

extended families by putting the family room at grade. But recognizing that the market for standard lots might now be smaller families wanting to rent out two suites at grade, they ensured that the family room had its own separate bath and entrance for conversion to a studio unit. Thus, the zoning changes fostered three potential units on 33-foot lots at the same time that the city was trying to deal with the issue of a second suite.

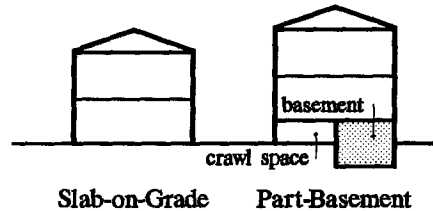
Lack of communication between departments also caused problems. By restricting height and reducing rear yard depth, the planning department was trying to encourage less space above grade and more space in basements. But while the zoning changes were being discussed, the engineering department decreased the depth of future sewer lines to save future installation costs and raised the required sewer connection depth from seven to five feet. In other words, planners wanted to push houses into the ground and engineers, observing that most new homes (Specials) did not have basements, wanted to push houses out of the ground. As a result of the new sewer policy, houses with basements often required a pumping system (estimated cost \$3000 to \$10,000) to bring sewage up to the required five-foot sewer connection depth even though they could connect to the existing sewer line without a pumping system. The cost of a pumping system could be avoided by building on slab on grade, using the single-storey addition in the rear yard to build at or near the full floor space ratio. The "long wall" created by this addition caused neighbours to complain about shading and overlooking. Although council required engineering to allow deeper sewers where possible, the department remained relatively inflexible.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Sewer Connection Costs", Memorandum, 2 Dec. 1986 and "Sewer Connection Depth Policy", Report to Council (Item 2), 26 Mar. 1987. City of Vancouver, "Revision to Plumbing Bylaw 5964: Fees for Public Sewer Connections," Manager's Report, 3 Apr.

After the zoning changes, the planning department conducted a survey of plans and elevations of 76 new homes by examining every fifth (or nearest) permit for a new single-family dwelling. The survey encompassed a six-month period five months after the 1986 changes, and represented 8 percent of all new construction for the year. The data showed that new construction was occurring in all single-family areas. About 80 percent of new homes were speculatively built, and about 80 percent were either Specials or Monster Houses.<sup>36</sup> Houses were deemed to have a suite if a self-contained unit could be created by closing a door within the house. Using this criterion, 24 percent of the sample were potential duplexes, 41 percent were triplexes and the remaining 35 percent true single-family homes. Triplexes were always east-side Specials, while most single-family dwellings were Monster Houses or traditional styles located on the west side.

The survey found that restricting height had virtually eliminated gables and dormers, made building on sloping sites more difficult, and resulted in higher site coverage and many "long walls". Moreover, as shown in Figure 19, many houses now had partial base-



**Figure 19.** The partial basement caused by the 1986 amendments to the RS-1 schedule.

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1987. Builders noted before the 1990 changes that they were installing pumps in roughly 70 percent of all new construction, and the Building Inspection Department confirmed this estimate in a telephone interview by author, Apr. 1990. City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Policy Report: Development and Building," 18 Mar. 1992 suggests that sewer depth remains a problem.

<sup>36</sup>Judging whether houses are speculatively built or should be classified as Monster Houses on the basis of style is subjective. Estimates of spec-built homes, which may be high, are based on permit data, knowledge of builders who tend to build speculatively, and familiarity with the houses themselves.

ments. Because deeper rear yards made it difficult to build the total floor space above grade on smaller lots, builders put the remaining floor space in a partial basement to achieve the 0.60 floor space ratio permitted by the zoning schedule. In December, a draft monitoring report concluded:

the repetition of houses built today will result in a hard urban environment with large building masses, increased concrete surfaces and decreasing opportunities for green open space on residential lots . . . [The issue] may not be the illegal suite, but the physical form . . . areas will take.

. . . [The city] needs a vision for the future . . . Neighbourliness is too fuzzy a concept to help staff make decisions that are fair and consistent.<sup>37</sup>

Although the amendments eliminated excessively large homes and illustrated the complexity of the problem, it was clear that the "quick fix" had failed to come to grips with residents' concerns about new houses of 2400 to 4000 square feet which were not excessively large. A report written by the housing planner noted that zoning was a "blunt instrument" for dealing with social and economic change, and that "in the absence of a clear direction on priorities, meeting one city objective may negate another." The report concluded with the need for a comprehensive review of single-family zones.<sup>38</sup>

### **Taming the Monster House — A Return to the Suburban Pattern**

The review that began in the spring of 1987 was comprehensive only in its careful examination of the issue of size. Its context was a rising market accompanied by new construction and media coverage of Monster Houses. Table 7 shows that single-family starts in the city rose from 900 in 1985 to

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<sup>37</sup>City of Vancouver, "RS-1 Monitor Report" (Draft), Dec. 1986.

<sup>38</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "1987 RS-1 Single-Family Work Program", 9 Dec. 1986.

1752 starts at the peak of the market in 1989 before falling in 1990 to 958 starts. Although duplex starts rose, rowhouse starts were insignificant until 1990, and low-rise multi-family starts declined. This imbalance reflects both the amount of land zoned for single-family use and effective demand. The market was geared to the affluent. Besides single-family houses, only highrise condominiums geared to wealthy buyers were being built in any number.<sup>39</sup>

Table 7:—Residential Buildings Constructed — City of Vancouver 1985–1990

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Single-Family	900	938	1327	1262	1752	958
Duplex	37	82	112	98	70	84
Rowhouse	2	5	3	0	0	21
Lowrise	32	13	8	14	9	2
Highrise	51	11	19	40	15	4

Source: City of Vancouver Permits and Licenses Department, Statement of Building Permits Issued, 1986 to 1990.

As neighbourhoods changed, journalists competed to inform and inflame readers. In an especially virulent piece, one columnist went directly to the fears that nourish demands by some residents for restrictive zoning.

The issue is that the hordes of Asia have moved in and are importing the ways of Asia. That means packing all the relatives into a single dwelling . . . In Calcutta, they live out on the sidewalk too . . . Given time, we, too, could reach that state of bliss. Anyone who doesn't like that sort of thing is a "racist" of course.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, Lance Berelowitz, "High-Rise Anxiety", *Canadian Architect* 37, no. 1 (January 1992): 9–13.

<sup>40</sup>Doug Collins, *West Side Week*, 5 April 1987.

Most media coverage was more balanced, but stories about Monster Houses kept the issue top-of-mind among residents.<sup>41</sup> It was in this context that the city finalized the terms of reference for a review of the single-family schedule. Five architectural firms were hired as consultants: one firm to study small lots (40 feet wide or less), another firm to study large lots, and three consultants to critique proposals for renovation potential, future flexibility and administration ease. The consultants were asked:

to achieve the best possible relationship between livability, marketability, and neighbourliness between existing and new houses . . . emphasis should be on *reducing site coverage and floor space ratio* (specifically above-grade building bulk).<sup>42</sup>

The process was described as a sharing of ideas between consultants and the presentation of these ideas to advisory groups of residents, designers, builders and realtors. Letters and briefs to the city were one means of choosing informed residents. One such document, complete with photos, detailed westside complaints: fear of density; loss of landscape and open space; poor construction quality; and inappropriate house form and detailing.

Once our neighbourhood was beautiful . . . Then along came these . . . bulging over the lot like a fat lady in a bikini . . . Although some houses are not completely ugly, they still don't "fit" . . . A fifty year old rhododendron . . . was smashed to make room for a house twice the size of the one that was there—yet the same number of people live there. . . here, two monsters side by side . . . The same depressing row housing (but not as well built) as one finds in the teeming cities of the old countries. Where brick and cement replace trees and green grass and the sun never shines.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>See, for example, Lori Cohen, "Invasion of the Monster Houses", *Western Report*, 9 Feb. 1987; Shelley Fralic, "Monster House tells story of social schism", *Vancouver Sun*, 24 Mar. 1987.

<sup>42</sup>City of Vancouver, "Terms of Reference: RS-1 Regulations Review," 11 June 1987. Emphasis mine.

<sup>43</sup>M. F. Painter, "The Destruction of a Neighbourhood", brief to Vancouver City Council, 5 Mar. 1987.



The builders brought a different perspective to the debate. They understood the technical implications of by-law changes, and acted as advocates for new home buyers who, for the most part, did not participate in the controversy. In a document prepared by their association after the 1986 zoning changes, they left no doubt that they built for the Asian market.

It is no coincidence that complaints doubled with the arrival of a wave of immigrants from Asia about a decade ago. Nor is it surprising they redoubled when these new immigrants . . . put their stamp on what they built or had built.<sup>44</sup>

In March 1987, the association presented their views to the city. They charged that builders were not consulted before the 1986 changes, that suite owners were afraid to speak out at public hearings, and that owners of large houses refused to speak. They charged that city staff had misinformed the public when they said that the 1986 changes would not affect the Special. They charged that the city had downgraded the kind of houses people could build while increasing house costs. They charged that the aberration was not the large house but the small bungalow built during and after the war.

. . . to scale down to a wartime criterion is retrograde, unrealistic and insensitive to the needs and aspirations of the buying public . . . the rate of demolition . . . today shows what can happen to small homes. . .

[The statement by] the young professional . . . who said "my house and the block were saved from demolition by being big enough to renovate or convert to duplex" will hold true in future if the city leaves the marketplace unfettered . . .<sup>45</sup>

The builders' charges were legitimate, and their opinions had merit. Their experience provided a rich source of information that was used to advantage in the 1988 zoning changes.

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<sup>44</sup>Michael Hennessey, "Racism and the Dilemma of Changing Neighbourhoods", brief to Vancouver City Council from Allied Builders, 1986.

<sup>45</sup>Allied Builders, "Agenda for Discussion with City", March 1987.

Another group that lobbied the city was the Vancouver Neighbourhoods' Association (VNA). The VNA concluded that most eastside residents had no objection to affordable suites in affordable houses. For them, size was the issue. Size caused problems for adjacencies and made the new houses too expensive. The VNA argued that problems caused by the Special could have been corrected in the 1970s by ensuring that basements were set well into the ground instead of changing the floor space ratio and introducing site coverage.<sup>46</sup> The association recommended a schedule similar to the 1938 schedule: a floor space ratio of 0.45 plus a full basement with 50 percent of its depth below grade, site coverage at 35 percent, and garages detached from the house or counted as floor space. Considering that these recommendations would produce houses with more total space than permitted by the 1986 zoning, the VNA stance was very reasonable.

Sessions with residents, builders and designers, representatives of the real estate industry and cultural groups brought a greater understanding of the issue. In summarizing the residents' views, the small lot consultants noted that residents expected their neighbourhoods to change, but were concerned with the speed and nature of change. Residents were not concerned about suites, but about the fit between existing and new homes. They wanted more green space around houses and some of the bulk transferred to the basement, even if this meant more total floor space. Renovations should be encouraged and new houses should reflect the character of existing homes.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>The Vancouver Neighbourhoods Association, "The Vancouver Special", brief to Vancouver City Council. 27 July 1987.

<sup>47</sup>Hulbert Group, "RS-1 Regulations: Small Lot Review, City of Vancouver, B. C.," Sept. 1987. RS-1 Monitor notes confirm this assessment.

Eastside builders resisted any change that would raise the cost of the Special, but westside designers and builders, who had more freedom of price and style, were open to change as were eastside designers who criticized the designs that the market and zoning imposed upon them. Both groups criticized zoning staff for interpreting regulations "to the exclusion of common sense", and suggested hiring a permanent RS-1 planner to bring a consistent interpretation to the single-family schedule.<sup>48</sup> Council had already funded a temporary planner, and was considering staffing the position on a permanent basis, but did not do so until after the 1988 changes were implemented.

Sessions with realtors included representatives of the Chinese and East Indian communities. A westside realtor pointed out that affluent Chinese buyers preferred single-family areas near good schools and close to city centre. The East Indian spokesman said that extended families had different needs than the typical Canadian family, and that the sponsorship conditions of the immigration policy also encouraged large homes. An eastside realtor estimated that 75 percent of the eastside market for new homes was Chinese, and most of the remainder was East Indian. "We do not sell lifestyle, we sell accommodation. The east side will not pay for character or age."<sup>49</sup>

These meetings and other observations led the consultants to conclude that new houses were too big and too boxy with too many materials, too much paving, too few details and too little landscaping. In their proposal, the consultants who worked on small lots concluded:

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<sup>48</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "RS-1 Workshop: Meeting with Builders and Designers," 9 July 1987.

<sup>49</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "RS-1 Workshop: Meeting with Realtors," 30 July 1987.

- The traditional pattern of front yard, house, garden and parking on the lane provides a superior living environment for families.
- Careful study of the building envelope could permit houses as large or larger than existing new homes with more neighbourly massing.
- The key to encouraging renovation while permitting variety in new house forms is careful control of house volume.
- The history of Vancouver's zoning is a guide for appropriate future revisions to zoning.<sup>50</sup>

This historical approach, based on patterns established in 1930, was shared by the large lot consultant and strongly influenced the 1988 changes.

Throughout the study, small and large-lot consultants refused to consider the city's request to reduce site coverage and above-grade floor space. "Because of incomes and lifestyle," argued one consultant, "[buyers] need larger accommodation for their cars, computers, electronic gadgets, and often quarters for live-in domestic help." Reiterating the builders, he noted that large houses are less prone to demolition because they can be changed internally. In the past, mature landscaping and similar details, texture and scale had enabled large houses to fit in with smaller neighbours. The critical aspect was not size but the treatment of space between buildings.<sup>51</sup>

Except for different approaches to massing, the two proposals had many similarities. Both firms advocated a return to the 35-foot height limit with no reduction to site coverage or floor space ratio. Both firms recommended a garden space in the rear yard with garages in a service zone on the lane, and both firms argued for transition zones around houses for porches and other projections that would soften the building edge and reduce the

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<sup>50</sup>The Hulbert Group, 3.

<sup>51</sup>James K. Y. Cheng, "RS-1 Regulations: Review (Large Lots), Final Draft," 1 Sept. 1987, 10–11.

perception of bulk. To control massing and bulk, small-lot consultants suggested horizontal and vertical transition zones controlled by a volume calculation while the large-lot consultant suggested a simpler scheme of controlled projections around the perimeter of the dwelling.

The consultant hired to advise on renovations concluded that the proposals provided a neutral to more positive environment for renovations.<sup>52</sup> The other consultants argued that the proposals be simplified. One advocated the reduction of above-grade floor space by adopting "a sliding scale" that the planning department was in the process of developing,<sup>53</sup> while the other believed that reducing site coverage was the most important consideration.

[Both firms] have taken a shotgun approach to the problem, attacking all sections of the existing bylaw, changing everything . . . residential design is going to be restricted to a handful of solutions that fit a set of very tight envelopes.

The solutions are to reduce site coverage, restrict parking and above-grade deck locations and if necessary mandate an open zone in the back yard. Simple solutions that can be tested and measured quickly, not complicated documents that only a few people can understand.<sup>54</sup>

Planners were also concerned that making too many regulatory changes at once would make results harder to measure. On their advice, council chose to implement only the most critical proposals and monitor the results. The amendments adopted in April 1988, shown in Figure 20, combined consultants' recommendations with changes advocated by the planning department.

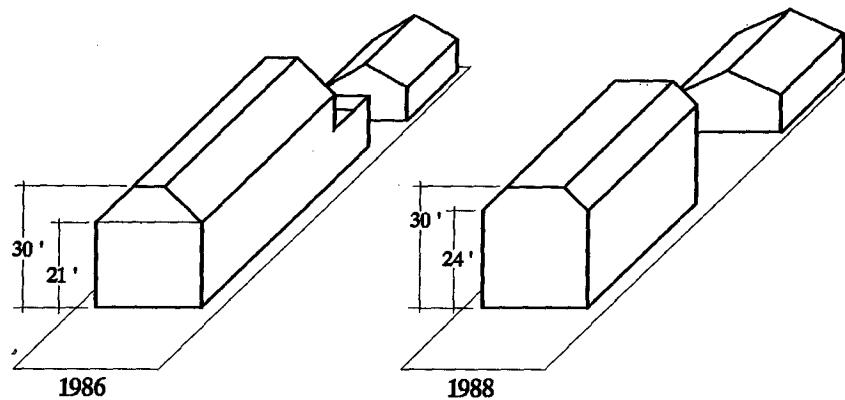
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<sup>52</sup>Paul Ohannesian Architect, "RS-1 Regulations Review: Critique of Proposals with Emphasis on Housing Retention and Renovations," Final Report, Sept. 1987, 39.

<sup>53</sup>Matsuzaki Wright Architects, "Large and Small Lot Proposals," 10 Sept. 1987.

<sup>54</sup>Stuart Howard Architects, "RS-1 Proposals: Final Submission", 4 Sept. 1987.

- The front yard depth became 20 percent of lot depth.
- Where lanes existed, garages and other accessory buildings were limited to a service area on the lane.
- The rear yard setback of 45 percent of lot depth was now measured from the rear property line and no construction was allowed between the house and the rear service area.
- Maximum height remained at 30 feet, but eave height was raised to 24 feet to resolve difficulties with new construction and renovation.
- Site coverage was reduced from 45 to 40 percent of lot area, consistent with actual site coverage in most new construction.
- Above-grade floor space was calculated by a formula—30 percent of lot area plus 1000 square feet. Total floor space was not changed.<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 20.** A comparison of the 1986 and 1988 building envelopes.

Before the 1988 changes, planners had observed that above-grade floor space of new construction decreased as lots became larger and developed a "sliding scale" to approximate market conditions. This formula was introduced because planners and council believed that changes that did not reduce above-grade space would be unacceptable to residents. The formula, shown graphically in Figure 21, permitted large houses on small lots while reducing above-

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<sup>55</sup>*City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-law # 3575, Amendments to the RS-1 District Schedule, April 1988.*

grade space relative to lot size as lots became larger. By reducing above-grade floor space, decreasing site coverage and opening up rear yards, the changes resolved most problems of overlooking, shading and view blockage, particularly

on small lots. The introduction of the sliding scale, however, resulted in more

partial basements because the difference between the permitted total floor space and above-grade floor space was not always enough for a full basement.

Although public support for the 1988 amendments was overwhelming, letters to council showed the polarity of opposition. The first letter typifies the views of those long-term residents who saw suites of any sort as a threat, while the second represents the views of many Chinese and East Indian immigrants who value the space large houses provide.

The argument put forward by the development community that the family of the '80s requires more FSR [Floor Space Ratio] is groundless. The typical new house built on a 33' x 122' lot has on the top floor approximately 1400 square feet and on the ground floor 1000 square feet . . . in the vast majority of these new houses, the ground floor is utilized as a revenue ILLEGAL suite. . . Allowing 1700 square feet above grade on a standard lot will amply provide all the amenities required by a SINGLE family.

We are paying very dearly for the building lot and in return we get a very much reduced home. The people who made the complaints are none other than the local Canadians . . . it is too bad and unfortunate for them, but it cannot be helped, as each and everyone has the right and freedom to choose whatever shape and style of housing he wants. . . The whole thing boils down to . . . a case of jealousy between the "haves" and the "have-nots".<sup>56</sup>

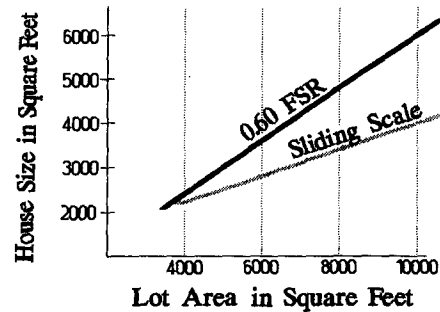


Figure 21. The sliding scale adapted from City of Vancouver Planning Department, Draft Policy Report.

<sup>56</sup>Letters to Vancouver City Council, 1 and 16 Mar. 1988. In the first letter, floor areas of 1400 and 1000 square feet refer to the Vancouver Special as it was built before the 1986 zoning amendments.

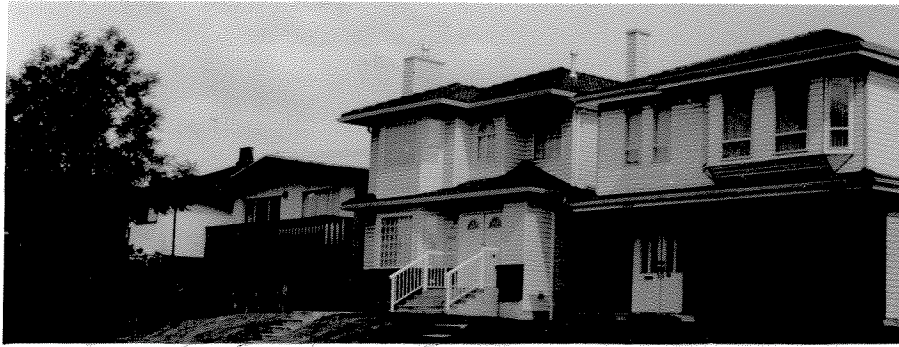
The 1986 and 1988 changes describe the period during which builders turned from building inexpensive new housing on the east side to building more expensive housing across the city. To compare this change, new single-family homes constructed after 1988 were surveyed following the same method used to survey new construction after the 1986 zoning changes.<sup>57</sup> The purpose of the 1988 survey was to compare the effects of the zoning changes more precisely than could be observed by on-site observation. After 1986, however, the zoning department changed its filing methods to separate out permit applications with minor technical problems. Applications with no problems were given a different code. The coding change was not evident until well after the two samples had been compared. Discussions with zoning technicians suggested that replicating the 1986 survey more precisely would not change the results of the comparison.

The sample of 76 homes, representing 6 percent of the houses built in 1988, showed that new construction continued to occur in all single-family areas with some clustering across both samples in the affluent Kerrisdale-South Granville area. As in 1986, most new houses were speculatively built, but few retained the facade or the plan of the Special. Between 1986 and 1988, houses with Vancouver Special facades dropped from 55 to 8 percent of the sample, while houses with Monster House facades increased from 18 to 75 percent. Traditional and post-modern styles decreased from 27 to 17 percent. As shown in Photo 15, the Monster House style, adapted to smaller eastside lots, had become the vernacular across the city.

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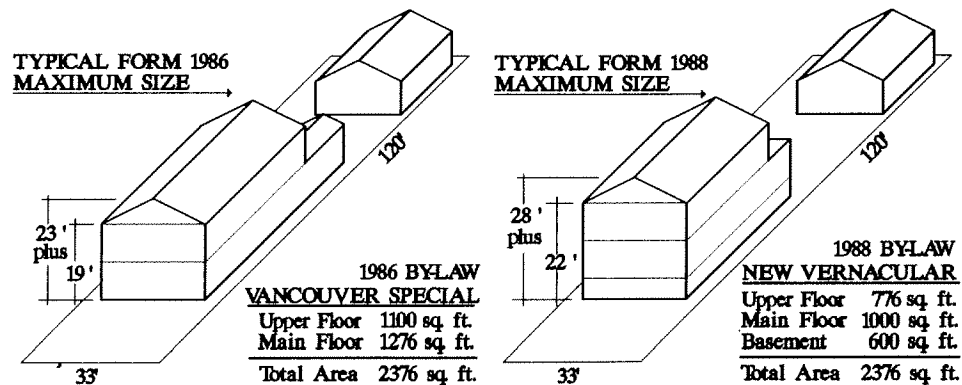
<sup>57</sup>Refer to page 118.





**Photo 15.** The new vernacular (centre) with a 1960s Special (left) and a 1986 Special (right).

In view of the builders' tendency to maximize floor space and site coverage, the 1988 zoning changes reduced bulk and site coverage more than would have been expected. Between 1986 and 1988, above-grade floor space decreased on average from 56 to 47 percent of lot area and site coverage dropped from 39 to 35 percent.

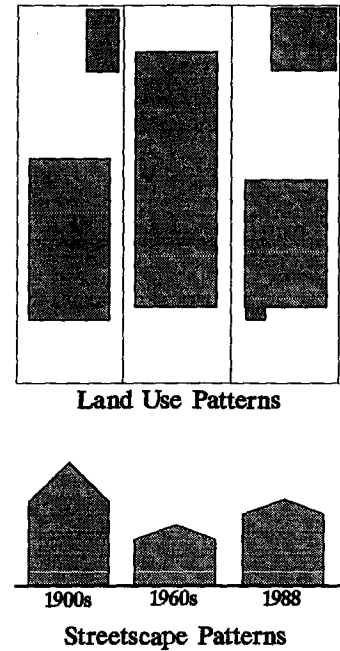


**Figure 22.** Spatial distribution resulting from the 1986 and 1988 by-laws. The 1988 spatial distribution is typical although articulation of the upper floor varies.

Demand for suites seems to account for these decreases. To create a viable basement suite of about 600 square feet on standard lots, builders had to take about 400 square feet from the permitted above-grade floor space and add it

to the 200 square feet of remaining total floor space that could not be built above grade. This spatial distribution, shown in Figure 22, approximated VNA proposals for above-grade space, but lacked the full basement recommended by the VNA.

If the 1986 changes partly dismembered the Special, the 1988 changes destroyed it. Mandating an open rear yard returned the suburban pattern of house, garden and garage on the lane, as shown in Figure 23. Living areas returned to grade and the suite was once more located in a basement now set four feet into the ground. Houses with two suites declined only slightly—from 65 to 60 percent between 1986 and 1988, but those with three suites had disappeared. Although houses on large lots still caused complaints, the city had resolved most of the functional problems that had driven complaints on smaller lots.



**Figure 23.** A return to the suburban pattern

The participatory approach of 1988 was clearly more successful than the top-down approach of 1986. Table 8 shows the cumulative effects of the zoning changes and the market response in terms of built and open space. By requiring an open rear yard after 1988, the city provided almost as much open space as was typical of many large homes built before zoning. But the table shows that, despite the city's need for built space, the 1988 schedule has not responded to this need.

Table 8:—A Comparison of Land Use — 1900, 1938, 1974 and 1988  
Square-Foot Area as a Percentage of a 4000 Square-Foot Lot

	<u>1900</u>		<u>1938</u>		<u>1974</u>		<u>1988</u>	
	Area	%	Area	%	Area	%	Area	%
Total Built Space	3120	78	3000	75	2400	60	2400	60
Above-Grade Space	2600	65	1800	45	2400	60	1800	45
Open Space	2766	69	2400	60	2200	55	2575	64

Calculations for 1988 included 400 square feet for a detached garage and 25 square feet for a typical front porch. The distribution of space is typical for homes with a 600 square foot basement, 1000 square feet on the main floor and 800 square feet upstairs. Source: Sample of new construction, 1988.

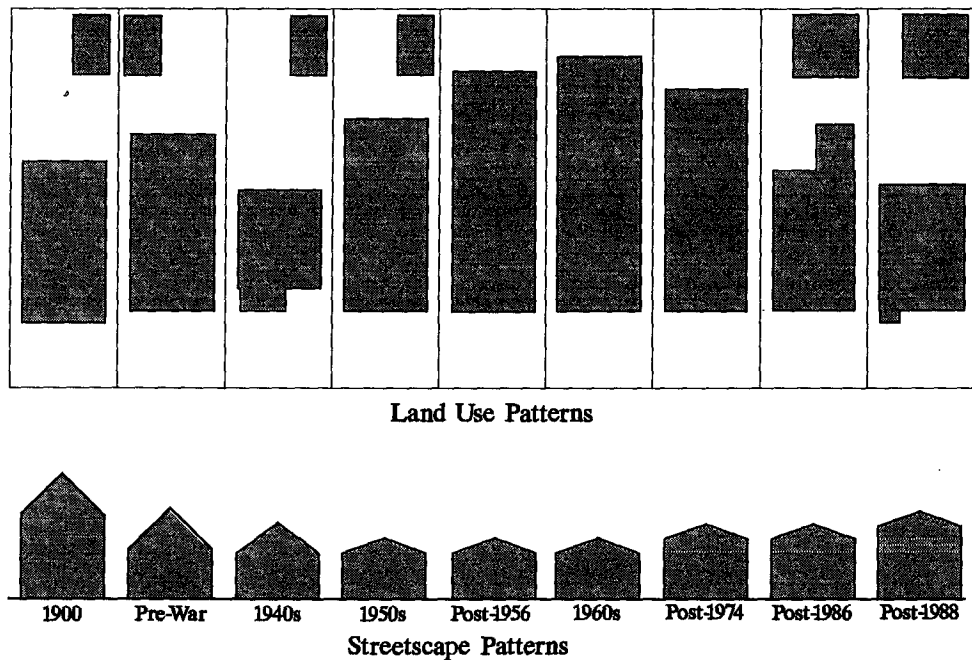
Photo 16 illustrates the change in land use in a different way. On the left is a "small" turn-of-the-century house on a 33' by 130' lot. The original dwelling (excluding a later rear extension) was about 2100 square feet in total floor area, about the same size as the "large" house built on a 33' by 107' lot after 1988. Both the original older dwelling and the new house are about 35 feet deep, but the older house appears smaller because of its narrowness, its sharply pitched roof and the planted open space around the dwelling that frames and softens the structure.



Photo 16. A "small" turn-of-the-century house (left) and a "large" house (right) built after 1988.

Previous chapters have shown the destruction of Vancouver's urban pattern of the 1900s and the destruction of the suburban pattern intended by

the zoning schedule of 1930. This chapter has shown the return to the suburban pattern intended by zoning, although with larger houses and conditional suites. Figure 24 shows the cumulative changes to the residential landscape over time and illustrates the relationship between height and open space. Under conditions of high demand and low supply, houses will spread out to cover the lot unless site coverage is restricted and height is encouraged.



**Figure 25.** Land use and streetscape patterns from 1900 to 1955.

This chapter completes the analysis of house form and land use. Although the city changed its single-family schedule again in 1990, the decline in market activity after 1990 made it difficult to assess the results of the 1990 changes. While the following chapter describes these amendments, it focusses on demographic patterns in Vancouver and the region to assess the consequences of returning to the land use pattern envisioned in 1930.

Throughout 1989, builders continued to take advantage of the rising market. Neighbourhood change intensified, and the need for affordable housing became acute. In reporting these changes, the media linked Monster Houses increasingly to Asian wealth. Several reports refuted this linkage, and attributed changes in housing demand to the natural aging of the population and to mobility within the region and from other provinces.<sup>1</sup>

During this period the research focus shifted from technical to social aspects of zoning because several pieces of evidence came together to indicate that most owners were Chinese. This evidence implied that builders chose designs that reflected the tastes of this market, but telephone interviews with owners of the houses surveyed suggested otherwise. Over half the owners responding disliked some or all of the new houses, and this dislike was most prevalent among recent immigrants. Builders interpreted signals from the market, buyers purchased what they built, and the act of purchase confirmed to builders that their product was desirable. As with the Special, the ethnic link to the large houses was through builders who were changing single-family neighbourhoods according to their perception of market tastes.

Despite the reduction of house bulk in 1988, complaints did not stop. Satisfied that the city had dealt as well as could be expected with the shading,

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<sup>1</sup>David Baxter, *Population and Housing in Metropolitan Vancouver: Changing Patterns of Demographics and Demand* (Vancouver: Laurier Institute, 1989). Gregory Schwann, *When Did You Move to Vancouver? An Analysis of Migration and Migrants into Metropolitan Vancouver* (Vancouver: Laurier Institute, 1989).

overlooking and view blockage caused by large houses, residents became more vocal about design, ethnicity, and the destruction of trees.

We . . . fear the power that Hong Kong money wields. We resent the fact that they are able to mutilate the areas they choose to settle in. Our trees are a part of our heritage. These people come with no concern for our past. . . They have no right to devastate our residential areas.<sup>2</sup>

These complaints forced the city to amend the zoning again. The 1990 amendments fine-tuned the suburban pattern re-established in 1988 by reducing the bulkiness of houses on larger lots, modulating their design, and encouraging renovation of existing dwellings. But these changes were superficial. They did not recognize that most Vancouver families did not need and could not afford the new large houses. The result of the zoning changes, therefore, may be the preservation of single-family zones for global wealth.

### **Baby Boomers, Migrants and the Large House Market**

After 1985, rising prices not only intensified the activity of builders in single-family zones but also drove first-time buyers into suburban markets and enticed older families to sell their city homes and move farther out. At the same time, local and offshore demand had impacted on those less able to afford housing. Rents soared, and developers began demolishing affordable older apartments to build luxury condominiums. When new construction displaced seniors from apartments they had lived in for years, a western journal argued for restraints on the market to protect community values.

. . . the well-being of our elder citizens is of much greater value and importance than the abstract, absolute freedom of the marketplace. The market economy exists and has been retained because of its ability to serve higher values . . . When the "invisible hand" turns out to be a clenched fist

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<sup>2</sup>Letter to Vancouver City Council, 5 Aug. 1988.

threatening the security of the community, then people are going to get serious about bringing out the handcuffs.<sup>3</sup>

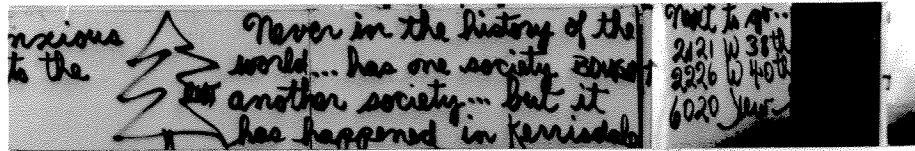


Photo 17. Signs on hoardings protest the demolition of affordable Kerrisdale housing.

Long before people began to feel the economic fallout from the boom, the planning department had described the need for more, smaller units. In 1981, it had published *Coreplan*, its vision for the prosperity and vitality of Vancouver. The document noted an imbalance between housing supply and demand by migrants attracted by core employment and by baby boomers now seeking family housing. Despite conversion of industrial areas, redevelopment of low-density areas, and replacement of older single-family homes by new houses with illegal suites, supply had not increased significantly. The document stressed the need to increase supply while preserving neighbourhood character, but noted that past actions had achieved mixed results. With some exceptions, redevelopment had occurred mainly in eastern core apartment areas and efforts to increase stock while preserving residential character had resulted in socio-economic change.<sup>4</sup>

*Coreplan* proposed intensifying land use throughout the city to achieve more medium-density, ground-oriented housing while diverting development from affordable areas towards the westside single-family zones. If this

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<sup>3</sup>Ken Drushka, "If the 'invisible hand' strikes out", *British Columbia Report*, 20 Nov. 1989, 4.

<sup>4</sup>The physical preservation of neighbourhoods has had similar results elsewhere. See George Prybylowski, "Housing in Existing Communities", *Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 165.

strategy was inadequate, the city would have to expand its transportation system to link the core to the suburbs. If strategies for housing, transportation and the environment were unfeasible or unacceptable, the city would have to limit core growth aggressively and undermine its goals of prosperity and vitality. Although demand by baby boomers would eventually decrease, *Core-plan* predicted Vancouver would run out of space in the early 1990s under current zoning and the metropolitan area could exhaust its land supply in about 20 years. High costs and lack of supply "could turn sons and daughters of Vancouverites away from their city and discourage the entry of talented people from elsewhere."<sup>5</sup> High costs impacted on locals, but did not deflect talent from elsewhere until the market peaked at the end of the 1980s.

In 1989, a planning department study showed that two-thirds of the city's housing demand over the next 15 years would come from **within** existing neighbourhoods as aging homeowners sought smaller units. The lack of capacity was resulting in the demolition of affordable apartments, and the lack of alternatives in areas zoned primarily for single-family use was resulting in residents having to leave the area when they moved from their homes. Assuming normal out-migration patterns, two conventional projections of demand predicted a population increase of 50,000 to 70,000 from Vancouver's base of 432,385 in 1986 for an increase of 31,000 to 33,000 households by 2001. A third approach estimated future demand generated by residents from within their own neighbourhoods and projected an increase of over 270,000 people and over 110,000 additional households. The report, recognizing that current initiatives were inadequate, proposed adding over 75,000 units outside the downtown core. Development would occur in industrial lands and "neigh-

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<sup>5</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Vancouver Coreplan*, 1981, 47.



bourhood centres" in established residential areas where the addition of multi-family housing would cause as little disruption as possible.<sup>6</sup> Without a change in residents' attitudes, it is unlikely that the city can meet these goals.

During this period, the media reported regularly on Asian investment in the market. In 1988, real estate and government spokesmen interviewed by the media had ascribed the boom to a buoyant economy and migration from other provinces. By 1989, they acknowledged that it was fed in part by Asian wealth.<sup>7</sup> In February 1989, the *Vancouver Sun* published statistics to show that residential sales to offshore buyers, primarily from Hong Kong, had risen from 10 to 30 percent between January and October 1988.<sup>8</sup> This attempt to connect Asian immigration to real estate investment drew fire from the academic community. One sociologist said that replacement of small houses by large ones had unleashed a tradition of anti-Orientalism, particularly on the affluent west side. A month later, he ascribed westside prices to increased demand primarily from Alberta and Ontario. Asian immigrants, he wrote to the *Sun* "are becoming scapegoats for market conditions for which they are not primarily responsible."<sup>9</sup> The sociologist was correct that people were

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<sup>6</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Vancouver's Housing Strategy," 23 Nov. 1989.

<sup>7</sup>Susan Balcom, "Don't expect a Toronto crisis here", *Vancouver Sun*, 28 May 1988; Rebecca Wigood, "Behind the boom", *Vancouver Sun*, 14 Jan. 1989; Margaret Philp, "Alberta, B. C. home sales soar", *Globe and Mail*, 24 Oct. 1989; "Vancouver called hot spot for Hong Kong investors", *Toronto Star*, 25 Mar. 1989; Bruce Constantineau, "Asian real-estate force expected to remain," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 Nov. 1989.

<sup>8</sup>Gillian Shaw, "How Asian money fuels housing market", *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Feb. 1989. Royal LePage Limited, *Royal LePage Market Survey*, 1989, showed similar statistics.

<sup>9</sup>"Race relations deemed unhealthy", *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Feb. 1989. "Letters", *Vancouver Sun*, 16 Mar. 1989.

blaming Asians for a problem they did not create. But, along with others, he discounted industry reports that immigrants were major players in the market.

Anti-Asian sentiments caused ambivalence as the Asian community tried to deal with racial slurs and their own concerns about neighbourhood change. In a letter to the *Vancouver Sun*, a westside Chinese teenager wrote:

These immigrants for the most part do not attempt to fit into Canadian society. With their rich and powerful Hong Kong backgrounds, they are perfectly content to isolate themselves. If discrimination is directed toward them, they shrug it off.

The situation is distressing for Chinese-Canadians like me. We are victimized by the same generalizations that are made about the immigrants . . . Even if we agree with parts of the generalizations, we cannot openly say so, as this would be betraying our own people.<sup>10</sup>

Denials by politicians and academics that the market could be responding to a specific ethnic group caused confusion in assessing the role of immigrants in the market, and confusion was compounded by using aggregate figures to describe the market. Several studies conducted for the Laurier Institute in 1989 illustrate that aggregate figures are of little value in assessing local markets.<sup>11</sup> In the first report, economist David Baxter used census data from 1971 to 1986 to analyze the 1075 square-mile Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). He concluded that baby boomers were reaching peak housing demand. If trends continued, demand in the region would be unprecedented. First-time buyers would decline between 1986 and 1996, and demand would come mainly from established household heads aged 35 to 54, a group that historically prefers single-family or ground-oriented housing.

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<sup>10</sup>"Letters", *Vancouver Sun*, 7 Dec. 1989.

<sup>11</sup>The Laurier Institute, a non-profit group formed in 1989 to promote understanding among cultures, was concerned that blame attributed to Hong Kong buyers for large houses was spreading through the Chinese community.

. . . the responsible group is everyone, not some unusual or exotic group of residents or migrants. In fact, there is no one to blame: the future growth in housing demand is a logical and normal extension of trends in the nation's population, trends that have their roots in the baby boom of the 1946 to 1961 period, and the historical desirability of metropolitan Vancouver as a place of residence.<sup>12</sup>

An analysis of city data suggests that baby boomers affect city and suburban markets differently. Table 9 compares these two data sets to show that, proportionately, the 45 plus age group decreased more and the 25 to 44 age group increased more in the city than in the region between 1966 and 1986. Although all age groups in the region increased in absolute numbers, only the 25 to 44 age group increased numerically—by about 44,000—in the city. The 15 to 24 age group decreased by about 11,000 and the group 45 and older decreased by about 4000 people.<sup>13</sup>

Table 9:—Age Group Sizes in Percentages — 1971 to 1986  
Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area and City of Vancouver

	1971	1976	1981	1986	Percent Change
CMA:15 — 24	23.5	23.4	21.8	18.9	-4.6
25 — 44	35.0	36.3	38.7	41.7	+6.7
45 plus	41.5	40.4	39.5	39.4	-2.1
City: 15 — 24	22.7	21.9	20.3	18.0	-4.7
25 — 44	31.3	32.9	36.3	40.7	+9.4
45 plus	46.0	45.2	43.3	41.3	-4.7

Source for CMA statistics: David Baxter, *Population and Housing in Vancouver*, 1989. Source for city statistics: City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Vancouver Local Areas 1976, 1981 and 1986*.

<sup>12</sup>Baxter, 79.

<sup>13</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Vancouver Local Areas 1976, 1981 and 1986*.

An analysis by local areas shows that two-thirds of the 25 to 44 age group are clustered in higher density multi-family areas. The only single-family areas showing this group as a higher than average proportion were Hastings-Sunrise and West Point Grey, on the eastern and western boundaries of the city respectively.<sup>14</sup> Although some aging baby boomers can afford large new homes and younger baby boomers may prefer apartment living, the clustering in multi-family areas suggests that many urban baby boomers are not active in the city's single-family market.

Before Baxter published his report, Royal LePage research suggested that older buyers and those who already had bought more than two homes would continue to fuel demand for luxury homes, particularly in the suburbs. The firm also believed that the decline of first-time buyers was a function of the market, citing as evidence that first-time buyers made up only 30 percent of the Greater Vancouver market in 1988, the lowest level in the country.

The market now is driven from the top down, where people at the top of the market with huge equities are selling and moving outward . . . If you go out to White Rock or Surrey, you'll see they are building 3000-square-foot homes for people who used to live on the west side.<sup>15</sup>

The firm stressed the need for smaller, more affordable urban housing units. "The 'not-in-my-backyard' mentality has to change," said one executive. "Government agencies and consumers are going to have to learn to accept smaller, more affordable homes situated in their neighbourhoods."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Local area figures are tabulated in Appendix D.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Constantineau, "First-time buyers head for valley," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Jan. 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce Constantineau, "Asian real-estate force expected to remain," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 Nov. 1989.

The heaviest demand was on areas most people could still afford. Cities as far away as Kelowna and Prince George lured buyers selling Vancouver homes for profit and a more relaxed lifestyle. Closer to home, White Rock offered young families a chance to buy a larger home and pay down their mortgage. "I think it will be a better place to raise the children," said one buyer. "There's more space and . . . more sunshine."<sup>17</sup> One retired eastside resident advised westside residents that the only solution was to move away.

The pace of destruction has not missed a beat in spite of minor design changes imposed on the city as a sop to complainers . . . I would advise our west side residents who tremble at the approaching bulldozers to do what so many of my east side neighbours have done. Take the money and run. No one is going to protect you.<sup>18</sup>

Builders and designers noted that their own friends were moving to the suburbs. One designer described a retired multi-lingual European couple who reluctantly moved to White Rock because they could not talk to neighbours who were now Chinese. Said a westside designer planning to leave, "Let's face it, who wants their child to be the only Caucasian in the schoolyard?"

The dispersal of Vancouver residents was precipitated not only by the economic advantage of the suburbs but by the example of friends and neighbours and the inability of the city to grapple with the cultural component of neighbourhood change. Although Baxter was correct in his analysis of the demand for single and multi-family ground-oriented housing, his aggregate

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<sup>17</sup>Dawn Hanna, "Kelowna, housing hotspot," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 Mar. 1990; Suzy Hamilton, "Blame it on the MARPies [Middle Aged Rural Professionals]: housing crunch hits the Kootenays," *British Columbia Report*, 19 Feb. 1990, 13; Marilyn Storey, "Surrey couple bursts with ecstasy over new Prince George lifestyle," *Vancouver Sun*, 17 Oct. 1991; Donna Anderson, "Cashing in on White Rock," *Vancouver Sun*, 23 Mar. 1990.

<sup>18</sup>"Letter", *Vancouver Courier*, 30 Nov. 1988.

figures do not show that demand by young and aging baby boomers for large single-family homes will be felt more acutely in the suburbs and other cities.

In a second Laurier study, economist Gregory Schwann analyzed mobility. He showed that the proportion of non-movers and those moving within the CMA had increased between the census years 1971 and 1986. Migrants were a declining force in the market, and the "churning" of the market was increasingly due to local buyers. But again, as Table 10 shows, there are differences between Schwann's aggregate figures and those for the city itself.

Table 10:—Mobility in Vancouver's Census Metropolitan Area and the City  
Percentage of Individuals in Each Mobility Status — 1971 to 1976

	Within CMA	From B.C.	From Canada	Inter- Nat'l	Non- Movers
Vancouver CMA	36.0	4.1	7.2	7.0	45.7
Vancouver City	31.1	3.2	6.2	9.8	47.7

Source for CMA: Schwann, *When Did You Move to Vancouver?* Source for City: Vancouver Planning Department, *Vancouver Local Areas 1976*.

Table 10 coincides with the rapid spread of the Special during the 1970s. City figures shows less movement into the city from the CMA, from the province and from other provinces for the five-year period ending in 1976. During the same period, proportionately more international migrants came to the city than to the CMA as a whole, and fewer city residents moved from their homes. Although Schwann could not incorporate figures for the five-year period ending in 1991, other data suggests that a similar mobility pattern may accompany the spread of the Monster House.

Schwann himself notes that net migration to the region "is disproportionately felt in the new home market",<sup>19</sup> and that ownership increased among non-movers and immigrants and decreased among other migrants between 1971 and 1986. Demand would be for large single-family homes and smaller multi-family units, and affluent migrants of all groups would buy the new large homes. "Because immigrants have not had incomes substantially higher than existing residents," he said in a *Vancouver Sun* interview, "they are not out there buying these massive homes."<sup>20</sup> A realtor interviewed in the elite suburb of West Vancouver considered Schwann "naive" in not recognizing the global forces at play in the market.

The Chinese want the British Properties because it reminds them of the Peak in Hong Kong. Iranian developers are responsible for the knock-downs in Ambleside and Dunderave . . . The new players are the Japanese. They buy summer homes, and so the houses are vacant much of the year. . .

I have very mixed feelings about my job . . . The land is being sold out from under the Canadians. Where do our children go? . . . The Laurier Institute is naive if it is using 1986 figures. The market has changed to a global market.

## **The Buyers of Monster Houses**

Baxter and Schwann describe a regional market responding to predictable demographic changes. The housing industry, in contrast, saw local markets changed by global events. To get a better sense of local buying patterns through the region, the eleven top salesmen (by number of units sold) for discrete areas in the region were interviewed by telephone in the

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<sup>19</sup>Schwann, 44.

<sup>20</sup>"Lower Mainlanders buy most Vancouver housing," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 Dec. 1989.

spring of 1990. Realtors distinguished between "Caucasian" and "Asian" buyers, but their remarks suggested that second-generation non-Caucasians had similar preferences to Caucasian buyers and that Asian buyers were usually Chinese. The interviews showed that buying patterns change relative to distance from city centre, with Asian activity highest near city centre and Caucasian activity increasing with distance from city centre.

According to east and westside realtors, the Chinese bought roughly 90 percent of new eastside houses, 50 percent of used eastside houses, and 80 percent of new westside houses. Caucasians predominated in the used westside market except where builders bought older houses for demolition. The renovation market was the reverse of the new home market with 80 percent of westside buyers intent on renovation being Caucasian. According to realtors active in suburban municipalities, the Chinese bought 80 and 90 percent of new homes in the adjacent suburbs of Burnaby and Richmond, while Caucasians bought most of the used houses in these areas. Caucasians also bought most of the new and used homes in the adjacent suburbs north of the city and in the outer suburban municipalities. These observations suggest that an outward dispersal of local residents accompanies Asian demand for large new city homes. The only significant exception to this pattern was a localized area south of the city in Surrey, where East Indians bought 80 percent of the new and 30 to 40 percent of the used single-family homes.

Several suburban realtors remarked that new housing follows traditional styles where Canadian-born buyers are active. And the westside realtor noted that Canadian-born buyers of all ethnic groups who can afford new large houses prefer quality used housing in traditional styles on the city's west



side.<sup>21</sup> The purchase of used housing by the Canadian-born, therefore, relates only partly to cost. Traditional styles more readily available in the used market are also a factor in housing choice among the Canadian-born.

Media reports confirm patterns described by realtors. In Richmond, a suburb just south of the city undergoing rapid ethnic change, one in 12 residents was of Chinese origin in 1986. In 1991, the city estimated one in five residents to be of Chinese origin, and within 10 years one in three will belong to a visible minority group. A Chinese developer noted that almost every home in developments in which he was involved was sold to Chinese buyers. "Chinese people like to move in among friends. . . . Richmond has become a very attractive city to the Chinese people from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines." As new people move in, said a Richmond planner, empty nesters and those near retirement are buying farther out. The possibility of providing alternatives in their own neighbourhoods is remote. People living in single-family areas, said the planner, do not want change.<sup>22</sup>

Data derived from the survey of new houses built in Vancouver after the 1986 and 1988 zoning changes confirmed the realtors' view of the new home market. Each address was matched to the owner's name on the assessment rolls to determine the ethnicity of buyers. There was considerable data loss because some addresses had changed, construction companies or numbered companies still owned some homes, and the ethnicity of names such as Lee and Stern was unclear. Eight percent of the 1986 sample addresses and 16 percent of the 1988 sample addresses could not be matched to owners'

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<sup>21</sup>This market splits evenly between Caucasian and Chinese buyers.

<sup>22</sup>Jes Odam, "Immigrants give Richmond an Oriental flavor", *Vancouver Sun*, 5 Dec 1991.

names, leaving 70 homes in the 1986 sample and 64 homes in the 1988 sample for which the ethnicity of the owner had been established. Four useful groupings emerged—Chinese, European, East Indian and British. Table 11 shows that Chinese owners made up the largest group in both samples. Furthermore, the proportion of Chinese owners increased between 1986 and 1988 while the proportion of European and East Indian owners decreased and that of British owners remained stable. Three percent of the 1986 sample were absentee owners, rising to 25 percent in 1988.

Table 11:—Percentage of New Home Buyers by Ethnic Origin  
Homes Surveyed after the 1986 and 1988 Zoning Changes

	Chinese	European	East Indian	British	Total
1986 (n=70)	67	16	11	6	100
1988 (n=64)	82	7	4	7	100

Source: B. C. Assessment Authority, June 1990.

Because of sample sizes, the data on housing preferences are not reliable. The British seemed to prefer the few traditional or post-modern styles on the west side and East Indians bought eastside Vancouver Specials almost exclusively. Chinese and Europeans were more eclectic in their choice of location and style and, within the sample, the most authentic traditional styles and the most contextual houses had Chinese and European owners. The data also suggest that East Indians and Chinese were more likely to buy houses with suites than were British or Europeans. In the 1988 sample, purchase of houses with suites declined among Chinese owners and increased among the few British owners. This shift suggests that Chinese buyers had less need for suites and that British buyers needed rental income to buy on the west side.

To find out more about these owners, Millie Chu, a graduate student in the University of British Columbia's planning school, conducted a telephone survey. Of the 134 owners represented in Table 11, 82 owners' names could be matched to telephone numbers.<sup>23</sup> A letter outlining the purpose of the survey preceded the interview, and the interview itself was limited in length because of legitimate concerns over language difficulties. All interviews began in English, and 20 percent were completed in Chinese. The interviews showed that determining ethnicity by owners' name was reliable.

Thirty-one owners from the 1986 sample and 24 owners from the 1988 sample responded for a total of 55 respondents. All but four had been born outside Canada. Over two-thirds of the 1986 sample had been in Canada over 10 years, and many had been residents for more than 20 years. In contrast, almost two-thirds of the 1988 sample had been here 10 years or less and most had been here less than 5 years. Across both samples, most British owners were born in Canada, and all Europeans and most East Indians were established immigrants. Two-thirds of Chinese owners were new arrivals.

Chu asked whether buyers found the appearance of the houses attractive. They were not asked to judge their own house, but to judge new houses in general. Nevertheless, photographs of respondents' houses showed that most respondents lived in either a Special or a Monster House. Because of the small size of the non-Chinese sample, all that can be said is that Europeans and East Indians found the new houses more attractive than did British buyers. Among the 36 Chinese respondents, 39 percent found the new houses attrac-

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<sup>23</sup>The difficulty of matching telephone numbers to owner's names is the major cause of the small sample size. Some owners had moved, others may have had unlisted phone numbers, but a large number may have listed the telephone under the the name of an English-speaking relative. Some of these were identified by matching last name to address in the telephone directory.

tive and almost as many liked some new houses and disliked others. A sizable group, 22 percent, found the houses "ugly". Within this group, new arrivals disliked new houses more often than did established immigrants. When asked about the influence of media coverage on taste, Chu noted that many of the recent arrivals were well educated and well travelled and therefore less likely to be unduly influenced by media reports.<sup>24</sup>

Because of time constraints, the questionnaire was not pretested. After 10 interviews, questions on suites (which respondents were reluctant to answer) were replaced by questions on the buyer's occupation, previous residential location and the number of generations in the household. Responses showed higher-status occupations in the 1988 sample, and considerable variation in previous residential location, with overseas buyers coming from other parts of Asia as well as Hong Kong. Chinese households often had three generations living together and many East Indian households included relatives of the same generation. Extended families usually lived on the east side.

The profile of the 1986 buyer is the well-established immigrant, usually Chinese but often European or East Indian, who has chosen to buy or build a Special. The profile of the 1988 buyer is the newly arrived Chinese immigrant with a higher status occupation who wants to settle quickly in a more expensive home than the Special. The builders, responding to this change in buyer profile, switched from building the Special to building in the Monster House style. This switch, evident in 1986, was almost complete by 1988. The rapid shift to the Monster House style shows that builders can adapt any new

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<sup>24</sup>Architect James Cheng notes that the wave of Chinese immigrants arriving in the 1960s was less educated than the group arriving in the 1980s. The latter, often the children of prosperous Asians, are generally more travelled and have more refined tastes. Interview with author, 15 May 1990.

zoning quickly to a formula they believe will sell. Because the market consists almost entirely of buyers for whom the existing residential landscape has no meaning, builders try to offer houses that have meaning to these buyers. No matter how often the city changes its zoning, new houses will reflect the builders' attempt to capture this market.

A master's thesis by geography student Niall Majury confirms the link between Chinese buyers and the new large houses in the affluent local area of Kerrisdale. His examination of census figures for Kerrisdale for 1981 and 1986 showed little growth in its Asian population except in some southerly enumeration districts where Chinese populations ran as high as 28 percent. Field observations showed these areas had been substantially changed by Monster Houses since the 1980s with 38 percent more new homes identified than in northern Kerrisdale where the Chinese presence was low.

Using assessment roles, Majury sampled 155 properties on three of the area's most prestigious streets. People with Chinese surnames owned almost 83 percent of the 40 homes constructed after 1980 while those with surnames other than Chinese owned 79 percent of the houses built before 1980. Using the city directory, Majury also traced change in ownership on a sample block of 30 houses from 1980 to 1990. British and European owners had decreased from 22 to 13, Chinese owners had increased from two to 14, and owners from other ethnic groups had increased from two to three. Four properties were either vacant or listed as "no return". Monster Houses had replaced eight of the 30 original houses. All were owned by Asians, seven of whom were Chinese. "There would appear to be strong evidence," said Majury, "that local developers and designers are constructing these 'monster' houses with a specific market in mind" and that the houses "deliberately engage the cultural

codes and symbols of a very specific intended clientele—new middle class Canadian citizens, usually of Hong Kong and Taiwanese origin."<sup>25</sup>

Majury concluded that the Monster House is not simply an economic phenomenon but a merging of economic and cultural motivations. The large house controversy, he said, is a clash between an Anglophile elite whose numbers and economic power are weakening and a new immigrant elite who want to imprint their identity on the landscape. Because Majury's study was limited to Kerrisdale, it could not address eastside anxieties. Concern among these residents suggest that the problem involves both cultural and economic motivations but is more complex than a clash between elite groups.

Stanbury and Todd use an economic rather than cultural analysis to explain resistance to change. In a third report commissioned by the Laurier Institute, they ask why residents pressed for more restrictive zoning when less restrictive zoning would add value to their properties. The report includes a detailed examination of the 1986 and 1988 zoning changes and an analysis of immigration patterns to the Vancouver region. Although the analysis recognizes the link between immigration and the Monster House, it concludes that, given current land prices, owners who wished to redevelop their property would choose to increase house size regardless of ethnic background. To do otherwise would make no economic sense. For those not interested in redevelopment, resistance to change was neither irrational nor ethnically based. The construction of new large houses affects the utility value of adjacencies. Residents wanted more regulation because they valued the cur-

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<sup>25</sup>Niall Majury, "Identity, Place, Power and the 'Text': Kerry's Dale and the 'Monster' House," (M. A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990), 116.

rent enjoyment or utility of their property more than any future value the property might have with less restrictive zoning.

Efforts by existing homeowners to make the RS-1 regulations more restrictive is [sic] not due to irrationality (even though they reduce the market value of their property) or due to them having different tastes from those who build the new large houses . . . For those who do not plan to move or renovate for a long time . . . the market value effect of regulatory changes will not be realized for many years . . . Hence, owners will maximize the utility value of their property by having the city make the RS-1 regulations more restrictive.<sup>26</sup>

Stanbury and Todd's argument suggests that owners fall along an economic continuum from those who have no interest in moving, renovating or redeveloping to those who want to move, renovate or rebuild immediately. Letters from residents to city council and to local newspapers suggest that residents also range from the racially intolerant to those who embrace cultural diversity. Other letters suggest that residents may range along other continuums in their desire to preserve streetscapes because of heritage, environmental or affordability concerns. Only those who embrace cultural diversity and do not value the existing neighbourhood character will favour less restrictive zoning. Those who are anxious about change to the character of the neighbourhood may accept regulations that preserve this character even if they want to renovate or redevelop their property. These various motivations for resistance help to explain why complaints about size and use were more complex than either Majury or Stanbury and Todd suggest.

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<sup>26</sup>Stanbury and Todd, iii.

## Stabilizing the Suburban Pattern — The 1990 Amendments

In 1990, the city tried to deal with the link between culture and design for the first time. This intent was expressed by one alderman who hoped that the 1990 amendments would "bring to a halt what I consider the underlying racism . . . the blaming of the problem on people who happen to look like Asians".<sup>27</sup> At the time, council was besieged by other housing-related problems elsewhere in the city, and these amendments were, as another alderman noted, a "panic reaction" to complaints from westside residents rather than a careful response that furthered gains made in 1988. Part of the reason for panic, said the alderman, was the unsettled status of the planning department. After the 1988 changes, the city had hired a new planning director and planners responsible for the 1988 changes had moved on to other assignments. Although the 1988 approach had given the city a process that had proven satisfactory, council chose to return to an arbitrary approach to amend the by-law in 1990. "Arbitrary zoning created by politicians", said the alderman, "is what happens when crisis meets planning."<sup>28</sup>

Planners proposed two amendment packages, each of which shaped residential form differently. One package returned maximum height to 35 feet while the other retained a maximum height of 30 feet.<sup>29</sup> Assuming a basement high enough out of the ground for some light penetration, a maximum height of 35 feet enables, although barely, the construction of a two-and-a-half storey dwelling while a 30-foot height maximum does not. Even

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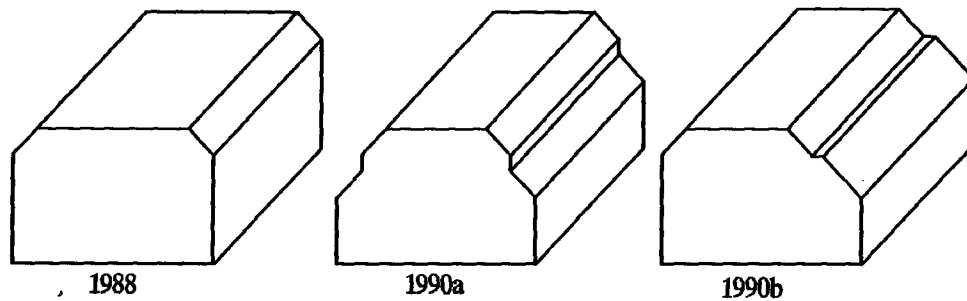
<sup>27</sup>Elizabeth Godley, "Council approves new restrictions on big houses," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 Jan. 1990.

<sup>28</sup>Alderman Carole Taylor, interview by author, 5 June 1990.

<sup>29</sup>The options are summarized in "Notice of Public Hearing," Appendix A.



with the articulation of form required by the 1990 amendments, a two-and-a-half storey dwelling covers less of the lot than a two-storey dwelling of the same size. The 35-foot height would have freed more open space and fostered the retention of neighbourhood character in areas comprised of older homes with steeply pitched roofs.<sup>30</sup> Comments by aldermen during the public hearing suggested that council did not recognize the different implications for urban form in the two options, and the amendments passed in April 1990 essentially adopted the proposals put forward in the 30-foot package.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 25.** The 1990 building envelopes on larger lots compared to the 1988 envelope (left). The second-storey setbacks (1990a and 1990b) can occur on one or both sides of the house.

- A change to the sliding scale formula further reduced above-grade space on larger lots. Owners of lots 60 feet and wider could use the 1988 sliding scale to gain more space if the Director of Planning approved siting, design and landscaping.
- A second sliding scale was introduced to create wider side yards on wider lots.
- For lots more than 40 feet wide, a deeper sideyard setback at the second storey modulated house form, as shown in Figure 25.

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<sup>30</sup>Although the by-law allows for height relaxations to 35 feet, speculative builders generally build to the regulations.

<sup>31</sup>*City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law #3575, Amendments to the RS-1 District Schedule, April 1990.*

- Interior spaces over 12 feet in height were counted as two floors in calculating floor space ratio.
- Porches were encouraged by increasing permitted projections into front yards.

Among concerns expressed by residents and architects were the awkward use of brick on front facades, its use as a single cladding material to produce houses clad entirely in brick (Photo 18), and the use of too many cladding materials in other homes. Other than imposing a second-storey setback and allowing discretion in the use of the 1988 sliding scale on wide lots, the city's only direct foray into design control was an ill-conceived proposal to limit cladding materials and to restrict the use of masonry to foundations. The proposal prohibited contextual design in areas characterized by Tudor-Revival homes and denied new designs which may have equalled these "half-timber" homes so admired by Bartholomew. This attempt at design control was strongly criticized at the public hearing and defeated by council.



**Photo 18.** This westside brick house does not fit the neighbourhood context of ranch-style houses but dispels the criticism that Vancouver builders do not understand how to build in brick.

Council also made technical changes to encourage renovation and set up a Housing Renovation Centre to help owners move through the zoning process

more easily. A planning department comparison of renovation activity for three six-month periods after each zoning change, shown in Table 12, suggests on the surface that the attempt to shift the bias away from new construction may have been successful.

Table 12:— Renovation Activity in Vancouver — 1987, 1989 and 1990

	Jan. to June 1987	Jan. to June 1989	May to Oct. 1990
New Construction Starts	594	944	309
Renovation and Addition	287	228	513
Total Construction Activity	881	1172	822

Source: Vancouver Planning Department RS-1 and RS-1S Statistics, 1990.

But whether the large increase in renovations in 1990 is due to homeowner confidence in the zoning changes, other market forces or simply a tendency to renovate in the summer (the period captured in 1990) remains unclear. What is clear is that, in the two time periods that can be compared (January to June 1987 and 1989), the 1988 zoning amendments further discouraged renovation and addition to existing dwellings.

As part of the 1990 changes, council also set up an RS-1/RS-1S Advisory Committee to review single-family zoning on a regular basis. The committee initially consisted of two architects, two landscape architects, a member from the Greater Vancouver Homebuilders Association (who represent only 10 percent of builders in the region), a local designer and the director of the Urban Design Institute plus up to five city staff.<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>32</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "RS-1/RS-1S Advisory Committee Status", 20 Sept. 1990.

subsequent addition of a local builder and local realtor has made the committee more representative of the local market. Nevertheless, according to one member interviewed, meetings have been infrequent and it is questionable how much influence the committee has on planning staff.<sup>33</sup>

Before the 1990 amendments, council had initiated a program to review the zoning for the South Shaughnessy-Granville area to preserve its residential character. After the amendments were passed, council persuaded the province to change the Vancouver Charter so that the city could pass a by-law to protect mature trees on private property during demolition and construction.<sup>34</sup> Along with zoning changes facilitating renovation, these initiatives were a powerful message that the city now valued its existing residential neighbourhoods and the cultural traditions they embodied.

For one resident who feared his neighbourhood would change before the city completed its South Shaughnessy-Granville rezoning, the city's actions were not enough.<sup>35</sup> At his own cost, he hired two architects to poll his area of 182 homes for approval in principle to change the zoning and draw up a new schedule for the area.<sup>36</sup> The architects proposed regulations designed to preserve neighbourhood character, but also eliminated uses such as family suites and special-needs facilities that benefit the larger community. After the planning department reinstated these uses and reduced above-grade

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<sup>33</sup>Committee member Brian Thorn, telephone conversation with author, 8 July 1992.

<sup>34</sup>*City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law #3575*, April, 1991.

<sup>35</sup>See Jeff Lee, "One man wields unique sword at 'monster' houses," *Vancouver Sun*, 25 May 1990.

<sup>36</sup>The area is centrally located within South Shaughnessy-Granville.

floor space to deflect new development to other areas, council voted to rezone to RS-3.<sup>37</sup> Council members on both the left and right of the political centre felt they had to support the application because they had repeatedly stated their belief in the right of neighbourhoods to self-determination. This intent is made clear in a letter from the mayor to an eastside resident.

You may rest assured that I have not ever been in favour of . . . "densification". I have consistently . . . said that residents should determine the character of the neighbourhood.

When it was clear that our Zoning and Development By-Law was not responding appropriately to the changes that have taken place over the last three years, and when it was clear that the former . . . council had no interest in maintaining the quality of life in our neighbourhoods, I said that our Council, if elected, would pursue a policy of neighbourhood protection.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this concern for self-determination, the process had included no input from residents other than approval in principle and made a mockery of planning in the public interest. The message sent by the city was that planning was not intended to be fair. The city did not intend to distribute costs and benefits equitably, but preferred to support initiatives by wealthy neighbourhoods at the expense of neighbourhoods that would bear the brunt of deflected development. This concern about the "privatization of planning" to the detriment of other neighbourhoods was expressed not only by the planner involved<sup>39</sup> but also by several aldermen who supported the rezoning.

This is a historically significant rezoning process. The desire of the residents is to put the neighbourhood in formaldehyde. I do object . . . that by putting a freeze on the physical change to the neighbourhood, the neighbourhood will not

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<sup>37</sup>*City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law #3575, RS-3 District Schedule, July, 1990.*

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Mayor Gordon Campbell, 10 May 1988.

<sup>39</sup>Planner David Thomsett, interview by author, 20 May 1990.

have to deal with some of the consequences that occur. That is an unfair thing for them to ask of the city.<sup>40</sup>

We have to ensure that planning is not just done for some at the expense of others. What happened [with RS-3] is the privatization of planning . . . It is important to note that this neighbourhood had the legal right to do what they did. We are not discussing the legality but the ethics of encouraging the privatization of planning.<sup>41</sup>

Because of the localized nature of the market, the construction of one Special or Monster House often creates a domino-effect on the street. The resident who initiated the RS-3 zoning recognized that a planning review could not respond quickly enough to prevent unwanted neighbourhood change. "Our neighbourhood feels it can no longer fiddle," he said, "because Rome is burning."<sup>42</sup> He believed that he was breaking ground for other neighbourhoods, and in all fairness, his initiative showed that any neighbourhood, given adequate financial resources, could draw up a plan responsive to local needs quickly and inexpensively.

Planners had already developed a process for such initiatives in rezoning First Shaughnessy in 1982.<sup>43</sup> In this instance, residents feared that developers would demolish the large homes in this affluent area (many of which were architectural or historical treasures) and subdivide the lots for new development. Shaughnessy hired an architect to prepare a plan to preserve the character of their neighbourhood but, dissatisfied with the result,

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<sup>40</sup>Alderman Gordon Price in Jeff Lee, "Rezoning idea has a permanent air", *Vancouver Sun*, 16 May 1990.

<sup>41</sup>Alderman Libby Davies, interview by author, 12 June 1990.

<sup>42</sup>Alison Appelbe, "City supports monster moratorium for small area of South Shaughnessy", *Vancouver Courier*, 10 April 1990.

<sup>43</sup>*City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Law #3575*, First Shaughnessy Official Development Plan.

prepared a second plan. The residents presented the city with both alternatives and, working with planners and architects, devised a plan similar to the one the residents had prepared. Shaughnessy residents recognized that they had to provide variety in unit size and tenure to keep their large old homes. In essence, they accepted a potential increase in population density (which has yet to occur) to preserve residential character. Infill dwellings and conversion of existing homes to multiple units are the mechanisms to increase density, and a design panel made up of residents, design professionals and planners ensures that any renovation or new construction follows the design guidelines accompanying the plan. As in the RS-3 zone, Shaughnessy residents initiated the plan in their own self-interest. But unlike RS-3, they recognized that they had to **negate** single-family use to keep what they valued in their neighbourhood. The Shaughnessy process, although too costly in tax dollars to merit general application, seems a better model for preserving neighbourhoods than the RS-3 zoning that council approved.

The 1990 zoning changes and the approval of RS-3 zoning coincided with the end of the real estate boom, and the slowdown in new construction makes it difficult to evaluate their results. The planner responsible for single-family zoning noted that "builders are catering to a more homogeneous taste pool, and east-and west-side homes are now looking more similar in terms of esthetics".<sup>44</sup> There is some consensus that the amendments improved the general level of design. Builders found houses built after 1990 more attrac-

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<sup>44</sup>Pamela Fayerman, "Monster mash: 'wedding cake' design replacing huge boxes in many neighbourhoods", *Vancouver Sun*, 15 Feb. 1991.

tive although more expensive,<sup>45</sup> and field observations showed more examples of restraint in design by the end of the decade.

Several designers were interviewed on the cumulative effects of the zoning changes since 1986. One designer credited the city for destroying the Vancouver Special, but felt that the zoning changes were otherwise severely flawed. His major concerns were the wasteful use of land and the safety of suites now set well below grade. "It's a crime to allow basements but not allow full basements raised enough above grade to be safe and livable," he said. "The new suites are fire traps . . . the windows are too small and sills too narrow for easy escape." He also argued for attic space. Roofs were now approaching 30 feet, and five feet more would make little difference but would provide more space for current and future needs. Because the new houses were inadequate in size and built to minimum building code requirements, he argued, "houses built today will not last more than 30 years."<sup>46</sup>

Other designers expressed concern about technical adjustments to the schedule. One argued that the formulas made sense mathematically but had little connection to the real world. The 1990 sliding scale had been tailored to fit the envelope almost exactly, and the side yard computation penalized 50-foot lots without giving lots 66 feet or more the wider side yards they need for good building proportions. "They are 'magic numbers' imposed on design rather than formulas that derive from real-life situations."<sup>47</sup>

The consultants hired for the 1988 changes faulted the arbitrary method chosen in 1990. They all concluded the 1988 process had been a positive

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<sup>45</sup>Fayerman.

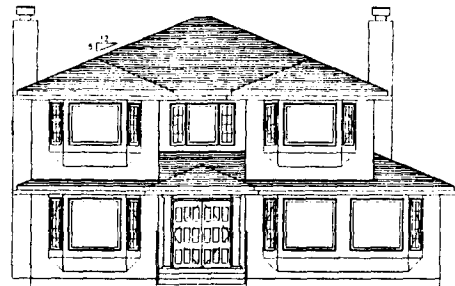
<sup>46</sup>Designer Reg Povey, interview by author, 1 May 1990.

<sup>47</sup>Intarsia Designs, interview by author, 8 May 1990.



experience, but criticized the city on two counts. Most felt that the 1988 schedule could have been improved had they been given an opportunity to critique it before it went to public hearing. And most felt that a continuation of the 1988 process in 1990 would have served the public better because a working group had been established that understood the issues.

Several of the consultants, along with other architects and designers, predicted that "structural nightmares" would occur, and they did. Houses built after 1990 included tiered "wedding-cake" designs and second-storey walls placed over large first-storey windows.



**Figure 26.** The effects of the second-storey setback, predicted by Intarsia, May 1990.

"What some people will want to do now," said one designer, "is keep the box but thrust out the living room to one side at the front, thus retaining the width across the front of the house and the flatness of the front facade."<sup>48</sup> This prediction, shown in Figure 26, is borne out in photographs supporting an evaluation of the zoning changes prepared by the city in 1992.<sup>49</sup> While this document shows that some excellent designs have resulted from the forced second-storey articulation, the logic of structure has been compromised to regulatory whim. The problem here, as with the sewer problem, is that city staff do not understand the fundamentals of good building practice.

The city's evaluation noted that both complaints and negative media coverage decreased after the 1990 amendments, and concluded that the zoning

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<sup>48</sup>See "1990 Monster House", Appendix B for plans that correspond to Figure 29. Intarsia's predictions were confirmed by field observations.

<sup>49</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Evaluation of Revisions to the RS-1/RS-1S Districts Schedule," 18 Mar. 1992.

changes, along with higher house prices and greater public awareness, had reduced resident concern and increased interest in renovation. The report acknowledged that this conclusion was not shared by design, development and real estate representatives on the RS-1/RS-1S Housing Advisory Committee. These representatives expressed concern about "sterility of design", the continuing need for pumping systems for sewage, and the costs incurred by the second-storey setback and by the general complexity of the by-law.

As property values continue to escalate . . . it is apparent that no individual purchasing high-priced land is satisfied with building anything less than the maximum floor space ratio. With current zoning regulations, in most instances this objective can only be fulfilled through the provision of aesthetically unpleasant structures.<sup>50</sup>

It can also be argued that the Gulf War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union deflected media attention from local issues and the falling market alleviated residents concerns. Because of capital losses resulting from unrest in mainland China, Hong Kong interest flagged, and by the end of 1989, sales to offshore buyers had dropped from 30 to 10 percent as buyers sought lower prices elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> Improvements in the general level of design could be a more perceptive response by builders to the tastes of a more affluent market or simply a more cautious response to a flat market.

### **The Style of the Monster House**

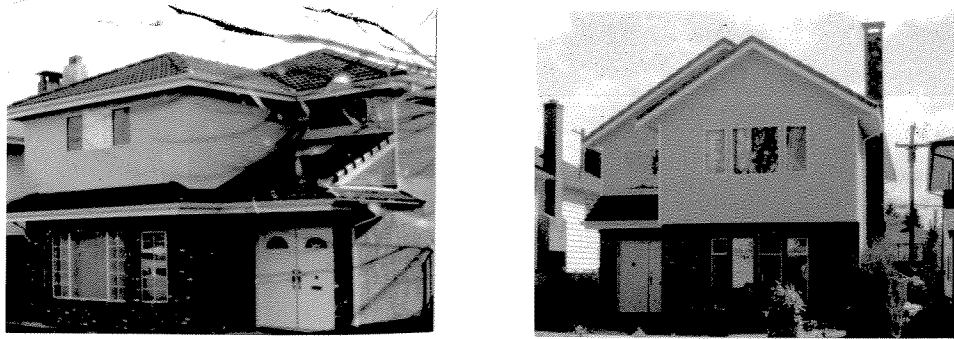
The 1980s produced three variants of the large house. The earliest variant, shown on the left in Photo 19, uses the materials and details of the

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<sup>50</sup>Letter to the Planning Department from RS-1/RS-1S Advisory Member Brian Thorn of Select Home Designs, 19 Dec. 1991.

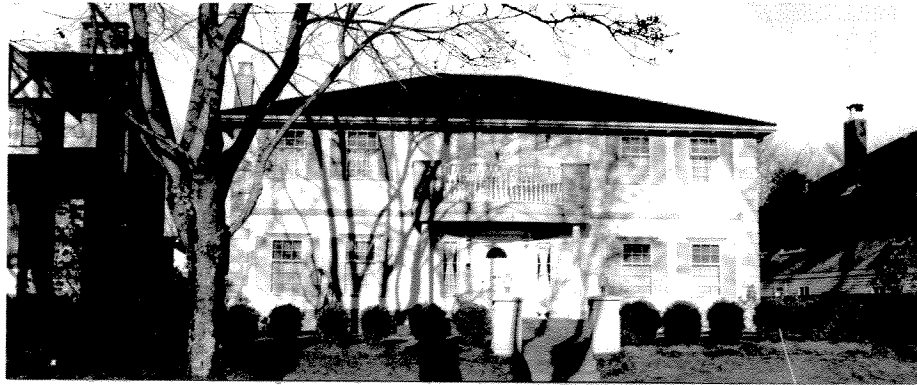
<sup>51</sup>Bruce Constantineau, "High city house prices reduce Asian interest," *Vancouver Sun*, 7 Dec. 1989.

Special, and results from builders transferring their perceptions of market tastes from the east side. The second variant, shown on the right, is a hybrid that mixes details of the Special with those of older westside homes. Incorporated into the design may be a fan-shaped window over the front door, low gables in the roof, porches with wrought iron railings and, with the arrival of the Taiwanese, a large, two-storey entry. Peculiar details often occur, with one of the more notable attempts at ostentation being a beige marble facade that looks like plywood sheathing from a distance.



**Photo 19.** A westside Monster House (left) that derives from a Vancouver Special and a hybrid (right) that draws inspiration from Specials and from traditional westside homes.

A third variant, shown in Photo 20 (top), brings design elements together coherently or reproduces a traditional style. Details are appropriate to materials and the design exhibits proportional relationships that are as graceful as height restrictions allow. The design often shows a contextuality absent in other variants. Such houses occurred more often in the 1986 sample and were generally found on the west side. The dearth of quality design in the 1988 sample suggests that restrictive zoning may eliminate houses of high quality at the same time that it raises the general level of design.



**Photo 20.** Above, the height restriction at the eave destroys the proportions of this large, new westside home built in a traditional style to fit the context of the neighbourhood. The new house, however, lacks the lush vegetation that frames an older westside house, below.

Site observations suggest that the most powerful contextual tools are colour and landscaping. The contrast between the landscaping in the houses in Photo 20 shows that the loss of mature landscape elements breaks the pattern of lush growth characteristic of many westside homes. On the east side, where landscape elements are smaller, retaining the few large trees that exist reduces the impact of the new homes. Photographs of surveyed houses showed that the loss of trees was a serious problem. Between 1986 and 1988, the proportion of houses with mature front yard trees dropped from 17 to 11

percent on the west side and from 5 to 1 percent on the east side.<sup>52</sup> Despite the tree by-law, which requires the replacement of mature trees destroyed on the site during development, observations suggest that the new residential landscape will be profoundly different because the new trees planted are varieties that are smaller at maturity than those they replaced.

The ability of colour to soften the impact of large new homes is equally striking. On streets where smaller houses are grey or white stucco with duroid roofs in muted tones, a large house clad with grey or white vinyl siding and a cedar shake roof appears less imposing than a Special with a red tile roof or a pastel pink Monster House. But because the purpose of vinyl siding is to reduce maintenance, it is unlikely that owners will paint the siding to diminish design flaws, reduce apparent house size or relate to neighbourhood context through the use of colour.

During the research period, various people made references to the taste of Asian immigrants. Many noted that the Chinese prefer houses as wide and as large as possible to advertise their wealth and impress their friends, and that they prefer new houses not only to avoid unnecessary maintenance but also to preclude purchase of a house in which a death may have occurred.<sup>53</sup> Some suggest that *feng shui*, a set of principles for building in harmony with nature, has had considerable influence on the style of the Monster House. It is probable that a misunderstanding of these principles by purchasers and their misapplication by builders have been responsible for some of the more unfortunate designs. But it is also important to note that no one interviewed

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<sup>52</sup>In both samples, the number of eastside houses was roughly equal to the number of westside houses.

<sup>53</sup>For example, Cannon, 177.

mentioned *feng shui*, and the research found no evidence that the proper application of these principles can adversely affect design.

In general, comments by local residents of Chinese origin support observations made by non-Chinese critics of the Monster House. In the first of the two quotes that follow, a Chinese resident who returned to Hong Kong acknowledges that immigrants from the colony have influenced the style of the new large houses. In the second quote, a local Chinese architect concurs with his assessment.

They go to Canada but they do not want to live like Canadians . . . You can't blame them for wanting to live in big houses after living in small spaces here, but they [the nouveau riche] have no taste—the houses are ugly.<sup>54</sup>

Asians from Hong Kong are a special breed. They are not used to the space for building that we have here, and space becomes a toy to play with. Their culture is warped—it is focussed on making money. They have no appreciation of other things: nature, green space. I have friends who are new immigrants. Some take a while to get sensitized to our way of life, and others are immediately sensitized and learn quickly to appreciate trees, residential landscapes and greenery.<sup>55</sup>

For the most part, however, the foibles of taste and design attributed to the Chinese can be attributed to any ethnic group. Cannon contends that the ostentatious display of wealth is not peculiar to the immigrant Chinese but part of a value system shared by Canadian young urban professionals, and other writers have described the conspicuous consumption of other eras.<sup>56</sup> According to one designer with ties by marriage to the Chinese community,

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<sup>54</sup>Gillian Shaw, "Investment anger confuses Hong Kong", *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Mar. 1989.

<sup>55</sup>James Cheng, interview by author, 15 May 1990.

<sup>56</sup>Cannon, 174. See also Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Modern Library, 1934); Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* (Montreal: Cardinal, 1961).

the brick facade found on many Specials and Monster Houses defers to the Asian desire for status and permanence.<sup>57</sup> He acknowledges that other cultures also use masonry to portray status and permanence, but adds that it was seldom used as a primary design element in Vancouver until the advent of the Special. The designer attributed the awkward use of masonry to a lack of professionalism within the industry and to the tendency of less skilled builders to copy details they believed would sell. Buyers, for their part, accepted these houses because they believed they were the latest style.

According to this designer, a key to understanding the style of the Special and the Monster House is the attitude toward family. The research has already noted the importance placed on the extended family by immigrants from India, and has referred to Goldberg's description of the emphasis on family in the Chinese culture.<sup>58</sup> The designer suggests that this emphasis on family life leads to a strong interest in the interior of the dwelling and a relative indifference to facade. This indifference to facade, mentioned by other designers as well, has much to do with survival in a world that Asians have historically perceived as unfriendly.

In Asian cultures . . . when you get old, you die on the street unless the family is there. . . The family pitches in for those unable to get jobs so that no one in the family goes homeless . . . In Western cultures, the thrust is more outward, more individualistic. That is why more emphasis is placed on facade—and why there are more homeless people. Welfare states . . . have made the family less important to survival.<sup>59</sup>

The designer argued that, because Asian immigrants are disinterested in the exterior of the dwelling and have no attachment to the city's heritage,

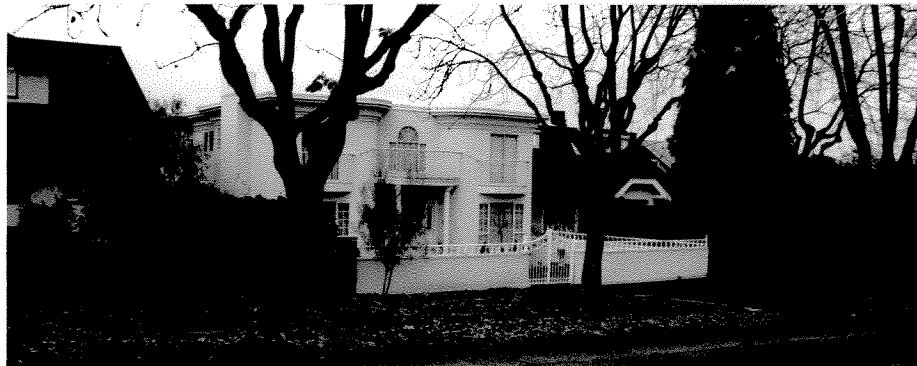
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<sup>57</sup>Chu, *Asian Mind Game*, 248.

<sup>58</sup>Goldberg, *The Chinese Connection*, 23–27.

<sup>59</sup>Designer David Witso, interview by author, 14 June 1990.

builders have no incentive to use styles that evoke this heritage. These buyers focus their concern on work, on family, and on "getting ahead". In response, builders use materials not available in the past to reduce purchase and maintenance costs. The desire for low maintenance and the emphasis on the interior, concluded the designer, drives the aesthetic of the large house and the minimal landscaping around it. That some owners have little interest in or understanding of facades is evident in custom plans where attention to interior space contrasts with lack of attention to facade. Moreover, designers have commented that some clients may ask for a Georgian house but demand details that are inappropriate. Designers try to explain the principles of the style, but finally must give the clients what they want.



**Photó 21.** Top, a westside house celebrates the Greek origin of its owners but its style and definition of territory are out of context with its surrounds. Bottom, another westside house does not impose on adjacencies and adds to the quality of the neighbourhood.



Although architects have suggested that public education would improve design, Photo 21 suggests that education would have minimal impact on designers, builders and clients who care little about design or context and would be of no benefit to those who do. Educating immigrants who buy on arrival is somewhat difficult, and the task would seem no easier with those who commission custom homes. "Suggesting that clients be educated to our tastes is pointless", said one designer. "We have tried."<sup>60</sup> Where immigrants have a sensitivity to form and context, zoning can work against them. Designers point out that, in these cases, restrictions can destroy the proportions of the spacious homes their clients can afford, resulting in a solution that offends both designer and client. This observation is confirmed by experience in the zoning department in 1986 and 1987 where immigrant owners and designers brought in contextual designs for approval. In several instances, regulations prohibited projections through the envelope that gave the designs their contextuality.

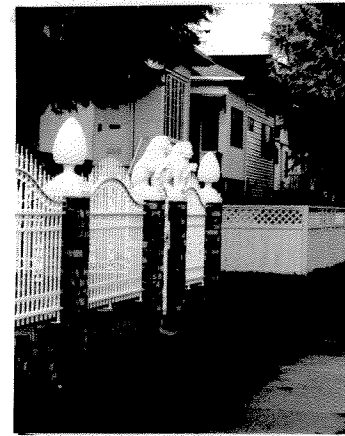
The quality of finishing materials used inside the dwelling confirms the emphasis on interior space. But with some exceptions in custom-built homes, interiors were finished no differently in terms of taste than suburban houses built to appeal to the Caucasian market. This observation suggests that the coding used by speculative builders does not extend to the interior. Exterior improvements to the dwelling by owners also suggest a desire to announce cultural identity, but these improvements, usually non-permanent additions to the site, can be changed by subsequent owners. Front yard fencing in particular, which changes the streetscape considerably, can be highly distinctive. New eastside houses tend to have elaborate brick and wrought iron

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<sup>60</sup>Intarsia Design, interview by author, 8 May 1990.

fencing while older homes, if fenced at all, have plain fencing softened by plantings or chosen for its ability to weather. On the west side,<sup>61</sup> new houses may have substantial brick or stucco fencing or, like older homes, define territory with shrubs or nothing at all. The differences in improvements made by owners, shown in Photos 19, 20, 21 and 22, suggests variation in taste both by ethnic group and by the economic status of the homeowner, with the tastes of affluent homeowners more closely aligned to those of local residents.

There is no doubt that immigrant buyers have influenced the style of the Special and the Monster House by expressing taste preferences to realtors, designers, and builders. And there is no doubt that some builders have foisted bad designs on buyers who lack knowledge of local tastes. The sheer number of Specials and Monster Houses relative to other styles also may have convinced new arrivals that these houses are the best the city has to offer even if they personally find them offensive. In periods of strong market activity, the sale of such homes can consolidate poor design as a popular style. When buyers discover that local residents dislike these houses, some commission an architect to design a home to replace the Monster House that they have bought.<sup>61</sup>



**Photo 22.** On the same eastside street, ornate fencing, top, contrasts with simpler fencing in the same picture and with wood fencing, bottom.

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<sup>61</sup>Architect James Cheng, interview by author, 15 May 1990.

Although immigrants have influenced the style of the Special and Monster House, their indifference to or dislike of the styles that have emerged suggests that design was an area in which the city could have intervened. It is ironic, therefore, that design was an issue that the city was reluctant to confront. This reluctance transferred responsibility for neighbourhood character to the speculative builder, and the speculative homes they built selected out immigrants because the homes held no meaning for local residents. This selection process was not intended by the first builders of the Special or by a city reluctant to intervene in the design of the Special or the Monster House. But the consequence has been a house style that, by selecting out some buyers and not others, may promote population shifts.

Style is not the only aspect of the large house to select out some buyers and not others. The use of the dwelling is also critical. But despite the zoning changes of 1986, 1988 and 1990, the intent to protect the lifestyle and investment of the propertied class that shaped the 1930s zoning remains implicit. The zoning changes do not recognize that the average Vancouver family has become smaller as urban property values have increased. Even if these families liked the large new houses, they neither need nor can afford them. Legalizing suites, while a positive step, is particularly useful to extended families. Most local residents belong to a nuclear family, and do not have an extended family to help finance home purchase. Moreover, they have been socialized to cherish the single-family home in the single-family neighbourhood as the best setting for family life. Those willing to accept a strata or infill dwelling on a smaller site cannot make this choice within a single-family neighbourhood. And those who reject the responsibility or loss of privacy that owning a house with a rental suite entails have no choice but to

compete for the decreasing supply of smaller, older homes or leave the city altogether. If, as the 1990 zoning changes suggest, the city chooses to preserve westside neighbourhoods without changing tenure patterns, then it has chosen to preserve single-family zones for the very wealthy. The evidence suggests that this wealth will not be local.

The studies of housing demand summarized in this paper have pointed to the demand for large single-family dwellings and the need for more, smaller units in single-family zones. But owners of single-family homes do not recognize that increased density in their neighbourhoods is the only way to keep friends and family members from moving away. It is hardly the city's intent to preserve single-family zones for overseas wealth, but the clustering of Asian immigrants in new houses in the city's single-family zones and the dispersal of locals to the suburbs are early indicators that ethnically-based population shifts may occur.

The empirical analysis has demonstrated that the Vancouver Special and the Monster House have profoundly changed the physical and social fabric of single-family neighbourhoods. The single-family vision was destroyed by cumulative adjustments to the 1930 schedule which itself had regulations too generous to shape this vision. The analysis has shown that these amendments to the schedule were in response to a market comprised primarily of European and then Asian immigrants. Ethnic data also suggests that the global economy brought a new dimension to neighbourhood change in the 1980s. Without a re-evaluation of planning theory and practice, the rebuilding of single-family neighbourhoods could move beyond local control.

By dealing with size and use separately and focussing on the single-family zone in isolation, the zoning changes of the 1980s could not address the problem that the large house presented in any meaningful way. Attempts to tame the Monster House did not address the broader issue of affordability for locals in a market that was now global in scope, nor did it address the increasing need for cultural identity in a world that was becoming more homogeneous by virtue of its technology. The zoning changes of the 1980s simply reproduced the low-density suburban pattern of the 1930s. By accepting that larger houses and conditional suites would be part of this pattern in the future, the city adjusted the pattern to suit the global market at the expense of local residents.

Bartholomew intended the suburban pattern to bring order to a city suffering from unfettered liberal capitalism—and for a brief period zoning accomplished this end. But this pattern was unstable because it was a low-

density pattern suited to nuclear families in the child-rearing years. It did not recognize that family needs and resources change over time or that immigration would bring families with different needs, traditions and resources. The pattern that emerged with the Special recognized the city's need for more built space and more smaller units. But it also transformed the physical and social character of eastside single-family neighbourhoods by attracting immigrant families as locals dispersed. In a different way, the Monster House has continued this transformation on the west side. In trying to deal with the large house, the city dealt with symptoms rather than causes. As this chapter will suggest, the issues were not size, use and ethnicity but rather a **density** that could accommodate the needs of local residents and **designs** that reinforced their local traditions.

It is unlikely that those involved comprehended that the zoning changes may have the effect of preserving single-family neighbourhoods for global wealth. Because there has been no discussion of this issue, there is no way of knowing whether residents find their own or their children's potential exclusion from these neighbourhoods acceptable. Local residents may prefer to sell their homes and move elsewhere, and their children may prefer to raise families in cities and towns at some distance from Vancouver. If so, the city has solved its large house problem. If, on the other hand, locals prefer to remain in their neighbourhoods, the city will have to find a new vision that will make its single-family neighbourhoods more affordable and acceptable to locals and immigrants alike.

This chapter returns to fundamental questions about zoning asked at the beginning of the paper. Do individuals have the right to build as they wish within the legal constraints of zoning? Does a city have the right to use

zoning to destroy places where people feel rooted? Does it have the right to use zoning to **exclude** by age, by lifestyle, by income or, however unintentionally, by ethnicity. Or does it have an obligation to use its schedule to **include**, as much as possible, along these same variables?

In this respect, the direction the city chooses has implications beyond its boundaries. Vancouver was the first to encounter and attack large houses, and in the 1980s, Vancouver became a leader in amending single-family zoning. The tendency to follow the leader means that other cities may accept Vancouver's solution without comprehending the forces that have shaped the redevelopment of Vancouver's single-family zones, and they may apply this solution indiscriminately to established and new neighbourhoods.

No branch of planning is more influenced by precedent than zoning. What is done in one city is often copied for application to different conditions in another city. What is suggested for regulation of changes in built-up areas is erroneously regarded as suitable for areas not built upon.<sup>1</sup>

### **Evaluating the Issues of Size, Use, Aesthetics and Ethnicity**

Few residents complained about houses that were simply large, or had a suite, or were designed inappropriately, or destroyed mature landscaping. Complaints occurred when two variables, such as size and use, came together in the same house, and most complaints occurred when three variables came together in the same house. On the east side, size, illegal use and inappropriate design coming together in the same house provoked the most complaints, and on the west side, where suites were less of an issue, size, design and landscape provoked the most complaints. In both instances, ethnicity was

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<sup>1</sup>Adams, *The Design of Residential Areas*, 63.

the variable that linked the issues that provoked complaint. As the research has already shown, immigrant demand for above-grade suites first increased the bulk of new eastside houses and this bulk, in conjunction with builders' perceptions of immigrant tastes, led to a house style that was generally disliked. On the west side, immigrant demand for large homes in conjunction with builders' perceptions of immigrant tastes, led to the loss of mature landscape elements and to designs that offended buyers and local residents alike. By treating size and use separately, by ignoring the ethnic connection and by treating the single-family zone in isolation, the city could not move forward to the fundamental issues of density and design. Breaking the problem down into manageable pieces denied not only the complexity of the problem but also the potential richness of its solution.

Barring the few extremely large houses that were built, it is hard to prove that size was the issue it appeared to be. That residents fought to preserve large old homes suggests that they objected to elements other than size in large new houses. To be sure, the houses that they wanted to save were often located among other large old homes, and the few that were located in areas of smaller homes invariably predated these homes and residents were used to their presence. In neighbourhoods of modest homes, the large old homes cause few problems for adjacencies because they have fairly low site coverages and large backyards and because their design and detailing diminishes their actual size. Where new large houses have been built with site coverage, massing and detailing similar to the large old homes, they have caused few, if any, complaints. When asked if residents complained about traditional styles built in 1990 and 1991, the planner in charge of single-



family zoning replied, "No, people love them."<sup>2</sup> Size, therefore, was a design issue. As the consultants for the 1988 amendments had noted, massing and detailing were more important in fitting large houses into established neighbourhoods than were technical adjustments to floor space ratio.

It does not follow, however, that cities should ignore the issue of size. Residents saw size as an issue—and the city had to address this perception. Given that builders were used to building a particular style, the most effective way to change the massing of new homes quickly was to reduce site coverage and above-grade floor space. Such measures are useful interim strategies in dealing with the large house issue. They permit construction to continue in a more orderly fashion while giving planners time to devise a schedule that is based on local concerns and broader needs.

Like size, suites were not the issue they appeared to be. Despite the evidence of multiple-use in elite areas, many homeowners still believe that single-family zoning protects their investment and the quality of their neighbourhoods. But in 1985, when suites were identified as a major issue, owners' attitudes were changing. Both the Vancouver Neighbourhoods' Association and West Point Grey residents noted that suites in existing homes made housing affordable for both owners and tenants, and by 1989, one alderman said in reference to the east side: "Affordability is an issue, demolition is an issue . . . people don't even consider suites to be an issue."<sup>3</sup> The issue in the 1980s was not the suite itself, but fitting it into existing single-family zones with as little disruption as possible. Like size, suites were first and foremost a problem of design.

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<sup>2</sup>Planner Alan Duncan, telephone conversation with author, Oct. 1991.

<sup>3</sup>Randy Shore, "City poll a subversion", *Vancouver Echo*, 23 Aug. 1989.

A problem of new construction was the bulk that accompanied demand for suites at grade. Ratepayers argued that large new houses and the suites they contained were more destructive of neighbourhood character than were suites in existing homes. They feared that legalizing suites would encourage the construction of more large homes and, until renovation was encouraged in 1990, this fear was justified. Reducing above-grade space and site coverage addressed some of these fears. New houses more closely resembled the spatial configuration of traditional Vancouver homes, and suites were again tucked discretely into basements. By forcing a more traditional configuration of space, Vancouver only partially addressed the suite issue, and designers have noted that the livability of suites has suffered as a result of the changes.

Nevertheless, the sample of houses constructed after the 1988 zoning changes suggests that most new houses have a potential suite and, unless single-family neighbourhoods become the preserve of the very rich, this potential will be used. Common sense, therefore, suggests that cities should anticipate that every single-family house may be used as a two-family dwelling and adjust zoning and building code requirements to enable the development of safe, well-lit and well-ventilated secondary suites. Planning residential neighbourhoods should not be an exercise in determining **where** to locate two-family dwellings but **how** to design them so that they provide quality space and enhance the character of the neighbourhood.

Although residents articulated their concerns about large houses in terms of size and suites, it would seem that the issue was design. But like size and suites, the issue of design was not what it appeared to be. The evidence suggests that good design, of itself, will not allay residents' concerns. To appease residents, both house and landscape design must reinforce their own

cultural traditions. The fondness for large houses built in traditional styles and the anger residents display when quality older homes are destroyed suggests that keeping or replicating symbols of the past may be critical in introducing new large houses into existing neighbourhoods. The tendency for some immigrants to choose traditional or contextual designs suggests that these buyers, in their desire to fit into their new community, also place importance on designs that reinforce the traditions of that community.

Even though many people disliked the design of new homes, planners and council were reluctant to intervene in design. Initially they believed in the freedom of individuals to express their design preferences, but increasingly they began to question the freedom to build houses that destroyed existing streetscapes. For residents as well, the right of the community to preserve values embodied in local streetscapes began to take precedence over the right to build any design that conformed to the by-law.

In all probability, the shift in focus from individual to community rights was an indirect way for some residents to express concern about ethnic changes occurring in their neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that ethnicity itself was an issue. Asians and non-Asians have lived harmoniously in single-family districts for years, and many residents believed that Asians who moved into the new large houses were as much in the grip of "developer greed" as they were. When Asians built houses that respected the local context, no one complained. But when Asians built houses that offended their neighbours, complaints were often linked directly or indirectly to race. One resident, who described how much she had liked her neighbour until he built a large house that shaded her garden, did not fail to note that he was

Chinese.<sup>4</sup> In a widely reported case, complaints arose when the owner of a westside home cut down two large sequoias in his front yard. Complainants linked the owner's Chinese origins to his apparent dislike of trees. Residents believed that the trees, although privately owned, belonged to the community, and that the owner had a responsibility to protect them.<sup>5</sup>

Lack of respect for local traditions continues to bring racism to the surface. In 1991, police attributed the burning of a Ku Klux Klan-type cross on the lawn of a North Vancouver home to a neighbourhood dispute about house size.<sup>6</sup> In coupling the large house controversy to the resurgence of cultural conflict elsewhere in the world, a *Sun* columnist commented that "there is no doubt in my mind the main motive for widespread 'community concern' three years ago was . . . racist."<sup>7</sup> But the tenor of most complaints was not intolerance of other races but rather a fear of being uprooted. Most residents wanted to live in harmony with new immigrants, but they did not want to lose their own cultural identity. If houses were to be demolished, neighbours wanted new construction to reinforce their own traditions. Asian buyers, *per se*, were not a problem. The problem was that Asians were practically the **only** buyers, and their choice in the market was restricted to houses that ignored the local context. It can be argued therefore that the fear

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<sup>4</sup>While working as a planner on the RS-1 amendments, the author noted several examples of the link between racial origin and house design.

<sup>5</sup>"Letters, *Vancouver Sun*, 6 Apr. 1990; "Woodsman, spare that . . . , Editorial, *Vancouver Sun*, 7 Apr. 1990; see also Ray Forster, "Saving the urban forest", *Vancouver Sun*, 7 Dec. 1989.

<sup>6</sup>Mary Lynn Young and Kevin Griffin, "Burning cross brings fear to North Vancouver doorstep", *Vancouver Sun*, 19 Nov. 1991.

<sup>7</sup>Frank Rutter, "Louisiana election shows new middle-class America eager to vote fascist", *Vancouver Sun*, 19 Nov. 1991.

of "the power Hong Kong money wields" was the fear that builders, responding to the only market they had, would continue to build houses that would change streetscapes beyond recognition. These houses, by attracting only Asian buyers, would change the neighbourhood socially to the point where locals would no longer feel at home. From the residents' perspective, the city had been derelict in its duty to preserve the cultural traditions of Vancouver residents. The issue was not size, suites or ethnicity. It was design.

Observers who believe that design is the critical issue commonly offer public education as a solution. But, as already noted, educational programs may not reach those who abuse the intent of the by-law.<sup>8</sup> Although demand by more affluent buyers—and to some extent the zoning changes themselves—contributed to an improvement in the general level of design, it is also probable that intense media coverage sensitized the actors involved. While the argument can be made that the media attack on large houses was elite propaganda,<sup>9</sup> it can be argued in this instance that media coverage expressed too many different views to qualify as propaganda. Media reports reflected, instead, a confusion about the issue and a search to understand it. Even though coverage was sensationalized to attract readers—and admittedly uncomfortable for owners of large new houses—the viewpoints expressed provided a forum for education at a city-wide scale. Thus, the most immediately effective educational tool for dealing with the difficult issue of

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<sup>8</sup>By 1990, "single-family" had been dropped from the intent statement which now read "to maintain the residential character of the RS-1 District". *City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-law #3575*, 1990.

<sup>9</sup>Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988) argue that the American mass media is a propaganda vehicle for government and the corporate elite.

neighbourhood change may be the kind of coverage provided by the local media during the 1980s.



Figure 27. Cartoon of Monster House published in the Vancouver Sun, June 4, 1990. Reprinted with the permission of illustrator David C. MacLean.

Observers of the Monster Houses have suggested that builders are to blame for the changes that have occurred in Vancouver's single-family neighbourhoods and, in her critique of land use, Perin observes that zoning:

has never been a reliable mechanism for deliberately limiting and channelling growth. In fact, just the opposite is true: it is a major piece of industrial equipment quickly tooled . . . to produce the latest models favoured by the capital market.<sup>10</sup>

But to blame the development industry for designs that change neighbourhoods is fallacious. Because the zoning schedule requires single-family use,

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<sup>10</sup>Perin, *Everything in its Place*, 148.

high land costs mean that the only economically sensible replacement for a small house is a larger one.<sup>11</sup> Unable to serve the local market with these large single-family homes, builders have turned to the global market. In Vancouver, planners have tried to "retool" single-family zoning to make new large houses less offensive to neighbourhood residents. But both the Special and the Monster House show that builders can work with any zoning schedule to produce houses that will sell. During the study period, the market was comprised almost entirely of buyers for whom the city's residential landscape has little meaning. If new immigrants continue to be major players in the market, builders have little choice but to build for them and will try to interpret their tastes, no matter how often the city changes its zoning.

The large house issue, then, is a complex design opportunity that presents three challenges. The first challenge, which Vancouver for the most part resolved, is to introduce larger houses into the existing residential fabric with as few functional problems for adjacencies as possible. The second challenge, which Vancouver only partly resolved by conditionally legalizing suites, is to write a zoning schedule that accommodates the need for smaller, less costly units throughout the city. The third challenge, which Vancouver barely addressed, is to retain symbolic referents which have meaning for local residents. Because these referents were lacking, locals pushed for zoning changes that unnecessarily restricted the size and use of new construction in the hope that they could stop or slow the changes occurring in their neighbourhoods. While some may argue that expressing cultural diversity in single-family homes is a valid comment on the diversity that exists within society,

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<sup>11</sup>Both family and rental suites are conditional uses. Family suites can be used **only** for related individuals. Rental suites, legal only in RS-1S areas, are conditional upon being built or renovated to standards set by the city.

the furor the large new houses caused suggests that anything more than a subtle expression of this diversity may be counterproductive.

## **The Fundamental Issues — Density and Design**

Affluent immigrants usually come from crowded cities and the empirical analysis has shown that they value spacious homes in low-density surroundings. Demands by locals for more restrictive zoning can only make single-family zones more attractive to these immigrants. Complaints about size and suites have reduced the built space that the city needs, produced a more tightly regulated low-density pattern that only the affluent can afford, and brought a more cautious approach to legalizing suites than is appropriate under conditions of high demand and low supply. This caution has closed the door to rental suites on the west side and to strata-titling, both of which broaden the market by keeping residents in their neighbourhoods and bringing in new local buyers. Strata-titling, in particular, offers owners opportunities to renovate homes that cannot be brought up to standard without substantial cost, and may also prompt builders to choose designs that appeal to a broader market. By rejecting strata tenure, the city has made single-family areas inaccessible to residents who might choose to own a smaller unit in a large "house". Because strategies to broaden the market did not accompany zoning changes, builders built almost exclusively for the immigrant market. Residents did not see that increasing density was necessary to attract others like themselves, and the city did not see that design was critical to introducing larger houses and more suites into single-family zones. Both public pressure for more restrictive zoning and the city's response was biased, unintentionally, toward preserving single-family zones for the global market.



Public concern about higher density in single-family neighbourhoods was apparent at public meetings, in letters of complaint, in concerns residents voiced during consultations with architects prior to the 1988 amendments, and in private interviews. One consultant hired by the city concluded that fear of increased density was a major reason for demands for more restrictive zoning. Another consultant suggested that, while the city appeared to be reducing density in single-family zones, the potential for increased density was implicit in the zoning decisions of 1988.<sup>12</sup> Other architects also accused the city of a "hidden agenda" to densify single-family neighbourhoods.

How is it possible to reconcile the real need to densify with public demand to do the opposite? The answer of course is to fool the public into thinking that downsizing is taking place and that control over design is making houses more neighbourly while at the same time sneaking the idea of 'increased housing potential' right by them. Very clever!<sup>13</sup>

The potential for increasing density was, of course, the open rear yard space dictated by the 1988 zoning amendments. By keeping this space open, argue Stanbury and Todd, planners could satisfy residents while at the same time preserve land for higher density in the future. "The planners' agenda was barely hidden, but there seems to have been a double agenda with the effects of the second to be revealed in the next decade or beyond."<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that planners saw the potential of the open rear yard space, but the notion of a hidden agenda does not stand up to examination. Planners have explicitly stressed the need for higher densities, and *Coreplan*

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<sup>12</sup>Stuart Howard and Eva Matsuzaki, interviews by author, 3 and 10 May 1990.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Christopherson, "Mega-houses and mega-futures", *South Vancouver Revue*, 3 Apr. 1988.

<sup>14</sup>Stanbury and Todd, 122.

in particular discussed the need to intensify use in existing residential neighbourhoods. Residents themselves were not unaware of the bias of the profession towards increased density. One eastside resident commented that urban planners at the University of British Columbia were "interested in providing housing for immediate and future populations. They are dealing with growth. You have to realize that they are trying to thwart your attempts to keep a house with a backyard."<sup>15</sup>

Both planners and council saw that adjusting the massing of new construction would bring immediate benefits to adjacent older homes. They also knew that homeowners' resistance to any suggestion of potential infill might block the benefits the rear yard space would provide. Earlier, awareness of both the need for and resistance to higher densities caused the vacillation by previous councils and resulted in the spread of illegal suites. But construction of Specials which accompanied this proliferation was hardly, as Stanbury and Todd suggest, "doing good by stealth".<sup>16</sup> Had planners and councils wanted to hide their intent, they would have ensured that house design made suites less conspicuous. In short, the actions of successive councils show confusion rather than stealth and a failure to comprehend the nature and scope of the problem in single-family zones. On this point, a number of architects, planners and aldermen agree.

During the last decade, the city's planning department has had no vision of the future . . . Attention to residential areas, which make up the bulk of the city's land area, has been sporadic and often inept. No wonder we are in the midst of a crisis: we have neglected to use the last decade

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<sup>15</sup>Jeane Manning, "Maintaining single-family neighbourhoods", *South Vancouver Revue*, 1 Feb. 1987. This comment was echoed in private interviews with residents.

<sup>16</sup>Stanbury and Todd, 136.

to identify and zone areas that can accommodate many more people.<sup>17</sup>

There is no hidden agenda. People don't know where they want to go at all . . . There is no vision. However, densification is an issue because we are dealing with problems which are based on densification.<sup>18</sup>

People can see massive change going on around them, but they can see it's in no way planned . . . We've got millions tied up in this absurd suite review program, and its taken away from the real planning issues like growth and transportation . . . It is a vacuum of leadership. What it really means is that developers are running city hall.<sup>19</sup>

The absence of a clear vision for Vancouver's single-family zones hampered a coherent approach to changing the single-family schedule. Furthermore, the issues of density and design, while fundamental to any vision for the future, never really became part of the public debate. To be sure, the city legalized the higher density that suites had already brought to the east side and provided some potential for higher density on the east side, but no attempt was made to establish a policy on density that would take the city into the next century. Steps were also taken to retain older houses and mature trees but, beyond some manipulation of form, no attempt was made to promote contextual design in new construction. It is also true that any city that tries to increase density and regulate design faces not only resistance by residents but also the hard questions of appropriate densities and designs. Without a compelling vision, debate could rage for years while neighbourhoods changed.

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Seelig, "Packing 'em in: plan for it now," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Oct. 1989.

<sup>18</sup>Architect Paul Ohannessian, interview by author, 10 May 1990.

<sup>19</sup>Alderman Libby Davies quoted in Ian Austen, "City has no vision", *Vancouver Province*, 18 Feb. 1990.

With neighbourhoods now populated by people of diverse cultures, cities must find a mutually acceptable vision powerful enough to provide a framework for the future yet unambiguous enough to guide decisions affecting urban form. One such vision is the environmental movement of the 1970s that has been rearticulated in the 1980s as "sustainability". Support for sustainability has grown over the past decade, and it is probable that those who bought and fought the large houses support environmental conservation at least in principle. Concerns about the destruction of mature landscapes, the demolition of quality homes, and the loss of open space were motivated not only by the self-interest of residents but also by an awareness of the need to conserve the environment for future generations. Using the concept of sustainability to structure a vision for the future turns residents' self-interest to the benefit of the larger community.

Assuming some support of this concept, arguing for higher densities becomes somewhat easier. The small single-family house is less economical in terms of land use and infrastructure than a duplex or triplex on the same site, and the large house, unless occupied by a reasonable number of people, consumes resources disproportionate to its size. Furthermore, neither small nor large homes used exclusively as single-family dwellings contribute to neighbourhoods that are socially sustainable because they limit housing choice. But unlike small homes, large houses can easily accommodate two or more families.<sup>20</sup> The higher densities that can be achieved by encouraging multi-family housing within the single-family form may be resisted less

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<sup>20</sup>Isabel Minty, "Let's fight these monsters", *Vancouver Sun*, 16 Jan. 1992. Minty, a Kerrisdale homeowner, notes that a new 15,000 square-foot single-family house built on her block could provide 16 suites of 700 square feet and still leave 3800 square feet for hallways and common space.

strongly than densities achieved through rowhouse and apartment construction.<sup>21</sup> Housing would become more affordable because land and material resources would be used more economically. More people could stay in their neighbourhoods as they age, and more young people would be able to buy.

The concept of sustainability can guide zoning decisions that affect housing cost. The planner in charge of the 1986/1988 zoning changes legitimately believed that costs incurred by the changes were insignificant relative to total house costs if the quality of the house or its surrounds improved. Detaching the garage was a legitimate cost that increased open space and reduced the impact of large homes on adjacencies. Pumping systems, on the other hand, do not benefit owners or neighbours, and may be environmentally and economically less sound over the long term than retaining the lower sewer depth that eliminates the need for such systems. Sustainability can also guide decisions that affect the design of houses and entire neighbourhoods. As society seeks ways to reduce consumption, cities will have to choose between zoning changes that add to the longevity of houses and those that do not. Using the Vancouver example, city council would have been more decisive about renovations that recycle existing structures, and the attempt to restrict materials in order to bring more unity to streetscapes would have had its basis in environmentally sound criteria that most residents could support. These examples illustrate how sustainability could guide zoning decisions in a coherent fashion. But because council narrowly defined the parameters for amending the single-family schedule, a vision for the future based on sustainability or some equally powerful concept could not emerge. The vision

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<sup>21</sup>Concerns by residents about generically different forms are noted in City of Vancouver Planning Department, *New Neighbours* (Vancouver: 1986).

that shaped the changes was the suburban pattern that residents wanted to preserve. It was not a vision that could take the city into the next century.

### **Segregation by Age, Status and Ethnicity**

Both the celebration of the nuclear family and the segregation of land use in this century have resulted in families no longer able to afford reasonable housing in locations of their choice. At the same time, the wealth of some immigrants, the extended families of others, and the work ethic of most mean that housing costs are less of a problem to immigrants than to the average Canadian family. As one Chinese resident wrote to the *Vancouver Sun*:

It is no mystery how many ex-refugees manage to purchase sizable homes. Their working and spending habits are different from those of us who take this land of peace and plenty for granted. . . all family members work and save together to have a mortgage-free home, even though at one time they lived below the poverty line.<sup>22</sup>

These new immigrants bring traditions that Canadians can adopt to survive in tomorrow's world. The extended family is one such tradition—or possibly a survival technique—that provides a springboard into the future.<sup>23</sup> With adult relatives at home, parents can work full-time without relying on daycare and the cost of housing and maintenance becomes less onerous. Quite possibly by such examples, local residents are bringing back the extended

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<sup>22</sup>"Letters," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 Oct. 1991.

<sup>23</sup>The assumption of the pre-industrial extended family is challenged by Peter Lazlett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965) in Beringer, 81–83. Beringer notes that Lazlett's findings have been duplicated by other historians for other places and other times and that Lazlett's own international survey showed that only Japan had significant numbers of extended families prior to industrialization. Such research suggests that the extended family may be an economic survival technique rather than a preferred lifestyle.

family in new ways. Seniors are choosing congregate housing to replace family in their old age, singles are joining together as "mingles" to rent or own housing, and several small families may buy a house together to share the mortgage and the risk.<sup>24</sup> Such lifestyle changes take time to permeate society, and the city does a disservice both to these "pioneers" and to less adaptive residents by not increasing alternatives within single-family zones. With the best intentions, the city has chosen to discriminate against those who lack the wealth or the extended family support that might enable them to own a home. In doing so, the city has chosen to respect the traditions of newcomers at the same time that it discounts those of local residents.

The large house issue, in its essence, is a clash of cultures. Single-family use became a tradition that protected the dominant culture through much of the twentieth century. Today, in the city's single-family areas, locals and newcomers clash because both want to protect lifestyles which are part of their culture. In Vancouver, these lifestyles are accommodated respectively in older smaller dwellings and large new homes. By dealing with single-family zones in isolation, by separating the issues of size and suites, and by disassociating culture from function, Vancouver was able to ignore the segregating effects of the single-family schedule.

The evidence suggests that social engineering, however much in dispute or disrepute, is still a powerful element in planning practice. Since 1930, zoning has defined two "lifestyle" environments—the highrise apartment and the single-family house—that have effectively discriminated on the basis of wealth. Planners and politicians, pressured by residents, have continued to

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<sup>24</sup>It is legal for families to co-own a single-family dwelling, but it is not legal for them to live together in the house that they jointly own.

promote economic segregation by retaining these land use categories under the euphemism of "variety of choice". More recently, planners and councils have tried to increase choice by providing family accommodation in medium-to-high density forms, but the demand for luxury accommodation in the city has spurred construction of expensive condominiums in once-affordable multi-family areas. Urban choices, whether a detached home, a rowhouse or a highrise apartment, are increasingly limited to the affluent.

The popularity of single-family homes suggests that many people may not want the variety of form that results from different land use categories. But it is clear that they want and need variety in unit size in locations of their choice. The spread of illegal suites could not have occurred without demand for small, affordable "niches" in single-family areas. Despite this demand, councils have vacillated over the suite issue for years, and still resist strata-titling suites in single-family zones. As a result, social engineering continues. Some residents are forced to leave their neighbourhoods when their needs change while others leave because the neighbourhood has changed around them. This dispersal is simply the evolution of a forced economic segregation that began when the commercial elite commissioned planners to zone for single-family use as part of the movement to control the haphazard development of *laissez-faire* liberal capitalism.

The social engineering that segregated people by age and income was not explicit, but its intent was clearly understood. The social engineering that may promote ethnic segregation is unintentional and not clearly understood. Ignoring the cultural aspect of residential design may reinforce any natural segregation by race, ethnicity or culture just as surely as zoning for discrete residential uses has reinforced any natural segregation by lifestyle and income



that otherwise would have occurred. The challenge is not to engineer social mix or segregation, but to provide real opportunities for people to choose whether they want to live among people like themselves or in communities that are socially and ethnically diverse. Recognizing that everyone cannot inhabit a city's most desirable land, real choice, then, means that all residential areas—both urban and suburban—must become more inclusive. In both single and multi-family zones, inclusiveness means a variety of unit sizes and tenures and a vernacular that, in its essence, either cuts across cultures or is robust enough to tolerate subtle cultural definition.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of inclusive neighbourhoods cannot help but raise anxiety among single-family homeowners who fear densities that will destroy the ambiance of their neighbourhoods. But coupled with sustainability, it is probable that inclusive neighbourhoods would be no denser than the compact neighbourhoods that developed before zoning. It is also possible that a robust vernacular can emerge from any zoning shaped by inclusiveness and sustainability, and that it will have much in common with past vernaculars that have stood the test of time. The large house controversy, then, is not a debate about size, suites, or ethnicity but about whether cities and their residents want their neighbourhoods to be inclusive and sustainable. Because both concepts defy the fundamental principles of single-family zoning, it is unlikely that cities will engage in this kind of debate. It is more likely that most will remain attached to planning principles that foster segregation.

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<sup>25</sup>The idea of inclusionary zoning for those of modest means is explored by Paul Davidoff, "Decent Housing for All: An Agenda", in *America's Housing Crisis: What to be Done*, ed. C. Hartman (Boston: Routledge, 1983). A vernacular that cuts across cultures was suggested by an observation by Rapoport, 79–82 that the constancy in house form is so great that what may be considered novel has usually been used in the past by other cultures.

## **The Impact of Vancouver's Zoning on Other Cities**

During the 1980s, large houses began to appear regularly in other cities, towns and rural areas. Because this research has focussed on Vancouver, the reasons for the appearance of large houses elsewhere in the country can only be speculative. It is probable that one reason for their appearance is simply the desire for housing space among families affluent enough to afford this space. A second reason may be the ramifications of zoning changes themselves. After the 1986 zoning changes in Vancouver, various sources suggested that when the builders could no longer build the Special in Vancouver, they shifted their attention to Burnaby,<sup>26</sup> and conversations with the zoning department in Surrey suggested a similar shift of construction activity. A third reason for the large house appearing elsewhere may be the result of population dispersal. This dispersal of buyers with the financial means to buy large houses in smaller centres creates a market for large new homes in and around these cities.

When large new houses are located in new suburban developments or in rural areas, they are not perceived as a problem. But in cities of reasonable size, the replacement of smaller dwellings in established neighbourhoods makes large new houses a contentious issue. Some cities have already adopted elements of Vancouver's zoning, and others have undergone a similar process with similar results. In comparing zoning schedules elsewhere, Vancouver

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<sup>26</sup>See, for example, "Big house builder loses Burnaby bid", *Vancouver Sun*, 6 Jan. 1987.

planners concluded that the city "appears to be leading the trend towards more complex and increasingly restrictive single-family zoning regulations".<sup>27</sup>

One of the earliest analyses of large houses was prepared by Donald Barcham for West Vancouver in 1988.<sup>28</sup> Very large houses began to appear regularly in West Vancouver in the late 1970s, and the district acted quickly by introducing a floor space ratio in 1981 and lowering the maximum height shortly thereafter. As in Vancouver, these amendments reduced extremes in overbuilding but did not stem complaints. Barcham's analysis, commissioned in response to these complaints, described attempts by other municipalities in the Vancouver area to control the size of homes. New Westminster, for example, began to experience problems with house size in 1974 when they changed their single-family schedule to provide smaller lots, and Burnaby and North Vancouver City and District began to address the problem in the mid-1980s. Of interest in Barcham's analysis are: the extent of the problem throughout the metropolitan region, the similarity of problem definition and resolution, and Barcham's own emphasis on design as a central issue.

In the case of West Vancouver, Barcham identified the issues as bulk relative to adjacent homes; design and appearance; privacy, shading and overlooking; loss of trees and landscaping; density; change in household size and characteristics; and ethnic values. A theme running through his analysis is the retention of those aspects of the single-family neighbourhood that residents value, but his recommendations depend largely on changes to the

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<sup>27</sup>City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Summary Report - Further RS-1/RS-1S Amendments," Reference Document 2, Survey of Single-Family Zoning Regulations Across Canada, 11 Jan. 1990.

<sup>28</sup>Donald Barcham, *The Large House Syndrome in Traditional and Developing Neighbourhoods*, prepared for the Corporation of the District of West Vancouver (May 1988) iii.

Municipal Act that would allow some measure of design control. It is important to note that the City of Vancouver, through the Vancouver Charter, is the only municipality in British Columbia that can control house design. Changes to the Municipal Act in 1981 left other municipalities in the province without this authority. Dependent on changes to the Act, Barcham recommended that the district develop guidelines for design, landscaping and neighbourhood character. Other recommendations not dependent on the Act were the reduction of floor area, the introduction of area-specific zoning and the initiation of an educational program to increase the understanding of district objectives among zoning staff and the general public. The following quote from his analysis makes clear that he is describing a complex problem that is tied to cultural traditions and environmental concerns.

The intent of all this is not to inhibit development, but to guide and regulate it in a manner sensitive to existing neighbourhoods, to site characteristics, and to the environment. To do less is an affront to our heritage; to be effective requires a strong political will.<sup>29</sup>

Vancouver's own analysis of zoning schedules compared a representative sample of 15 cities, 12 of which were concerned about large houses. Of the latter, most had tried to control bulk, and none was entirely satisfied with its approach. Some used only setbacks, site coverage and height as the control mechanism, some used a simple floor space ratio, and others already using floor space ratios were considering reductions to the ratio or adopting Vancouver's sliding scale. A number of cities had tried to limit size by reducing height and relating setbacks to site and building dimensions, but none had adopted setbacks proportional to lot width and depth. Three cities restricted maximum house length, and three others capped floor area at an

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<sup>29</sup>Barcham, iii.

absolute maximum area that varied from 4000 to 6000 square feet. Most cities relied on outright zoning. Only a few had tried to control house or landscape design, although such controls appear to be a growing trend.

Apparent in the comparison was the similarity of setbacks and site coverage from city to city. Height showed considerable variation, ranging from a 26-foot maximum to a 35-foot average between peak and eave. Floor space ratios also varied from 35 to 60 percent of lot area excluding basements. Most site coverages, however, were around 40 percent, and setbacks were remarkably consistent across the cities surveyed. Front setbacks ranged from 20 to 25 feet, rear yard setbacks were almost invariably 25 feet, and side yard setbacks were roughly four or five feet. With the exception of side yard setbacks, which reflect code requirements for fire separation, setbacks and site coverages appear to have been copied from city to city.<sup>30</sup>

Toronto and Vancouver have chosen very different approaches to control single-family development. Vancouver has changed its outright schedule to regulate single-family development while Toronto has adhered to a schedule it now considers too restrictive in order to force applicants to go to its Committee of Adjustment.

The City prefers this because it guarantees neighbourhood input into the design. Since decisions can be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board, an expensive and time-consuming process for all parties, neighbourhoods have become self-policing. A consequence is that almost all buildings are non-conforming.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Notable exceptions are: Halifax with side and rear setbacks limiting the distance between houses to 12 feet; Toronto's sideyard setback of 1.5 feet, and Calgary's front setback of 9.8 feet.

<sup>31</sup>"Summary Report," Survey of Single-Family Zoning, 13.

Toronto's solution is an informal design control that treats each site as unique and transfers responsibility for design to owners and neighbours. Of the fifteen cities surveyed, seven cities had formal design or landscape controls or were proposing them. Of these, Calgary had developed the most comprehensive approach. Calgary acknowledges that subdivision of urban lots and the construction of larger homes are natural consequences of growth. The challenge, as the city sees it, is the sensitive design of these larger homes.

[T]he process of incremental change is expected to be phased over many years. It is important that during the transition period, new development should attempt to respect neighbourhood character and the existing scale of adjacent houses. An infill development built to the allowable maximum height and lot coverage can, if not sensitively designed, result in an overly massive and imposing building.<sup>32</sup>

Calgary's guidelines are based on design principles that encompass essential aspects of the house in its setting. The thrust is to present design principles that are easily comprehended, and the guidelines are illustrative rather than prescriptive. Nevertheless, a development permit is required for any lot 40 feet or less and may be required for any development which varies significantly from the principles adopted.

Design control, usually a discretionary process, is time-consuming and therefore expensive. In Toronto, where redevelopment and renovation have already produced a sizable stock of large single and multi-family homes, discretionary zoning by default may be a valid approach. In Vancouver, development is less compact and many homes are small and poorly built. Because this stock must be upgraded or replaced, Vancouver would need a large staff to administer discretionary zoning. If outright zoning can encourage new

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<sup>32</sup>City of Calgary Planning and Building Department, *Single-Family Infill Housing Guidelines for Established Communities*, Mar. 1988.

houses that fit their context or encourage pleasant neighbourhoods where a distinct context is lacking, outright zoning may be more appropriate.

There are compelling arguments for and against design control but, in the final analysis, the cost of design control must be weighed against the long-term benefits that may be gained. Vancouver's planning department found that several cities were less than satisfied with the results of design control and, after the survey, Oak Bay<sup>33</sup> abandoned an attempt of granting additional floor space for contextual design because applicants found it inequitable. Burnaby limits design control to large houses on large lots, an initiative Vancouver adopted in 1990. Applicants can request a rezoning for a higher floor area, but plans become open to public scrutiny and discretionary control. The process has created animosity among neighbours and takes considerable staff time. Although design controls can be used to exclude, there is no evidence that design controls can protect neighbourhood character except in areas where an existing unity of streetscape makes the writing of relatively clear guidelines possible. Where such unity does not exist, architects, designers and builders have spoken out strongly against design controls to protect a design freedom which they seldom use. One architect, however, makes a powerful case against design controls in any market where neighbourhood character is shaped by the speculative builder. "Mediocre designers," he asserts, "will quickly discover the latest 'quick approval formula', and will produce dozens of such designs all over the city. There will be almost no discernable change from the present situation."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>A suburb of Victoria, B. C.

<sup>34</sup>Paul Ohannesian, slide presentation by the Housing Committee, Architectural Institute of British Columbia to Vancouver City Council, Public Hearing, 15 Mar. 1990.

The concern that design controls will have little impact on speculative development is legitimate. It may be possible, however, to establish design guidelines that the building industry would support. Builders will support guidelines only if they are convinced that building to the guidelines will produce houses that carry no more risk to their capital than the houses they are already building. In creating such guidelines, planners would have to confront the reality of the marketplace, and involve builders, designers, realtors and residents of new and older homes. The process has to include a commonly shared goal to build a better city that overrides the confrontation that is perhaps a necessary aspect of the permit process. While guidelines that evolve from such a process may express the lowest common denominator of agreement, some exciting initiatives could also emerge.

There are also ways of implementing contextual controls that are outright. An example is front yard averaging. Halifax calculates the front yard setback by averaging setbacks of adjacencies and permits the house to slide two feet on either side of this average. Vancouver reinstated this practice in 1986 and still uses averaging in limited form today. Experience during 1986 showed that the two-foot slide simplifies siting and tends to move houses forward over time because owners and builders use the option to gain more space in the rear yard. Where averaging permitted very small setbacks, builders refused to site houses closer than 12 to 14 feet from the front property line. The consistency between the builders' notion of an appropriate transition zone and the front yards of the Davis cluster suggests social mechanisms related to house type and density that ultimately control siting.

Another opportunity for contextual design control was contemplated by the planner in charge of the 1986 and 1988 zoning changes. She believed that



residents might pursue local design initiatives in the same way that they currently obtain local improvements. Using a similar mechanism, residents could control height, landscape, colour, materials and even specific vernacular styles for their block. Once passed by council, these controls would become outright. Although administration would be difficult at first, it would become less complicated as initiatives were repeated by other blocks. Over time, area schedules would emerge, and neighbourhoods would take on unique identities through different combinations of controls.<sup>35</sup> Although the idea was never pursued, architects and designers have favoured a similar concept of local area schedules and advisory design panels.

However appealing the idea of unique neighbourhoods that arise from participatory planning, the thrust of zoning amendments currently tends towards uniformity. Two municipalities adjacent to Vancouver are examples of the tendency of planners to copy initiatives of other cities. The District of North Vancouver imitated Vancouver's process, hiring one of the consulting firms previously hired by Vancouver to propose amendments to control house bulk. Burnaby is an example of a schedule shaped by Vancouver's own zoning.<sup>36</sup> One planner, noting the similarities in the Burnaby schedule, facetiously wondered why Burnaby had gone through a costly two-year exercise when it simply could have photocopied Vancouver's schedule.

It is understandable that Vancouver would have a direct influence on Burnaby and North Vancouver. But zoning changes for North York (in Metro

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<sup>35</sup>Discussions with Ann McAfee to determine the feasibility of this approach, 1987.

<sup>36</sup>Burnaby Planning Department, "Proposed Zoning Regulations for Single-Family Dwellings", 4 Sept. 1991; Rian Maelzer, "Attack of the Monster Home", *Burnaby News*, 11 Sept. 1991, 4.

Toronto) show that complaints about house size can trigger similar processes and solutions beyond Vancouver's sphere of influence.<sup>37</sup> North York's process ran parallel to Vancouver's in many ways. The city hired a consultant about the same time and engaged the public in dialogue along the way. The concerns of residents echoed residents' concerns in Vancouver. Suites did not seem to be an issue in North York, nor were concerns about ethnicity and the loss of cultural values evident in the documentation.<sup>38</sup>

North York's amendments were directed towards reducing bulk through adjustments to setbacks, site coverage, and height. A floor space ratio, requested by many residents, was deemed an inappropriate control for size. As in Vancouver, residents' dissatisfaction with the zoning changes led to further amendments. In assessing the documentation, similarities to the Vancouver example suggest that, even when cities are not directly influenced by the actions of other cities, shared attitudes, the sharing of information, and common planning approaches lead to similar solutions.

The shared belief in the virtues of single-family zoning, nurtured by planning departments and councils for decades, suggests that resistance to change by local residents will manifest itself in much the same way in various cities. The similarity in design of many large houses, whether in Vancouver and Toronto or in cities remote from their influence also suggests that builders' responses are shaped by similar market forces and the widespread availability of stock plans, materials and technology. The similarity of zoning responses to large houses, whether these responses arise from shared planning

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<sup>37</sup>City of North York, *Infill Housing*, 1 and 2, Feb. 1987 to Nov. 1990.

<sup>38</sup>Descriptions of residents' attitudes in Cannon, 199, and DeMont and Fennel, 113, suggest that ethnicity may have factored in complaints.

principles or from copying other cities, suggests that cities will rebuild their single-family zones much like Vancouver is in the process of doing.

Cities were once shaped by the constraints of climate, terrain, materials and cultural conventions. Because society does not permit any useful discussion of conflicting cultural traditions, and because new technology allows builders to ignore constraints of climate and terrain, cities lack a framework that will bring a unity to streetscapes that is acceptable to all. In trying to tame the Monster House, Vancouver's council made no attempt to define a vision for the future of the city's single-family zones or to introduce a development pattern that would accommodate the needs of its own residents. Because the Vancouver Special and the Monster House have less built space than other single-family forms that could have been built to the same site coverage, it is likely that they will suffer the same fate of the smaller bungalows they replace. Any city that adopts Vancouver's solution adopts a built-in obsolescence that has been characteristic of our era. Without a vision that draws from their own building traditions, cities will slip by default into a planning approach that delivers houses that differ little from city to city. Wherever these houses have little meaning for local residents, these residents will disperse to other cities and to remaining pockets in cities and suburbs where vernaculars still support their cultural traditions.

Tracing the new large houses from their beginnings in the 1960s shows clearly that they are the result of a zoning schedule that has changed over time in response to the immigrant market. The Vancouver Special became a standardized design that offended neighbours and offered buyers little choice. The Monster House is still evolving, but the restrictiveness of the current schedule may have the same effect of standardizing a particular design as did the earlier relationship between zoning and the market. The problem is not standardization, because standardized styles that emerged before zoning continue to be copied because of their integrity and their functional use of space. The problem is that Vancouver has eliminated valuable options as it changed its zoning to accommodate the immigrant market. The elimination of the typical house form built before zoning, for example, denied the city a pattern that combines adequate open space with the built space the city needs today.

The spread of the Special and Monster House brought greater cultural diversity to both the east and west sides of the city. This diversity would have occurred in any event, but because the style of new homes attracts only immigrants, cultural diversity may be a transitional phase to more ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods. Comparing the 1986 and 1988 zoning changes showed a market shift from immigrants who had to establish themselves before they bought to those who could buy on arrival. The latest immigrant wave is part of a global pool of buyers seeking a stable and secure environment for their families and their wealth in single-family areas close to city centre. Once they have bought large new houses in the region's most desirable areas, there is little reason to move outward. The consequence of the trans-

formation of the Special into the Monster House may be the displacement of earlier immigrant waves by those now active in the global market.

In general, local residents of all ethnic groups cannot compete with new immigrants for these large new houses and, in any case, prefer the declining stock of used housing in more traditional styles. Immigrants, even if they dislike what the market offers, need housing and can outbid many locals for new houses in locations they prefer. Thus, in the 1980s, the relationship between zoning and the market came full circle. Single-family zoning, which once excluded less affluent families who were often immigrants, still excludes. But the price of entry to Vancouver's single-family districts is now measured globally and families now being excluded are the descendants of earlier immigrant waves. These people are by no means poor, and many have sold city homes to move elsewhere. Their dispersal will affect the housing choices of those of more modest means seeking accommodation in the suburbs and other cities. Cities that adopt Vancouver's initiatives may experience a similar dislocation of local residents although the "new arrivals" may be those leaving larger cities that attract immigrant wealth.

The critical question here is whether the data presented in this paper is an anomaly occasioned by specific global events or whether it reflects an early phase of a continuing trend. Much will depend on the global economy and the twists and turns of Canada's immigration policy, but if immigration continues to reflect the past several decades, the future direction of Vancouver's single-family schedule becomes important. If local residents want single-family zones to remain exclusive, and if immigrants continue to cluster in these zones, Vancouver may be choosing an urban future of racial segregation. If locals opt for more inclusive neighbourhoods, then they must

accept increases in density with little delay, and these increases in density must deliver more affordable housing stock. As long as people value proximity to city centre, there is no way to make market housing in Vancouver's single-family areas affordable for most middle-class buyers. Nevertheless, increased density can accommodate those of the middle-class who were able to afford these areas until recently and can provide niches for those of more modest means who are willing to sacrifice space for proximity to city centre.

Increasing density and affordability is not enough to make single-family zones more inclusive. The housing stock must also embody meanings important to local residents. Unless single-family zones can attract these residents, builders will continue to build for the global market. Neighbourhoods will take on new symbolic referents despite efforts to regulate size, use and design, and these referents will accelerate the clustering that is already occurring. Broaden the cultural diversity of the market and the industry will respond. Inclusiveness, therefore, is a three-pronged approach that combines density, affordability and attention to meaning in the residential landscape. Once the large house controversy is recast in terms of making single-family zones more inclusive, the issues of size, suites and design are no longer problems to be resolved, but strategies that contribute to a coherent and more equitable rebuilding of single-family neighbourhoods.

### **The Legitimacy of Large Houses, Suites and Contextual Design**

The replacement of small, older homes by large new houses is a time-honoured method of delivering more built space in cities. But, as photographs in the text show, large houses need not be "monsters". With attention to massing, site coverage and detail, they can add gracefully to neighbourhoods

without impairing the use of adjacent smaller houses. The Davis cluster proves that large houses can provide both adequate open space and enough interior space to suit extended families or several smaller households. The Vancouver Special itself proves that with adequate interior space, the conversion of large houses can be as simple as opening and closing doors.

Although reducing house bulk decreases the potential for density, it is a valuable tool in managing the pace of change. It benefits adjacencies and does no harm as long as house size remains reasonable and opportunities for addition and infill are preserved. When reducing the permitted floor space, the questions planners must ask are: "where can owners add space easily and economically in the future?" and "what amenities do adjacencies lose when space is added to existing dwellings?" Vancouver could not explore such questions adequately because residents feared increased density. On standard and even reasonably wide lots, infill or addition will leave less open space than if council had encouraged taller homes with lower site coverage and full basements. To accommodate growth, the city will have to tolerate the loss of open space or the demolition of homes currently being built.

The suite is also a valuable tool in managing change. While many people still object strongly to suites, others want to keep affordable suites and affordable opportunities for ownership. Although there is support for new houses with suites tucked discreetly in the basement, there seems to be no support for new strata-titled units and new purpose-built duplexes that would change existing streetscapes. The renovation of older stock into rental and strata-titled units, however, may bring fewer objections. The challenge for planners is to ensure that suites are safe, bright and airy enough for the families living in them. Because the cost of achieving these goals can be

prohibitive in many existing homes, renovation that permits strata-titling may be a useful strategy to pursue.

The suite, which was critical in helping new immigrants establish themselves in owned housing, is now critical in enabling local residents of all ethnic groups to live in single-family neighbourhoods as owners and tenants. If prices continue to rise, those affluent enough to buy the large new homes in single-family areas may not need rental suites. Despite demand for suites, single-family districts may lose population as new houses without suites replace older houses, as new houses with suites convert back to single-family dwellings and as owners who cannot upgrade their suites to city standards phase them out. Encouraging suites as a counterbalance to rising land costs, therefore, becomes an important part of any large city's housing policy.



Photo 23. An addition to an older westside house.

Rezoning that increases built space and the variety of unit size and tenure will be ineffective in broadening the market unless local residents feel comfortable in Vancouver's single-family zones. The research has shown that local residents of all ethnic groups probably prefer used housing, and that used housing is all that many of them can afford. Any area that wants to



preserve the essence of its residential landscape must encourage renovation and conversion of existing homes to retain local residents and attract other locals marginally able to afford older housing. Because most renovations are more contextual than new construction (Photo 23), facilitating renovation and conversion of existing dwellings may be more effective than any other single strategy in preserving the cultural essence of its residential landscape.<sup>1</sup>

A by-law that provides incentives for renovation, conversion and infill could change the nature of the single-family market. It legitimizes older houses still affordable by local residents and encourages their maintenance. Because many buyers now need a rental suite to afford even used housing, renovation that encourages conversion and infill is more likely to maintain a stock of rental housing than is new construction targeted to the affluent. Similarly, the opportunity to strata-title existing homes would attract buyers who prefer to own without the responsibility or uncertainty that a rental suite entails. Yet a schedule that encourages renovation does not stop the construction of new housing for affluent immigrants who prefer this option because a supply of poorly maintained housing always exists.

Attempting to preserve the character of more affluent neighbourhoods through design controls or reduced floor space ratios that deflect new construction to other areas—as in RS-3—may simply be a short-term cosmetic that preserves these areas for global wealth. Because of their attractiveness, amenity and proximity to city centre, these areas will change socially and economically if not physically. To preserve residential qualities that locals value, design and landscape controls would have to be very restrictive and

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<sup>1</sup>A graphic case study of a contextual renovation that contains a secondary suite is shown in Appendix C.

may not have the desired effect in the long run. Leaving aside the cost and difficulty of administration, the tendency for one neighbourhood to adopt the exclusionary design controls of another may result in islands of exclusivity, and builders would shift their activity to areas where controls, or lack of them, operated to their advantage. Where streetscapes do not have clearly definable architectural or historic merit, it may be more sensible to let designs adapt to changing needs rather than rely on design controls.

### **The Legitimacy of Zoning Regulations**

This research does not take issue with the need for zoning but with the legitimacy of the regulations that have evolved. The planners of the 1930s did not realize that the zoning they put in place could be abused to the extent that it was. The 1988 zoning amendments in particular proved that carefully considered technical adjustments to the schedule could eliminate many functional problems caused by this abuse. While Vancouver's regulations are greatly improved in this regard, some are more powerful than others in controlling form and context.

Site coverage is the most critical element in obtaining an appropriate balance between open and built space. Although setbacks can achieve the same results, the combination of reasonably generous setbacks with a more limiting site coverage provides greater variation in siting on individual lots. Flexibility in siting the dwelling can provide opportunities for deferring to the needs of adjacent dwellings and retaining mature landscape elements that otherwise would be lost.

Along with site coverage, setbacks can be excellent controls for context. Increasing the rear setback resolved most complaints about shading and over-

looking while providing more space for gardens and future infill. The sliding scale for sideyard setbacks was also reasonably successful. The side yard is now more proportional to the size of new dwellings and provides opportunities for plantings that soften the impact of new construction. Vancouver's resolution of the front yard setback was less successful because averaging only comes into play if the front setback is more or less than an adjacent setback by five feet. This regulation standardizes an overly generous front setback that sacrifices more backyard space than is necessary.

Height is also critical, and the tendency to reduce height to counteract bulk is counterproductive. Height restrictions cause problems for renovations and destroy designs that depend on height for styles and proportions that reduce the appearance of bulk. Although tall houses may seem out of place on streets of small houses, the varying heights in areas that predate zoning suggests that height is less meaningful in unifying streetscapes than colour, style, detail, materials of construction and landscape elements. Height and site coverage are directly related. Most cities faced with the problem of large new homes have chosen, perhaps unwisely, to reduce height and sacrifice open space and a more graceful massing of the structure. If cities want to increase their capacity to house people in existing single-family neighbourhoods, then they must either sacrifice open space or permit taller homes.

The value of a floor space ratio is arguable. Floor space ratio can encourage the articulation of structures that would otherwise be simple boxes that produce the most space at least cost. While builders, for obvious reasons, favour boxy dwellings, architects, designers and planners encourage articulation of the structure to provide "variety" to streetscapes. No one can deny that Monster Houses add variety, but it is questionable whether badly or

excessively articulated dwellings add as much to streetscapes as simple, well-proportioned, and appropriately detailed boxes. The passion for maximizing floor space at whatever limits are placed upon it may in fact contribute to poor design. Certainly the time spent calculating floor space and altering plans to reach maximum floor space might be better spent resolving problems of proportion and detail. With carefully considered site coverage, height and setbacks, a floor space ratio may be unnecessary.

### **A Vision for the Future**

Vancouver is at a crossroads in the development of its single-family zones. Much of its stock is old, and much of it reflects the haste in which the city built after the Second World War, but many homes have the potential for renewal. The city has two sets of choices. Does it want to retain the character of its residential landscape or does it want to rebuild its single-family zones in an entirely different manner? Does it want to retain the exclusive nature of its single-family zones or does it want these zones to be more inclusive? If the market activity of the 1980s was not an anomaly, and if the city wants to encourage its own residents to buy and live in its single-family areas, then redevelopment must be inclusive. Housing must become more affordable through conversion and infill that uses land more economically, and street-scapes must retain the essential qualities that local residents value.

Reducing bulk cannot make single-family neighbourhoods more inclusive. Nor can it preserve the residential landscape. As long as zoning permits new houses large enough to meet basic needs, builders will demolish older houses for more expensive new homes. Legalizing suites that meet city standards, while a step in the right direction, has reduced opportunities for

owners of older housing to retain affordable suites, and reduced opportunities for others to buy affordable used housing in areas where rental suites are illegal. In this regard, much more variety of unit size and tenure must be offered throughout zones that are now single-family in use. Although many see design controls as a long-term solution to preserve streetscapes, controls that are not accompanied by a more inclusive use of single-family zones may simply preserve these zones for global wealth. The renovation and conversion of older homes to owned and rented multi-family dwellings seems to offer the best hope for mitigating potential population shifts while retaining neighbourhood qualities that residents value.

The compact settlement pattern that results from a mix of single and multi-family accommodation in large, detached houses may be one of the most flexible patterns for future urban settlements. Such neighbourhoods can reach densities that approximate rowhousing without the limitations to family size that typical rowhousing imposes, and the detached form permits renovation and new construction with little displacement of people and no assembly of land. The individual house can accommodate extended families with ease, and respond to changing family fortunes by conversion to multiple-family use. Given large enough houses, neighbourhoods can adapt relatively quickly to changing economic conditions.

Houses designed solely for and restricted to single-family use have never been an appropriate method for building cities. The lack of variety in dwelling size and tenure that exists in many single-family neighbourhoods forces an artificial homogeneity that does not reflect the diversity of age, ethnic background and financial resources found in the larger community. The inability of the small single-family house to respond to the ordinary and

extraordinary needs of people as they move through stages in the life cycle makes neighbourhoods composed of these dwellings particularly susceptible to physical, social and economic change. On the other hand, the large single-family houses now being built are wasteful of land and other resources unless occupied by an extended family. That single-family zoning now works against local residents reveals that the economic segregation that was a fundamental principle behind single-family zoning was wrong. Surely the function of zoning should not be segregation by age, race or economic status but rather the building and maintaining of sustainable neighbourhoods that, as equitably as possible, nourish the body and the spirit for the challenges of life.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this research was to understand the nature of neighbourhood change prompted by large new houses in Vancouver and the city's response to this change. The research method permitted opportunities to look at discrete aspects of the problem, and some of the paths followed are of little further practical value. To explore immigrant buying patterns in more detail, for example, may be interesting but will serve only to reiterate the conclusion that these patterns are simply the result of exclusionary zoning practices. Other areas that the research examined superficially may yield greater practical value. The most important are design control, pre-zoning settlement patterns and sustainable development.

This research began with a belief in the necessity of grass-roots design control and ended with the belief that design controls were unnecessary and possibly harmful. This conclusion may be erroneous. Controls may be necessary, at least initially, to broaden housing choice. In any event, Vancouver's

survey of other cities showed that design and landscape controls are an emerging trend. The difficulty of legislating and implementing such controls and the uncertainty surrounding their efficacy suggests a comparative analysis of cities that already have controls in place. While such research could yield no conclusions about their long-term benefits, it could eliminate methods that have proven unworkable or unfair in practice. Knowing the costs and merit of the various methods already in use would enable cities that are considering design controls to marshal their planning resources more effectively.

The research has suggested that the compact residential pattern that characterized turn-of-the-century development may provide a balance between built and open space more appropriate to the twenty-first century than the suburban pattern which emerged in the twentieth century. In the United States, architects and planners have already applied older patterns to new suburban development, and transportation planners have studied the grid street pattern in an effort to solve contemporary problems of traffic flow. Similar research into Canadian patterns from the past may prove useful in rebuilding established urban and suburban neighbourhoods. Accepting the pre-zoning pattern does not mean the reproduction of the styles of the past, but the reproduction of the principles that made this pattern succeed. Such principles may help to develop a new but equally robust vernacular that can accommodate the cultural values of local residents and immigrants alike.

Research into sustainable residential environments may suggest a set of principles that parallel those that define the pre-zoning pattern in Canada. Sustainability, because it emphasizes reducing, reusing and recycling materials, means the renovation of existing structures where possible and the construction of houses built to last for generations. Concern about the use of

non-renewable resources means a greater reliance on building forms and technologies that work, as in the past, with the constraints of climate and topography to protect residents from the elements. It also means more built and open space, more variety in unit size and tenure to reflect changing household needs, and an infrastructure that supports routines of daily life without high energy costs. Finally, sustainability means densities that are gentle on the land, neither so low nor so high that a costly infrastructure is required to support them. It is possible that these densities would approximate those achieved by the mix of detached and attached houses found in Canadian cities after the mid-1800s. With forms responsive to climate and materials restricted to those that impact as little as possible on the environment, it may be possible for streetscapes to achieve a unity that would permit people to express cultural diversity with little harm to the whole.

Research into older patterns and sustainable residential environments implies densities that many homeowners will resist. At the same time, many urban professionals will find these densities too low for modern cities. But just as it has made little sense to use up land in low-density suburbs that now sprawl beyond a reasonable commute, it makes little sense to rebuild cities to densities that are neither sustainable nor leave no trace of the past beyond the token preservation of a building or a street. Neither is necessary. Canada has cities that have developed their urban and suburban land unwisely and dormant towns that could be thriving communities again. Careful redevelopment of already used land could lead to sustainable communities both in cities now experiencing population growth and in towns that need population to survive.



## Appendix A: Vancouver's Single-Family Regulations

This summary provides an overview of Vancouver's single-family zoning to 1988. Because zoning schedules are complex and technical legal documents, it is inappropriate to do more than selectively summarize critical changes to the schedule, bearing in mind that minor changes and interpretation of the regulations can also affect form and design in single-family dwellings.

In 1925, the British Columbia Legislature passed the province's first Town Planning Act. In 1926, Town Planning Commissions were established for the City of Vancouver and the Municipality of Point Grey.

In 1926, Point Grey passed one of the earliest zoning by-laws in Canada. In its residential zone, one and two-family dwellings could not exceed 35 feet or two-and-one-half storeys in height. Front yards could not be less than 24 feet deep; rear yards could not be less than 25 feet deep; and side yards could not be less than 5 feet. (Lots less than 40 feet wide could have side yards not less than 3 feet). Open space on the site could not be less than 60 percent of lot area. Yard depths defined the **setbacks** for the dwelling, and open space regulated the **site coverage** or the area of the site that buildings could cover.

In 1927, the City of Vancouver passed an interim zoning by-law. In its one- and two-family residential zone, only setbacks were regulated. Front yard depth, excluding open porches, could not be less than 20 feet; side yards could not be less than 10 percent of lot width; and rear yards could not be less than 20 percent of lot depth.

In 1928, the city amended the interim by-law to define one and two-family dwellings, basements, cellars, and accessory buildings. Garages had to be attached to the dwelling or located at least 60 feet from the main street and 5 feet from adjacent streets. The required rear yard could not be less than 25 feet. Side yards remained at 10 percent but need not exceed 5 feet in width. The site area could be no less than 4800 square feet. Relaxations were permitted for sites less than 4800 square feet but not less than 3600 square feet.

These amendments initiated increasingly complex definitions for terms used in the by-law. **Accessory** buildings are buildings on the site (such as a garage or workshop) which serve the principle building. **Basements** are spaces considered high enough out of the ground to be habitable. **Grade** is defined as "the elevation of the surface of the ground at any point on a site", with finished grade being the elevation of the ground after development is completed. Calculating grades can be very complex, and the footnote below shows the precision of the by-law with reference to simpler basement calculations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Basements are defined in the by-law (#3575, 1989) as the "space between two floors, with the lower floor located less than 5 feet below finished grade and the floor surface of the storey above located not more than 6.52 feet above finished grade." Cellars, on the other hand, have their lower floor 5 or more feet below grade.

In 1930, Harland Bartholomew and Associates completed the *Plan for the City of Vancouver*. Only the zoning section of the plan was adopted. The zoning clearly regulated single-family use, but permitted conversion to two-family dwellings with the consent of the Board of Appeal. Height and setback regulations were unchanged from the interim by-law, but front yard averaging was introduced.

In 1938, the city introduced a floor space ratio of 0.45 to regulate the amount of livable space that could be built on the site. Accessory buildings not exceeding 12 feet or one storey in height were permitted in the rear yard as long as they did not exceed one-third of the area of the rear yard. Projections such as steps, eaves, cornices, sills and chimneys were allowed in front and rear yards, and fire escapes were allowed in the rear yard.

In 1939, the city amended the by-law (#2516, 1939) to improve the livability of suites and housekeeping rooms and adjusted the definitions of one and two-family dwellings. As well, **floor space ratio** was defined (rather ambiguously in terms of basement space) to mean:

the ratio obtained by dividing the total area of all the floors within all the buildings on a site including accessory buildings, by the area of the site less any proposed street or lane dedications as determined by the Director of Planning. Basements or cellars shall not be counted as floor area for the purpose of computing floor space except where basements are considered as habitable accommodation under the city by-laws.

In the late 1940s, the Town Planning Commission concluded that the city's needs had grown beyond its own small staff working with consultants. In 1951, the city established a Planning Department and subsequently appointed a Director of Planning reporting directly to City Council. In 1956, the city discontinued front yard averaging and the rear setback was changed to 35 feet measured from the centre line of the lane.

In 1974, the city introduced a site coverage of 45 percent and changed the floor space ratio to 0.60 (including basement space). The accessory building regulation was more rigorously defined but remained generous in size.

In 1986, maximum height was reduced from 35 to 30 feet, the rear setback was increased to 45 percent of lot depth and front yard averaging was introduced again. Averaging is currently determined by averaging the setbacks of the two adjacent buildings on either side of the development site (four sites in total) to establish the setback for new development.

In 1988, site coverage was reduced to 40 percent of lot area and a sliding scale (30 percent of lot area plus 1000 square feet) was introduced to regulate the amount of floor space built above-grade. Roof heights and floor area ratio now control basement depth. For houses built after April 12, 1988, the by-law (#3575, 1990) stipulates that basement height from grade to the floor surface of the main floor cannot exceed 4 feet if the basement is to be excluded from above-grade floor space calculations. This regulation pushes basements deeply into the ground and contrasts with the "high" basements common to houses built before the Second World War.

Table 13:—Selective Summary of Vancouver's Single-Family Schedule  
1927 – 1988

Date	Setbacks			Height		Site Coverage	Floor		Floor Area
	Front	Side	Rear	Peak	Eave		Space	Ratio	
1927	20'	10%	20%	—	—	—	—	—	—
1928	20'	10%	25'	—	—	—	—	—	—
1930	<b>24'*</b>	10%	25'	<b>35'</b>	—	—	—	—	—
1938	24'	10%	25'	35'	—	—	<b>.45</b>		2970
1956	24'*	10%	<b>35'</b>	35'	—	—	.45		3550
1974	24'	10%	35'	35'	—	<b>45%</b>	<b>.60</b>		2376
1986	24'*	10%	<b>45%</b>	<b>30'</b>	<b>21'</b>	45%	.60		2376
1988	<b>20%</b>	10%	45%	30'	<b>24'</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>Scale</b>		2376

Source: City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-Laws.

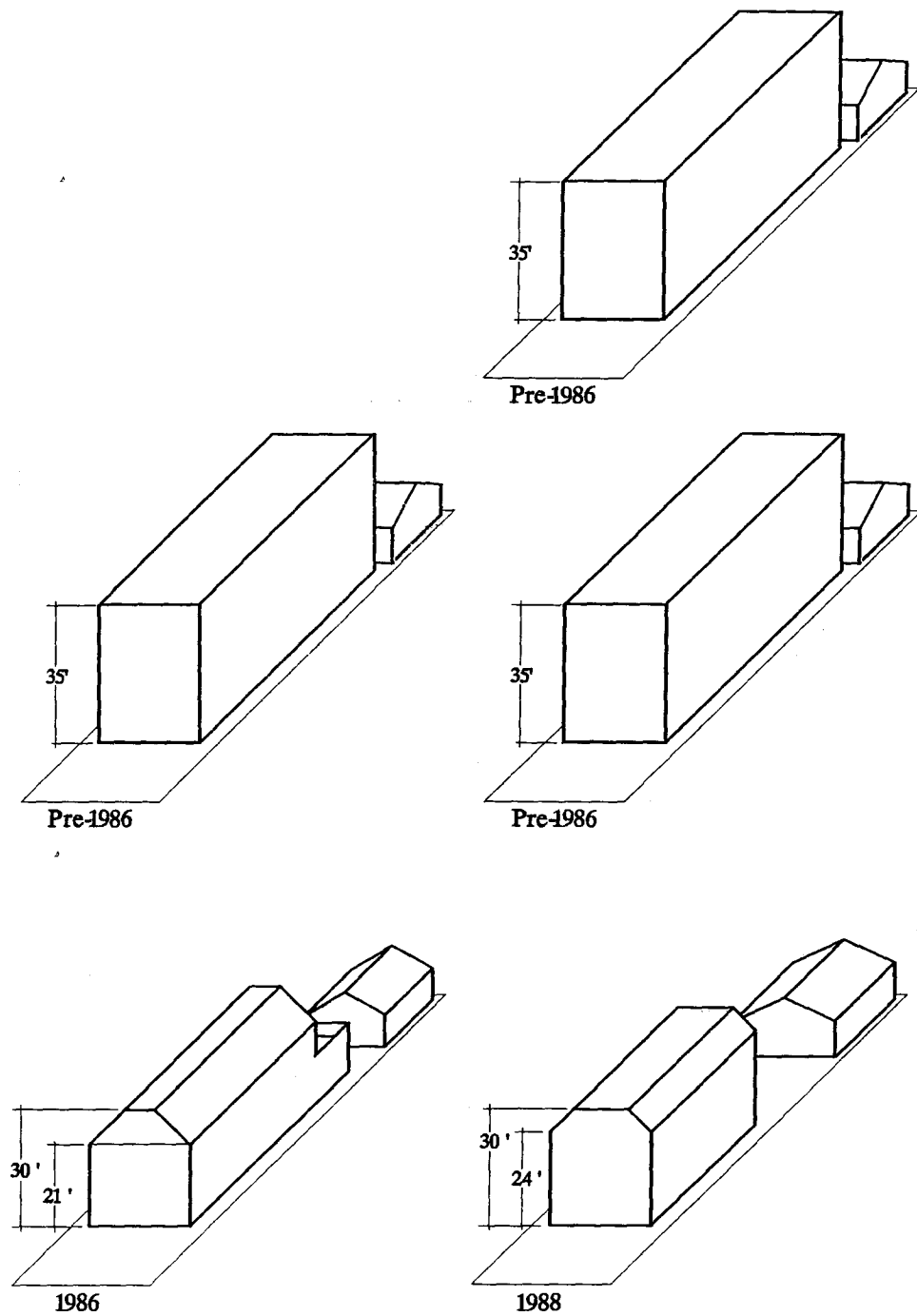
Table 13 summarizes the critical change to the schedule. Asterisks (\*) indicate that averaging was introduced in 1930, discontinued in 1956 and reintroduced in 1986. All other changes are **boldfaced**.

Floor area calculations have been made for the maximum space that could be achieved achieved on 33 by 120-foot lots after each zoning change. Although floor space ratios are lower before the 1974 zoning changes, the total floor area permitted was greater before 1974 because basements were excluded from floor space calculations. These floor areas can be matched to total floor areas on page 222. With the exception of the first drawing and the drawing accompanying the 1956 bylaw, the drawings illustrate typical forms of each zoning period built to maximum size.

The first drawing (page 222, top left) shows how the 1938 zoning schedule would have reduced the typical size (dotted line extension) of 1900s two-and-one-half storey houses if such dwellings had been built after the First World War. The second drawing (top right) shows a typical form after the First World War at maximum size. Most houses of the period, however, did not achieve maximum size, but ranged from about 1800 to 2400 square feet (including basements) on 33-foot lots. The drawing accompanying the 1956 by-law (centre left) shows the form of new construction during the 1950s and 1960s at typical rather than maximum size. This form, the early Vancouver Special, grew in size over the period, but houses built at maximum size were the exception rather than the rule. After 1974, Specials were built at or near the maximums permitted by the zoning schedule.

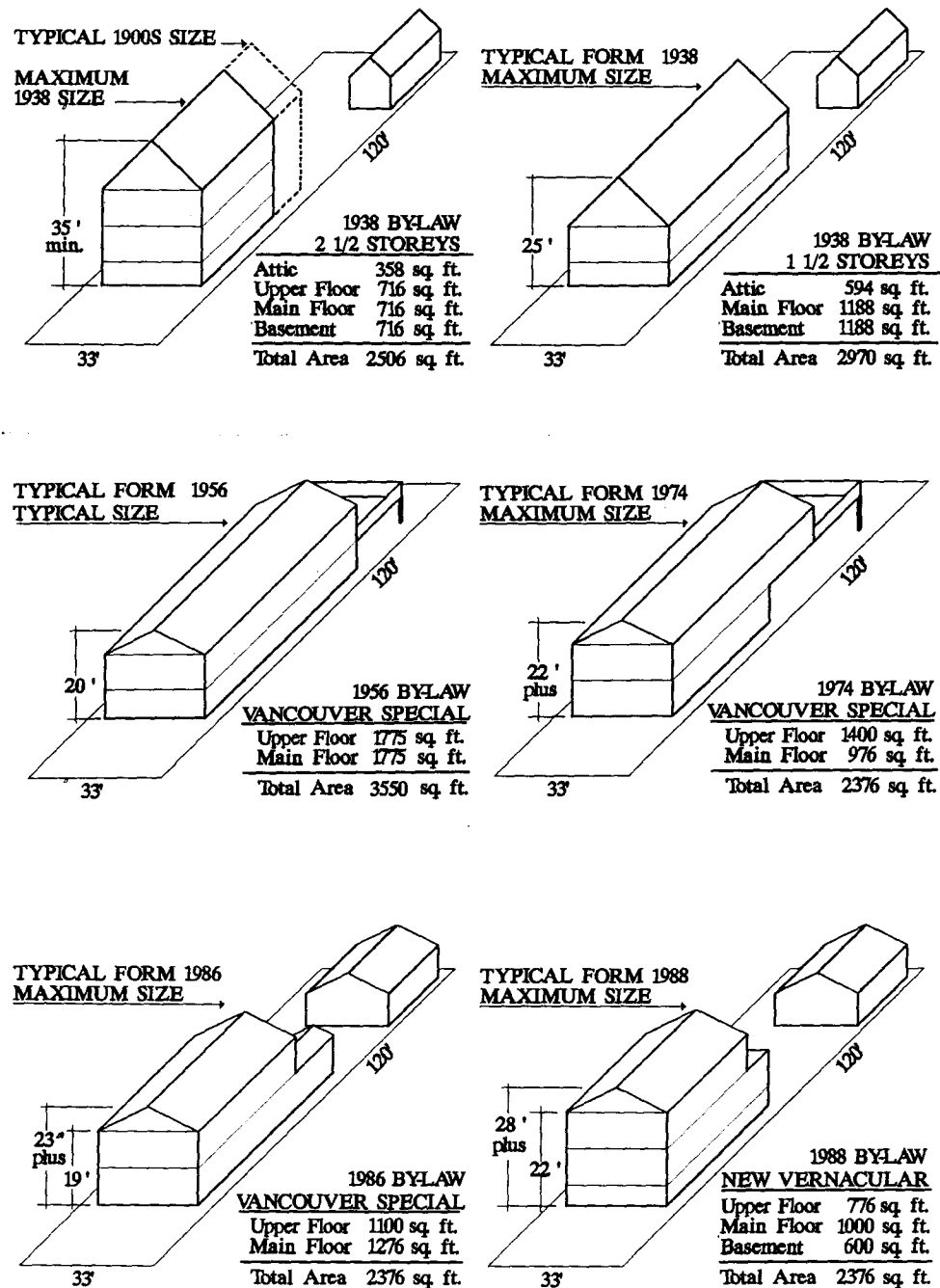
A copy of the RS-1 District Schedule prior to the 1986 changes and the proposed changes to the schedule in 1990 completes Appendix A.

## Building Envelopes 1930 – 1988



**Figure 28.** The building envelope remained essentially unchanged until 1986. This page can be reproduced on mylar to show more clearly the relationship between envelopes and typical forms.

## Cumulative Results of Zoning Changes



**Figure 29.** The drawings show typical forms for each zoning period and calculations for maximum floor areas permitted (except for 1956) for a 33 by 120 foot lot.

# RS-1 DISTRICT SCHEDULE

## 1 Intent

The intent of this Schedule is to maintain the single-family residential character of the District.

## 2 Outright Approval Uses

2.1 Subject to all other provisions of this By-law and to compliance with the regulations of this Schedule, the uses listed in Section 2.2 shall be permitted in this District and shall be issued a permit.

## 2.2 USES

2.2.A ● Accessory Buildings and accessory uses customarily ancillary to any of the uses listed in the section provided that:

- (a) no accessory building exceeds 12 feet in height;
- (b) all accessory buildings are located in the rear yard and in no case are less than 5 feet from a flanking street, subject also to the provisions of Section 11.1 of this By-law;
- (c) the total area of all accessory buildings is not greater than 35 percent of the minimum rear yard prescribed in this Schedule, or 520 square feet, whichever is the greater;
- (d) not more than 80 percent of the width of the rear yard of any lot is occupied by accessory buildings.

2.2.D ● One-family Dwelling.

## 3 Conditional Approval Uses

3.1 Subject to all other provisions of this By-law and the provisions and regulations of this Schedule, the Director of Planning may approve any of the uses listed in Section 3.2 including such conditions or additional regulations as he may decide, provided that before making a decision he:

- (a) considers the intent of this Schedule and the recommendations of any advisory groups, plan or guidelines approved by Council for the area; and *(see Appendix G)*

*Author's Note: This schedule, effective before the 1986 zoning changes, illustrates the basis for the 1986, 1988 and 1990 amendments. Subsequent schedules grew in length and complexity.*

(b) notifies such adjacent property owners and residents he deems necessary.

### **3.2**      **USES**

- 3.2.A**      • Accessory Buildings and accessory uses customarily ancillary to any of the uses listed in this section, subject to the same provisions of subsection 2.2.A.
- Accessory Buildings and accessory uses not in compliance with the provisions of subsection 2.2.A.
- Aircraft Landing Place.
- 3.2.B**      • Boarding House or Rooming House resulting from the conversion of a building where the conversion took place prior to June 18, 1956 and the use has been continual since that time, provided that any development permit granted shall be limited in time.
- 3.2.C**      • Child Day Care Facility.
- Church, subject to the provisions of Section 11.7 of this By-law.
- Community Centre or Neighbourhood House.
- 3.2.D**      • Deposition or extraction of material so as to alter the configuration of the land.
- Dwelling Unit or Housekeeping Unit which existed prior to and has been used continuously as such since June 18, 1956, provided that any development permit granted shall be limited in time.
- 3.2.G**      • Golf Course.
- 3.2.H**      • Hospital, but not including a conversion from an existing building, a mental hospital or an animal hospital, subject to the provisions of Section 11.9 of this By-law.
- 3.2.I**      • Institution of a religious, philanthropic or charitable character.
- 3.2.L**      • Local Area Office
- 3.2.M**      • Marina, but not including boat building and major repairs and overhaul of boats.

- 3.2.P
  - Park or Playground.
  - Parking Area ancillary to a principal use on an adjacent site.
  - Public Authority Building or use essential in this District.
  - Public Utility.
- 3.2.S
  - School (public or private), subject to the provisions of Section 11.8 of this By-law.
  - Social Service Centre operated by a non-profit society.
  - Special Needs Residential Facility, subject to the provisions of Section 11.9.
  - Stadium or any similar place of assembly.
- 3.2.T
  - Tourist Court, subject to the provisions of Section 11.12 of this By-law.
  - Truck Garden, Nursery or Greenhouse for propagating and cultivating.

#### **4 Regulations**

All uses approved under Sections 2 and 3 of this District Schedule shall be subject to the following regulations:

##### **4.1 SITE AREA**

- 4.1.1 The minimum site area for a one-family dwelling shall be 4,800 square feet.
- 4.1.2 Where the site is less than 32 feet in width or less than 3,600 square feet in area, the design of any new dwelling shall first require the approval of the Director of Planning.

##### **4.2 FRONTAGE — Not Applicable**

##### **4.3 HEIGHT**

- 4.3.1 The maximum height of a building shall be the lesser of 35 feet or 2½ storeys.

##### **4.4 FRONT YARD**

- 4.4.1 A front yard with a minimum depth of 24 feet shall be provided.
- 4.4.2 In the case of a site having an average depth of less than 120 feet,



- (a) balconies, canopies, sundecks and other features which the Director of Planning considers similar, permitted to a maximum total area of 8 percent of the floor area;
- (b) patios and roof gardens, provided that the Director of Planning first approves the design of sunroofs and walls;
- (c) parking areas, the floors of which are at or below the highest point of the finished grade around the building;
- (d) child day care facilities to a maximum floor area of 10 percent of the permitted floor area, provided the Director of Planning, on the advice of the Director of Social Planning, is satisfied that there is a need for a day care facility in the immediate neighbourhood.

**4.7.4** For the purpose of calculating floor space ratio in this District Schedule, the depth of a riparian site measured from the abutting street shall be the lesser of:

- (a) 120 feet or
- (b) the depth thereof as determined from any plan or other document of record in the Land Title Office as of the 15th day of April 1978, and relating to the boundaries thereof.

#### **4.8** SITE COVERAGE

**4.8.1** The maximum site coverage for buildings shall be 45 percent of the site area.

**4.8.2** For the purpose of this section, site coverage for buildings shall be based on the projected area of the outside of the outermost walls of all buildings and includes carports, but excludes steps, eaves, cantilevered balconies and sundecks.

**4.8.3** Except where the principal use of the site is a parking area, the maximum site coverage for any portion of the site used as parking area shall be 30 percent.

#### **4.9** OFF-STREET PARKING AND LOADING SPACES

**4.9.1** Off-street parking and loading spaces shall be provided and maintained in accordance with the provisions of Section 12 of this By-law.



## **CITY OF VANCOUVER NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

**Proposed Amendments to Zoning and Development  
By-law, No. 3575.**

On **THURSDAY MARCH 15, 1990**, COMMENCING AT 7:30 P.M. in the AUDITORIUM, SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL SECONDARY SCHOOL, AT 7055 HEATHER STREET (HEATHER STREET AND 54TH AVENUE) the Council of the City of Vancouver will hold a Public Hearing pursuant to the provisions of the **Vancouver Charter**, to consider the following proposed by-law amendments:

**TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE RS-1 AND RS-15 DISTRICTS SCHEDULE**

Council will be considering two alternative by-laws:

### **BY-LAW A**

The proposed amendments, if approved, would:

- (1) increase the permitted height from 30 to 35 feet and refine the building envelope to reduce the width of upper floors to 50 percent of site width;
- (2) reduce the permitted above-ground floor space ratio to 0.23 plus 1,250 square feet from the current 0.30 plus 1,000 square feet;
- (3) encourage covered porches by excluding their floor area from above-ground floor space ratio;
- (4) establish design regulations for exterior finishing materials; and
- (5) any consequential amendments.

### **BY-LAW B**

The proposed amendments, if approved, would:

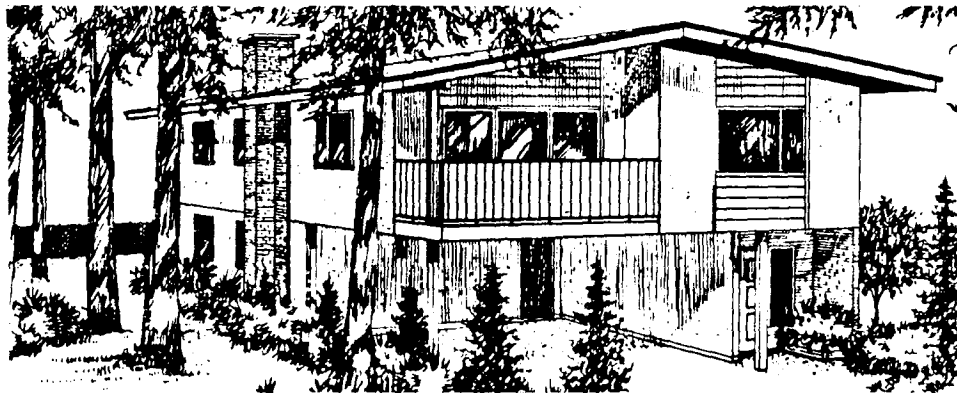
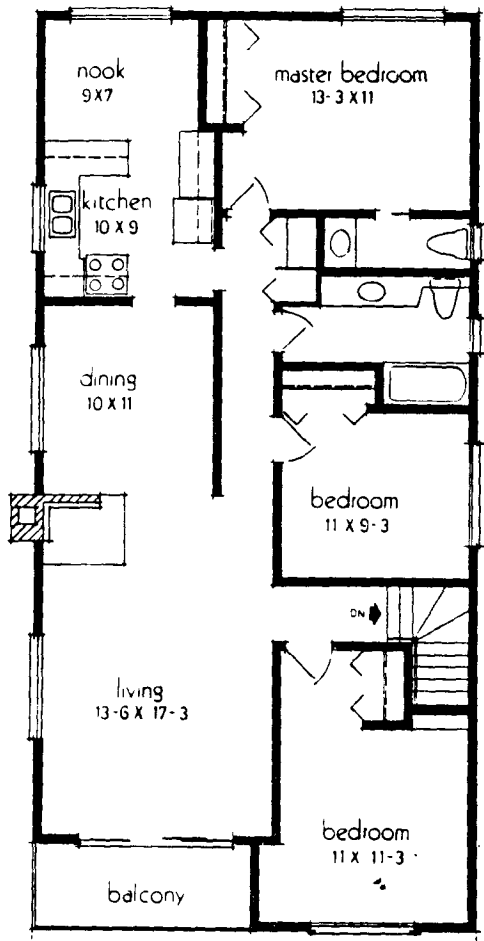
- (1) maintain the existing permitted height of 30 feet and refine the building envelope to reduce the width of upper floors to 60 percent of site width;
- (2) establish a sliding scale to require larger side yards on wider sites;
- (3) reduce the permitted above-ground floor space ratio to 0.20 plus 1,400 square feet from the current 0.30 plus 1,000 square feet;
- (4) encourage covered porches by excluding their floor area from above-ground floor space ratio;
- (5) establish design regulations for exterior finishing materials; and
- (6) any consequential amendments.

At the Public Hearing, all persons who deem themselves affected by the proposed by-laws shall be afforded an opportunity to be heard before Council on matters contained therein. Copies of the draft by-laws may be seen on and after Monday, March 5, 1990, at the City Clerk's Office and in the Planning Department, City Hall, 453 West 12th Avenue, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday to Friday on regular working days.

**Maria Kinsella  
CITY CLERK**

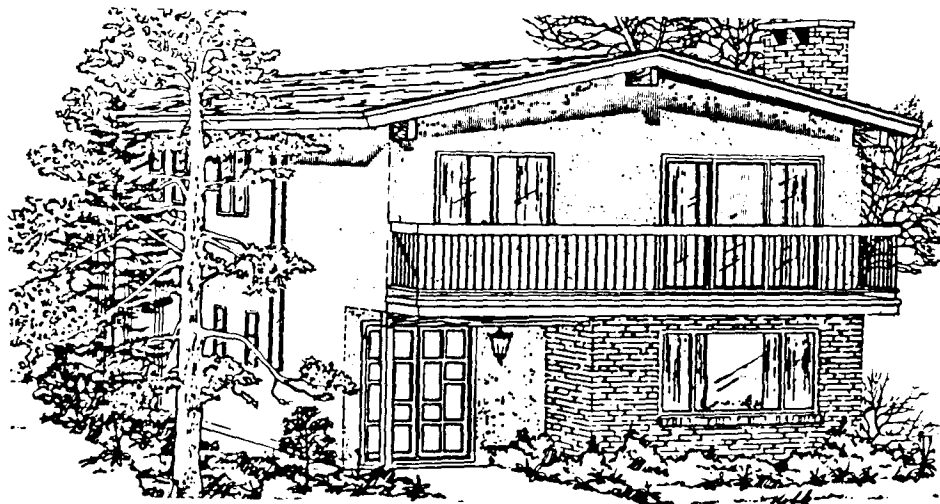
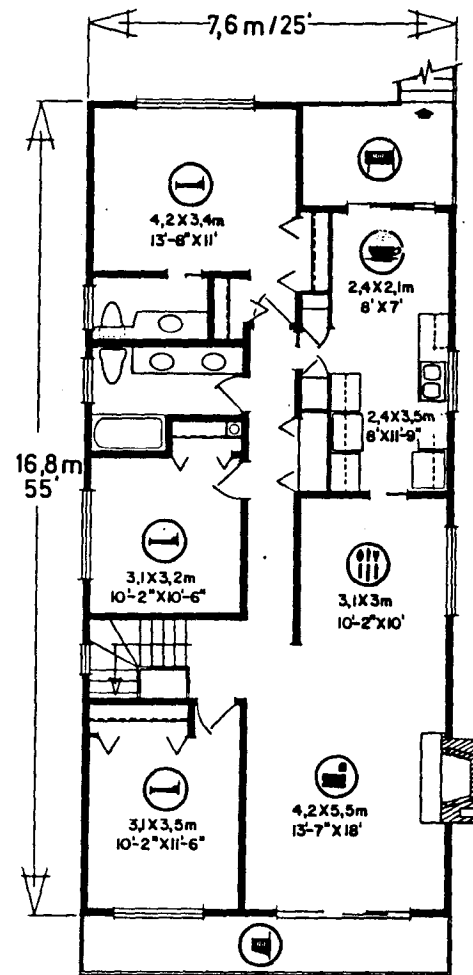
## Appendix B: Plans, Elevations and Perspectives Vancouver Specials and Monster Homes

### 1960s Special

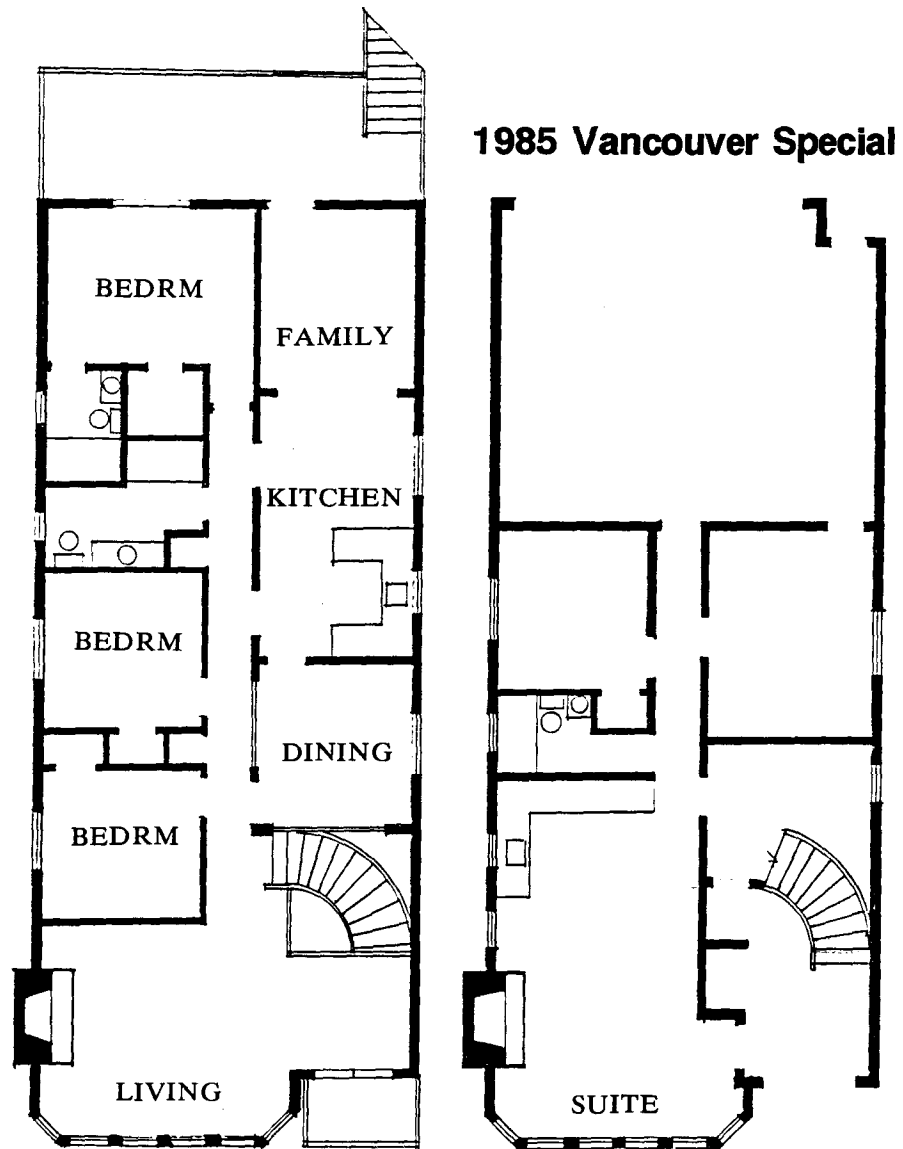


**Figure 30.** A Vancouver Special dating around 1968 shows its origins as a ranch bungalow on a raised "basement". Courtesy of Select Homes Designs, Series 32, no. 40, 198.

## 1970s Vancouver Special

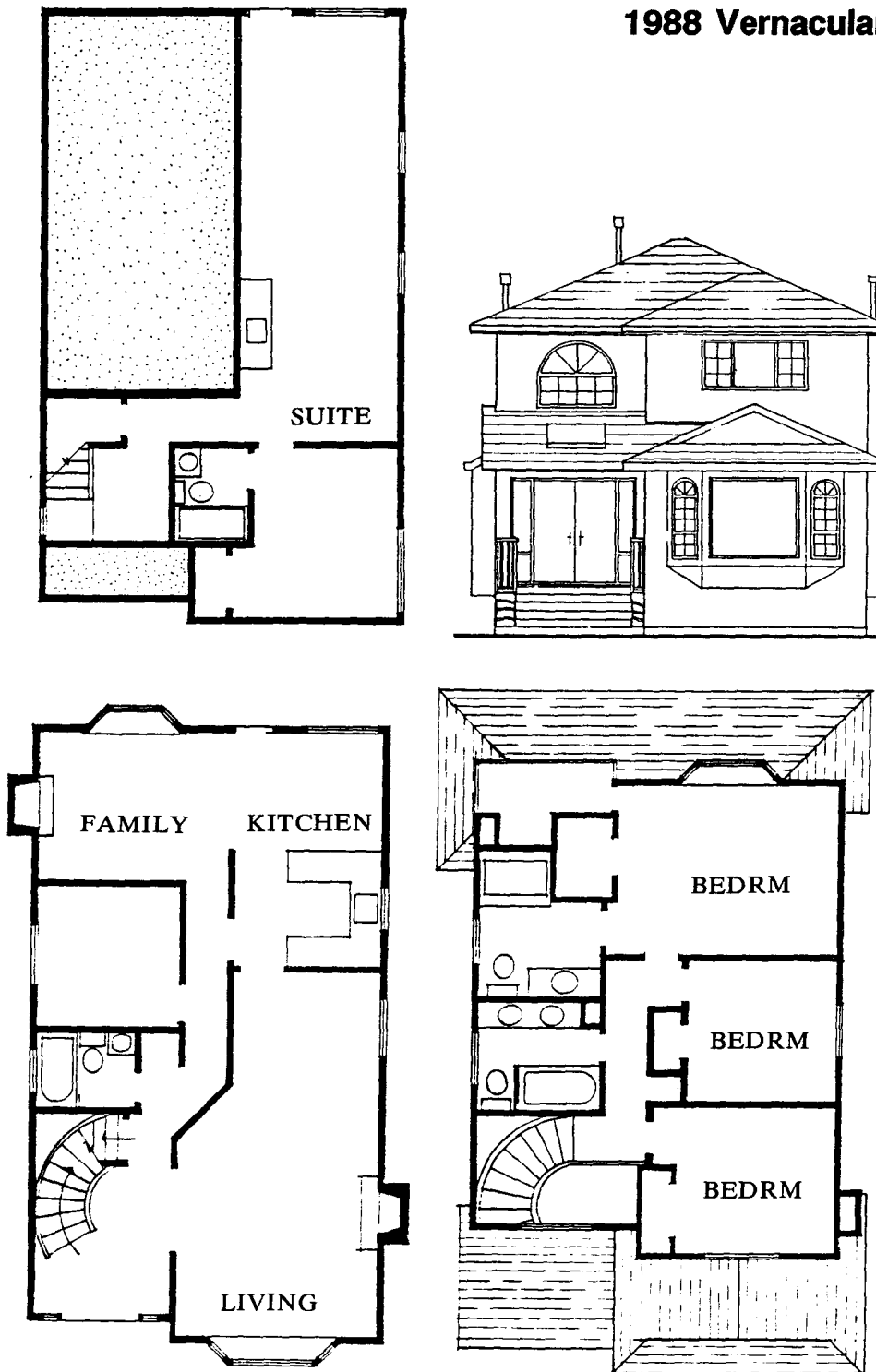


**Figure 31.** A Vancouver Special dating around 1972 shows the use of brick cladding on the facade which was typical until the late 1980s. Courtesy Select Homes Designs, Series 32, no. 14, 193.



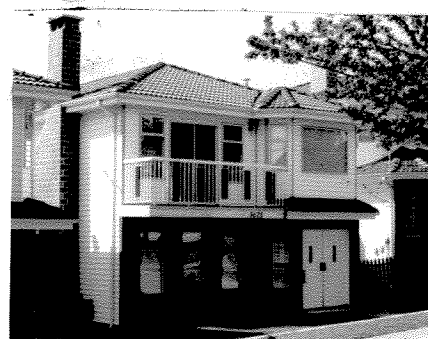
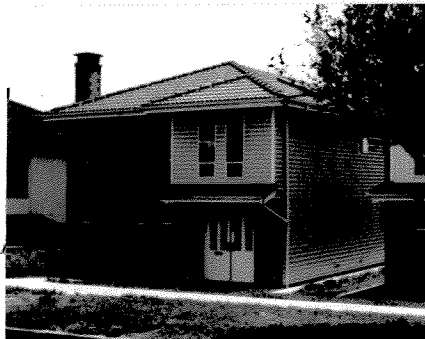
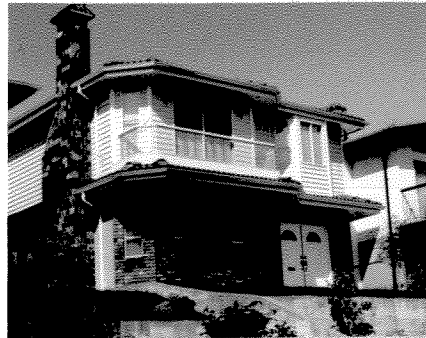
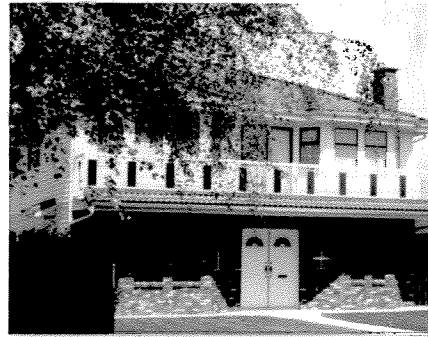
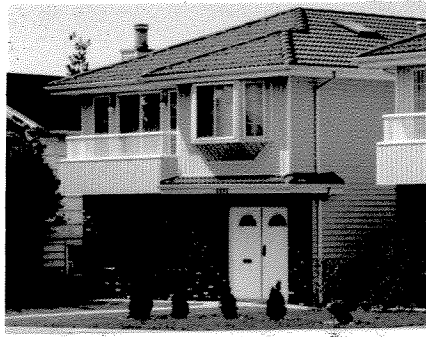
**Figure 32.** A Vancouver Special approved for construction just before the 1986 zoning amendments. The house is designed to full floor space ratio and, with garage, has a 42 percent site coverage. The house is 25 feet wide, 68 feet long, and typical in plan. Permit JP202277.

## 1988 Vernacular



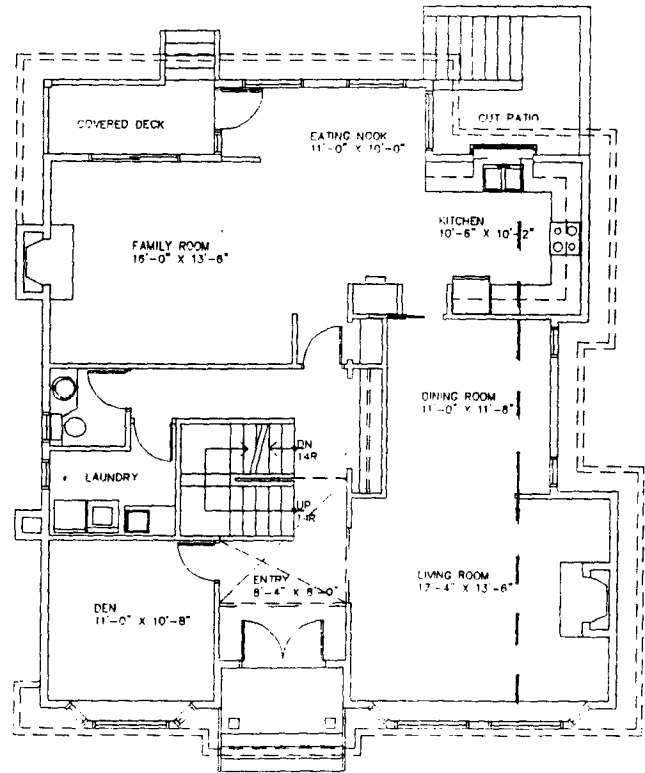
**Figure 33.** This house, designed after the 1988 zoning amendments, has little in common with Vancouver Specials. Permit JP204725.

## Variants of Vancouver Specials

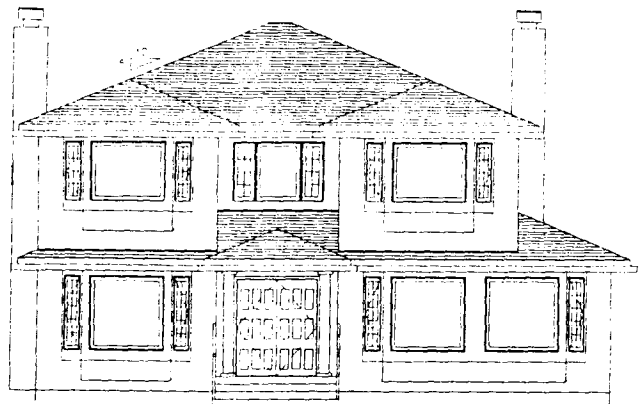


**Photo 24.** The similarity of Vancouver Specials can be seen in these photographs taken from the survey of homes constructed after the zoning changes.

## 1990 Monster House (Hypothetical)

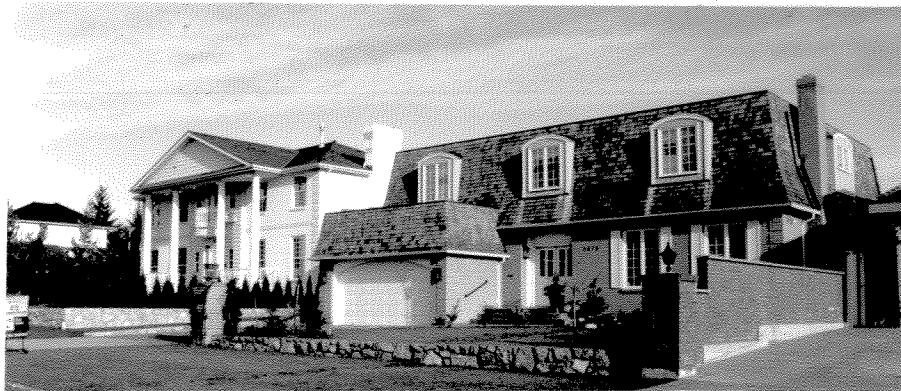


**Figure 34.** Plans and elevations by Intarsia predict the results of the 1990 zoning amendments on a 50' by 120' lot. The second-storey setback results in a wall over first floor windows as shown in elevation and in plan (long single dashed line). This expensive structural response to the amendments occurred in many homes built after 1990.



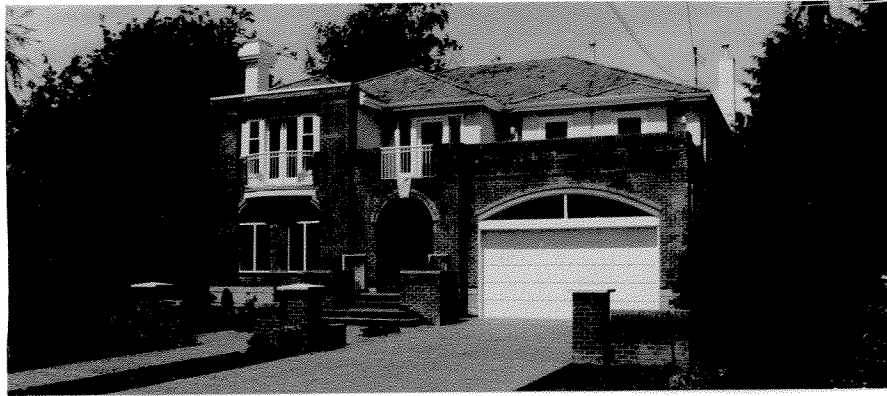


## Variants of Monster Homes



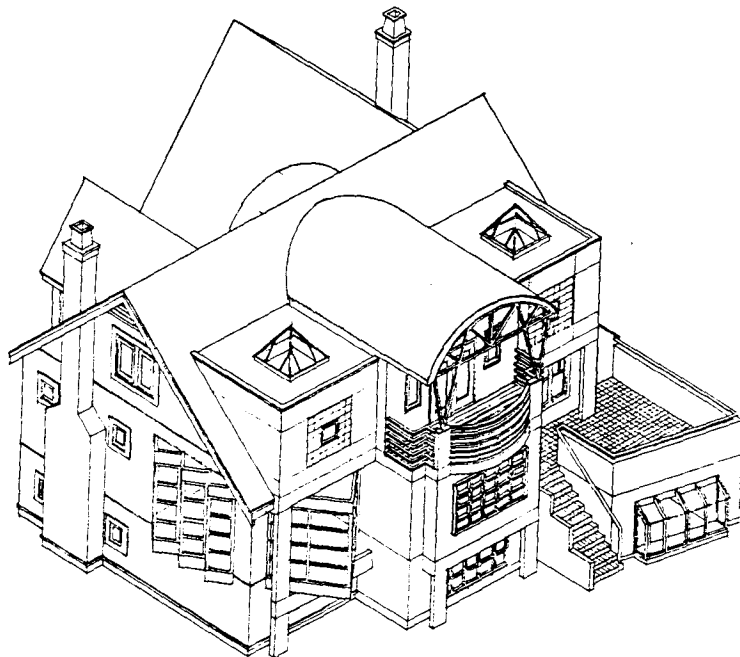
**Photo 25.** Variants of large or "monster" homes built after the 1986 amendments.

## Variants of Monster Homes



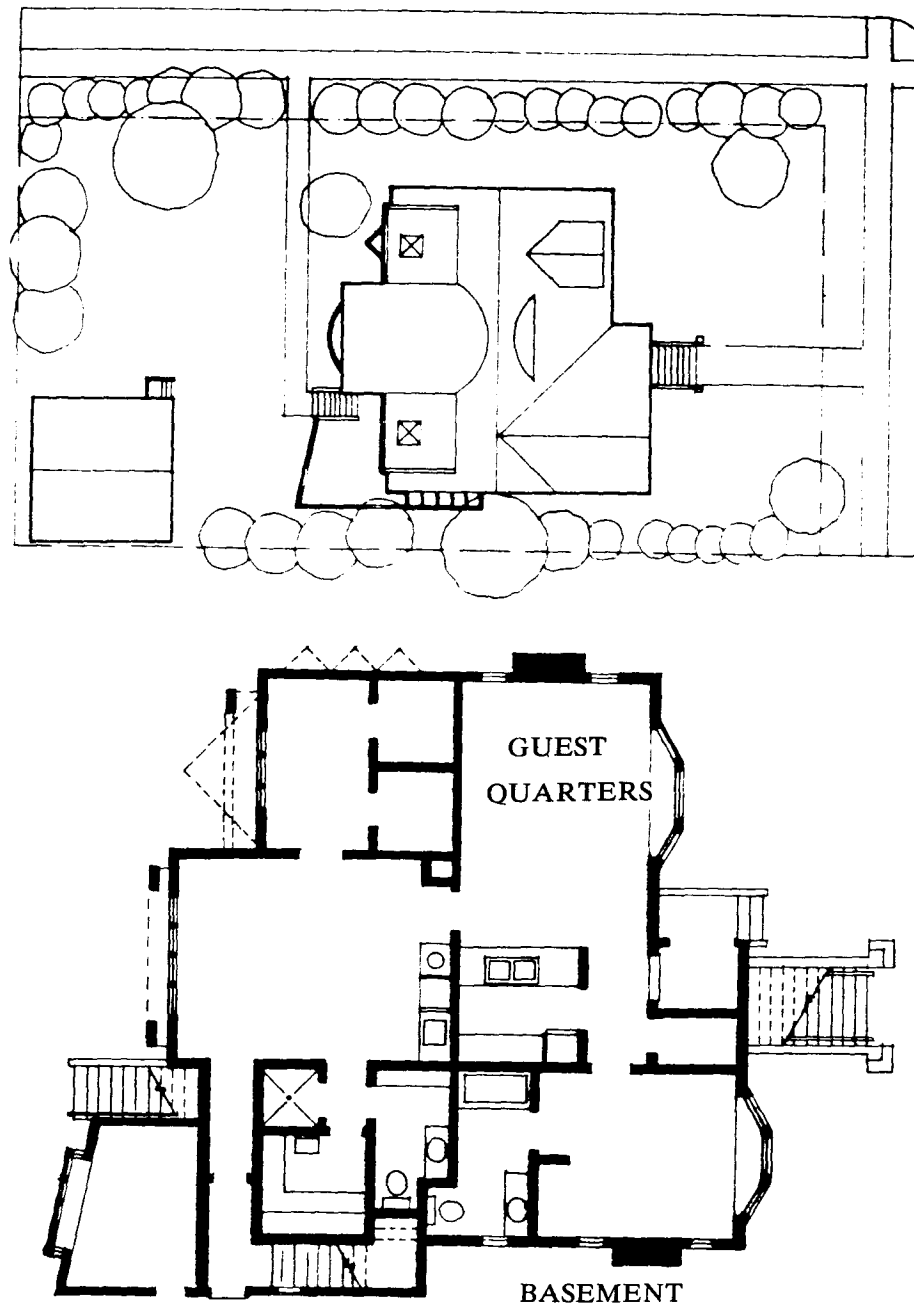
**Photo 26.** Variants of large or "monster" homes built after the 1988 amendments.

## Appendix C: Renovations and Conversions A Storey-and-a-Half Dwelling



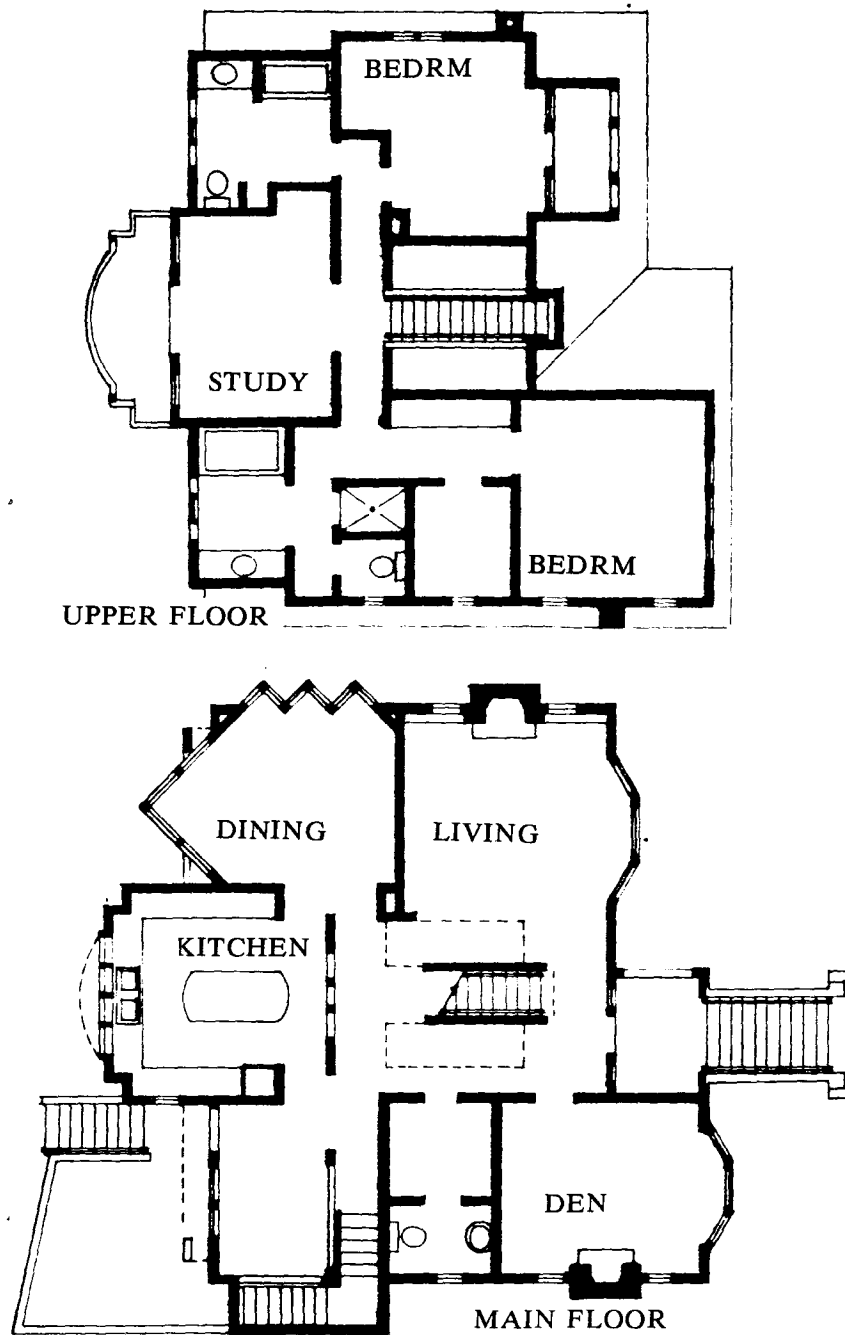
**Figure 35.** A renovation after the 1986 zoning amendments fits the context of the street. The three-dimensional drawing shows how the architect juxtaposed contextuality of the front facade (top) with dramatic design at the rear. The house required a height relaxation to fit the envelope (Board of Variance Appeal # 224025). Drawings courtesy of architect Franklin Allen.

## Storey-and-a-Half Dwelling: Site Plan and Basement



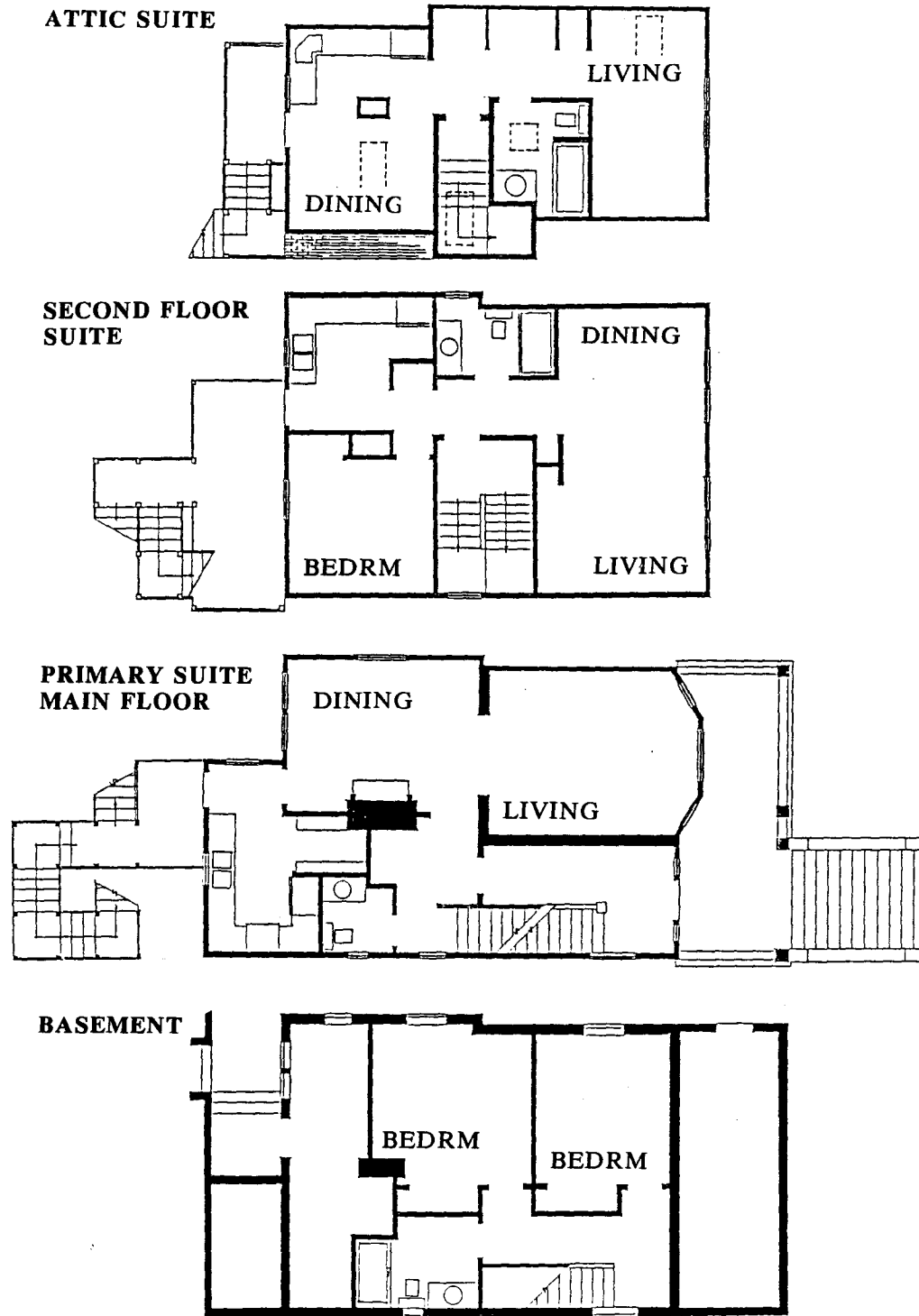
**Figure 36.** Site plan and basement of renovation. The renovation has the maximum floor space permitted. Above-grade floor space increased from 0.31 to 0.39 and site coverage increased from 25 to 29 percent. These figures are substantially lower than average floor space ratios and site coverages for the 1986 and 1988 samples.

## Storey-and-a-Half Dwelling: Main and Second Floor



**Figure 37.** Main and upper floor plans of the renovation. Renovation costs were substantially less than costs for new construction.

## Renovation and Conversion: A Converted Davis House



**Figure 38.** Plans of one of the Davis houses show the conversion to three suites. The possible conversion to two suites (by removing the third floor kitchen) or to a single-family dwelling (by removing kitchens in second and third suites) shows the flexibility of the large house.

## Appendix D: Tables

Table 14:—Housing Characteristics by Selected Local Areas 1971 – 1986

	Units/ Acre	Percent Owned		Percent Detached	
		1971	1986	1971	1986
Dunbar	3.1	89	85	95	88
Kerrisdale	3.1	62	61	62	60
Oakridge	4.1	70	63	70	59
Shaughnessy	2.5	71	79	72	73
S. Cambie	4.1	62	58	65	58
Point Grey	5.2	66	60	75	60
Hastings	3.8	77	69	86	73
Kensington	6.6	72	61	79	63
Renfrew	4.0	82	71	90	73
Riley Park	5.5	63	58	67	59
Sunset	5.0	72	68	81	76
Fraserview	5.3	77	70	83	74
<b>West Side Areas</b>	3.5	72	69	75	68
<b>East Side Areas</b>	4.8	74	66	81	70
<b>Vancouver</b>	6.4	47	42	50	38

Source: *Vancouver Local Areas 1971 and 1986*. Units per acre for 1986.

Table 15:— Mobility in Single-Family Zones 1971 – 1976  
Percentage of Individuals in Each Mobility Status

	Within CMA	From B.C.	From Canada	Inter- Nat'l	Don't Move
Dunbar	24.1	2.7	4.8	5.9	62.0
Kerrisdale	28.2	2.2	4.2	3.6	60.8
Oakridge	23.9	1.3	3.8	8.6	61.3
Shaughnessy	27.3	1.9	5.6	6.7	57.6
South Cambie	26.6	2.2	5.8	9.2	52.4
Point Grey	27.9	3.1	7.3	7.2	53.0
Hastings	25.4	1.6	3.4	7.7	60.9
Kensington	27.0	2.9	4.4	11.7	52.9
Renfrew	26.7	2.2	3.5	8.7	57.8
Riley Park	27.3	2.7	4.9	11.0	52.8
Sunset	27.2	2.5	3.7	12.8	53.0
Fraserview	27.6	1.6	2.0	7.2	60.1
Vancouver	31.1	3.2	6.2	9.8	47.7
Vancouver CMA	36.0	4.1	7.2	7.0	45.7

Source: *Vancouver Local Areas 1976*.

Table 16:—Percentage Changes in Age by Local Area 1971 – 1986

	0–14	15–24	25–44	45 plus
<b>Single-Family West</b>				
Dunbar	-6.8	0	7.4	0
Kerrisdale	-4.5	-2.1	8.6	-2.0
Oakridge	-5.8	-3.0	2.3	6.6
Shaughnessy	-5.3	-1.8	5.2	1.9
South Cambie	-3.5	-3.0	9.3	-3.3
W. Point Grey	-5.0	-4.5	10.3	-0.9
<b>Single-Family East</b>				
Hastings	-11.6	-0.4	10.6	1.4
Kensington	-7.3	0.7	6.6	-0.1
Renfrew	-7.2	0.3	5.7	1.1
Riley Park	-11.8	-1.7	9.5	1.1
Sunset	-5.7	-0.2	5.3	0.6
Fraserview	-6.8	-3.1	4.9	3.8
<b>Multi-Family</b>				
Arbutus	-4.5	-3.5	5.1	2.9
CBD	-1.7	1.4	11.7	-11.4
Grandview	-9.4	-2.1	11.6	-0.3
Fairview	0	-10.0	22.4	-12.5
Killarney	-6.7	-2.1	7.0	1.6
Kitsilano	-4.8	-8.2	20.5	-7.5
Marpole	-4.4	-4.1	11.6	-3.3
Mount Pleasant	-5.9	-4.9	14.5	-3.7
Strathcona	-6.4	-0.3	6.2	0.5
West End	-2.3	-7.0	11.8	-2.5
<b>Vancouver</b>	<b>-5.5</b>	<b>-2.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>-1.5</b>

Percentage changes in population by age groups show clustering of 25–44 age group in multi-family areas.



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