

**'A new breed of group':
Community Activism in Vancouver's Strathcona Neighbourhood, 1968-1972**

by

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Abstract

Between 1968 and 1972 the residents of Vancouver's inner-city neighbourhood of Strathcona were engaged in a movement to stop the clearance and redevelopment of their neighbourhood. While mobilized around this effort to protect their homes, this movement had broader goals focused on reforming the democratic structures that had left them in such a marginal position. Residents succeeded on both accounts, halting the City of Vancouver's plan to replace their houses with high-density apartment blocks while also reforming political attitudes towards inner city communities and enhancing civic engagement. This was a genuinely grassroots movement of residents who had no experience challenging structures of authority or engaging in political activism. While this case study does fit within a wider context of urban community activism in the late 1960s and 1970s, Strathcona stands as a unique case as witnessed in the neighbourhood's ethnic, class, and generational diversity, as well as by the lack of experience in activism by those who participated in the fight to save the community. This paper is an analysis of the community structure, tactics, and strategies, as led by residents and organizers with the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association, or SPOTA.

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Introduction

As in many North American cities, urban activism and protest exploded in Vancouver in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Community groups and neighbourhood associations organized to protest massive infrastructure projects, social housing developments, and slum clearance schemes. In Vancouver, this activism was centered in the inner-city neighbourhood of Strathcona, one of its oldest residential neighbourhoods and a community characterized by shifting waves of first-generation immigrants, working-class families, aging bachelor sojourners, and a mix of homeowners and tenement renters. In 1968 residents mobilized against a city plan to expropriate and demolish their houses in order to replace them with high-density social housing. The residents halted the project but they also succeeded in a larger goal of reforming the democratic structures that had left them in such a marginal position. In Strathcona, the people protesting at public meetings, writing petitions, and going door-to-door to organize and mobilize their neighbours were more often unilingual Chinese immigrants, first-generation Ukrainian merchants, or ageing Italian homeowners than they were the idealistic university-trained organizers who characterized urban activism in other cities.

While the activism in Strathcona paralleled a contemporary North American political phenomenon, Strathcona stands out as an exception to other urban community movements of the period. Many of the latter tended to take place in ethnically homogenous neighbourhoods where many participants were experienced activists. Strathcona, however, was a multiethnic community with a strong Chinese presence alongside a large number of southern and eastern European residents. This area is deserving of study because, in contrast with other community movements of the time, these residents had little-to-no experience in activism, did not have the benefit of trained "professional" organizers, and engaged in a creative movement where strategies, tactics, and organizational structure expressed a genuinely grassroots character.

Inner city community activism was one of the defining aspects of North American politics in the 1970s. As the ideologically-rooted politics of the 1960s faded, a new form of direct democratic action emerged in cities across the continent. The activists and organizers behind this movement regarded the local community and the civic arena as a new staging ground for democratic reform. These groups were local in origin and were most often catalyzed around the issue of defending a neighbourhood against massive infrastructure or housing schemes promoted by a coalition of governments and developers. Much of this activism outwardly appears to have been conservative in nature and rooted in the impulse of residents to stop development in their backyards. But in the course of realizing their capacity to restrict such development, residents in marginalized neighbourhoods also awakened to the broader realization that it was governments that had placed them in this precarious position. Strathcona resident and activist Shirley Chan recalled this awakening:

For me it was listening to my dad and mom and recognizing [that] there was a tremendous injustice being done and feeling the drive to correct the injustice, needing to correct the injustice... It was fundamentally altering. You become conscious of a whole other layer and where government can be evil. Government, whether intentionally or not was doing something very bad.¹

Throughout North America in the 1960s and 1970s residents in working-class communities were awakening to the reality that these development projects were the ultimate indicators of their limited power.

The experiences and actions of Strathcona residents provide insights into how “ordinary” citizens, often from marginalized communities, engage in the process of democratic reform. The mobilization of Strathcona residents against the planned clearance and reconstruction of their neighbourhood, which peaked between 1968 and 1972, was led by the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association (SPOTA), formed in November 1968. From the outset, the residents’ resistance to urban renewal was a creative movement that sought to redefine the ways in which citizens interact with various levels of government. This was a resident-driven

grassroots movement that succeeded through strategies of organization and mobilization that were cultural in origin.²

Chapter 1: Case Studies of Community Activism in the late 1960s and 1970s

Case studies of American community movements form the core of the theoretical literature examining this activism in the 1960s and 1970s, with the exception of a small number of works that examine urban renewal and a proposed freeway in Toronto. The American literature regards community activism as a uniquely American political movement rooted within the local democratic traditions of the United States and mobilized against an unresponsive system of government.³ Such inner city activism, however, was not particular to the United States, as the Strathcona and Toronto examples attest. What follows is a critical examination of the academic literature of American community activism in the 1970s, serving both as a tool to help understand the Strathcona case and a means to demonstrate Strathcona's particularity.

All community activist movements of the 1970s were oriented in some way towards democratic goals. For instance, in writing about citizen organizing in the US, Harry C. Boyte argues that activists and organizations "moved from simple criticism of specific abuses to deeper analyses of the very structure of power and decision making itself."⁴ Boyte notes that the vast majority of these community movements had formed in reaction to infrastructure, housing, or slum clearance projects but insists that these were merely catalysts to broader goals centered on democratic reform. In his study of The Industrial Areas Foundation, an activist resource and finance network in the United States set up by Chicago community activist Saul Alinsky, Mark R. Warren writes that community activists were mobilized by a desire to rebuild structures of local democracy that had been eroded by the three levels of government.⁵ In studying the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and 80s, sociologist Barbara Epstein similarly emphasizes that community activism was more broadly social in its goals than it was oriented around specific issues. "The direct action movement" she asserts, "has been about cultural revolution."⁶

Also important for our understanding of urban activism in Strathcona is the suggestion of several American authors that when the radical politics of the 1960s in the US collapsed, they took on a more local and reform-oriented character. Boyte writes that as the ideology of mass revolt climaxed and ultimately failed, key activists who had been disheartened by their inability to affect significant structural change in American society refocused their energies on the pre-existing institutions and traditions of communities that had survived. Boyte writes that the culture of the community provided the social capital that residents needed to take up the cause of local democratic reform.⁷ Robert Fisher and Peter Romanofsky similarly write that with the coming to an end of the 1960s, the impulse for reform evolved into an upsurge in localized community activism. Fisher and Romanofsky write that protest changed from being revolution-driven to becoming a reformist, locally-centered “national opposition to corporate control of people’s lives and unresponsive government.”⁸ In writing about inner-city activism in Chicago, Robert A. Slayton argues that a desire for security and stability after the social tumult of the 1960s allowed residents to bridge the class barriers that had previously divided the community. Slayton writes that, in the case of the “Back of the Yards” neighbourhood in Chicago, overcoming these divides ultimately led to the successful defence of the neighbourhood from developers and provided the structure for a community organization that could embark on broader reforms.⁹

The concept of community social capital is also featured in the analyses of group formation and tactics undertaken in the course of community activism. Warren defines a community’s social capital as “the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”¹⁰ A community’s social capital is located in the cultural traditions of residents, within institutions such as churches, unions, ethnic and fraternal organizations, and in interpersonal networks. Warren writes that understanding the importance of a given community’s social capital is central to

understanding how activist groups are able to form and where residents draw their resources from in the course of their activism.¹¹ Boyte writes that an understanding of how these citizens' groups formed and how they conducted their activism cannot be gained without an understanding of how participants used the social capital found in their own cultural traditions:

In the process of insurgency, people draw upon rich cultural resources and traditions from the past, unearthing subversive themes of protest, dignity, dissent, and self-assertion, fashioning them into foundations of a new culture.¹²

According to Boyte, social capital is rooted less in a community's institutions than in the traditions and cultures of its residents. Boyte and Warren further suggest that leadership, tactics, support networks, and strategies of communication all emanate from the cultural traditions of the activists themselves. It is these traditions that provided the necessary training and experience for neighbourhood organizations, the creativity, and the level of commitment necessary for a movement to be successful. In the case of Strathcona, it is this focus on experience, culture, and tradition that best facilitates an understanding of group formation, tactics, and structure.

The literature on community activism gives particular emphasis to group leadership. There are two divergent approaches to this analysis: one emphasizes that effective leadership is inherently internal to the community, the other that externally educated professional organizers are essential. Boyte, Fisher, and Henig write that effective leadership must be organic and internal to the movement, while for Slayton and Warren, effective leadership requires appropriate training and activist skill development in order for a movement to be successful.

While the core argument of this literature - the wider democratic impulse of these movements - stands as a central framework for an exploration of activism in Strathcona, the overall theoretical modeling for community activism done by Boyte, Slayton, Fisher and Romafsky, Warren, and Henig indicates that Strathcona is a somewhat special case that must necessarily call some aspects of those models into doubt. The comparison demonstrates that an

understanding of activism in Strathcona can gain from, but cannot rely uncritically on, models developed from the American experience.

Locating community activism within an American democratic tradition is problematic for Strathcona. While Canada has unique democratic traditions, there is the additional factor that the residents of Strathcona were largely immigrants from Asia and Europe, many from cultures without democratic traditions. It is therefore not helpful to place the protests and movement for reform in Strathcona within a cultural tradition of direct action and democratic impulse. A similar discrepancy exists between the American case studies and the Strathcona case in that organizers in Strathcona were not experienced activists who had the benefit of the 1960s as a training ground for political activism. The literature on community organizing in the US suggests that organizers in the 1970s had the experiences of the sixties to guide their activism. The residents and organizers in Strathcona had not been participants in the anti-war protests or the civil rights movement that defined the 1960s, and did not come from an activist background.

A further divergence between Strathcona and American case studies of community activism is that the existing literature discusses social capital only in a white working-class context. In Strathcona, the mix of Asian, European, and North American cultures makes identifying how residents drew upon their social capital much more complex than in studying more homogenous communities, predominantly with Anglo-European backgrounds. In these studies, institutions such as churches, fraternal organizations, labour unions, and social clubs play a central role in revealing how communities were able to organize and in identifying the resources they were able to draw upon in the course of their activism. But these institutions were much less prevalent in Strathcona and were dispersed across several different ethnic groups. Therefore, churches, unions, or fraternal societies were not important sources of activist strength in Strathcona. Instead, social capital there was more cultural than institutional, with the result that residents drew more from their ethnic traditions than community-wide institutions.

Consequently, significant differences in tactics, internal structure, goals, and level of success differentiate community activism in Vancouver from that in American cities.

Chapter 2: Cases Studies of Citizen Activism in Canada

Citizen activism elsewhere in Canada also differed from the Strathcona case. At the same time as urban renewal was being adopted in Vancouver, other Canadian cities also sought to build state-sponsored housing and infrastructure projects. In Toronto, where five clearance and housing projects were planned, an organized citizen resistance emerged against clearance plans in the inner-city Trefann Court neighbourhood.¹³ In 1966 Toronto City Council adopted a plan to expropriate and demolish homes in the Trefann Court area and replace them with high-density apartment blocks. Initially residents only petitioned City Hall for better prices for their homes, but residents later changed their demands to outright opposition. The community hired John Sewell, a lawyer and later City Councillor, to give legal advice. Sewell ended up working as the community's organizer, with help from several of his friends from the University of Toronto who believed that activist-minded students should move to low income, working-class neighbourhoods and organize its residents to protest to City Hall.¹⁴ The plans for Trefann Court were shelved in 1968 when the Federal Minister of Transport froze funding pending a nationwide review of urban renewal. The redevelopment plans were finally abandoned in 1970 following the Minister of Transport's announcement of a reduction in funding for social housing in Toronto.¹⁵

While Trefann Court shares a similar timeline with Strathcona, the differences between the two neighbourhoods overshadow their similarities. Central among these differences is the composition of the community. In his case study of the protests against urban renewal in Trefann, Graham Fraser writes that prior to being targeted for clearance, residents never regarded themselves as a community. Fraser writes that Trefann was "virtually created as a community by an urban renewal scheme,"¹⁶ and was only "a community by omission"¹⁷ with no pre-existing

community consciousness¹⁸ Trefann also better resembled the communities discussed in the US studies in that it was a predominantly white, Anglo Saxon neighbourhood where many residents had experience in labour activism.¹⁹ Another significant difference between Trefann and Strathcona lies in its leadership structure. Fraser highlights the role of Sewell and the organizers from the University of Toronto who came to Trefann Court specifically to organize working-class residents. In his memoirs, Sewell similarly stresses the role of himself and other trained organizers while making little mention of grassroots organizing within the neighbourhood. Lastly, neither Fraser nor Sewell regard the movement in Trefann Court as successful. While clearance was halted, Fraser credits the federal government for this. Fraser and Sewell both write that the creation of a Working Committee to enable resident participation in the planning process was merely a means of diffusing opposition rather than representing any meaningful reform.²⁰

Another example of citizen activism in Canada was the fight to stop a planned freeway through Vancouver's Chinatown, immediately west of Strathcona. Vancouver City Council adopted a plan to construct an elevated freeway in 1967. In response, a coalition of local business owners, community groups, academics, and planning professionals rallied to stop the plan, which was shelved in early 1968.²¹ Hasson and Ley write that this fight marked the beginning of changes to the City's "paternal and autocratic decision-making style," and that the "freeway fight" resulted in "a newly mobilized citizenry [being] created."²²

The success in stopping the freeway in 1968 may well have had the effect of awakening some Strathcona residents to the fact that City Hall could be forced to back down. However, the fight to stop the freeway did not act as a training ground for Strathcona residents, and the nature of the protests varied widely from those in Strathcona. V. Setty Pendakur and Kay Anderson both write that the freeway fight was not so much an effort of residents as it was a coalition of business groups, planning professionals, and academics who wanted to preserve the neighbourhood because of its architectural heritage and its economic value. Pendakur documents

the effort to stop the freeway as a series of meetings and demonstrations organized by UBC architecture professors and students trying to protect the area's historic buildings. He notes that a 1967 protest in the streets of Chinatown was not attended by area residents, but by fifty UBC architecture students.²³ Anderson also describes these efforts as led by a business-academic-professional alliance created to preserve Chinatown's uniqueness and potential as a tourist destination.²⁴ Neither author makes reference to any wider democratic or reformist impulses within this movement; instead they portray the fight as protectionist in nature. The Strathcona fight, by contrast, was much more a grassroots, resident-led and reform-oriented struggle. Indeed, SPOTA records and interviews with key organizers make no reference to the 1967 freeway fight as influencing their cause or being a training ground for their activism.

A similar expressway project slated to be built down Toronto's Spadina Avenue was underway in the late 1960s. The community most affected in Toronto was similar to Strathcona in that it was in the inner city, populated mainly by working class residents of mixed ethnic heritage.²⁵ However, the literature that looks at the protests against the expressway project pays little attention to the role of the residents in protests or to how the mix of cultural backgrounds impacted upon the movement. Instead, Sewell, former *Globe and Mail* columnist James Lorimer, and Darryl Newbury focus on the role of the coalition of academics, planning professionals, and professional organizers, notably Sewell, Alan Powell and Jane Jacobs, in stopping the expressway.²⁶ There is little discussion of this being a movement for democratic reform or a grassroots community movement. Newbury writes that the community groups that began organizing to protest the freeway after construction started in 1962 barely got off the ground, mainly due to the lack of experienced and educated leadership. Newbury adds that it was only with the formation of the Stop Spadina Save Our City Coordinating Committee (SSSOCCC) in 1969 that opposition began to be effective. SSSOCCC was formed and led by Sewell, Jacobs, and other experienced activists who had gained experience in opposing urban renewal in places

such as Trefann Court, many of whom were not residents, but professional activists.²⁷ Newbury also writes that SSSOCCC was often seen as a “small clique” of academics and professionals, and does not portray SSSOCC as a resident-driven movement.²⁸

The central differences between Strathcona and the cases of Trefann Court, the Chinatown freeway protests, and the Spadina Expressway lie in the leadership of the movements and the extent of community involvement. Strathcona was a movement with internal leaders and grassroots-level organization where strategies and organizational structure reflected the cultural make up of the community. However, in the three cases examined above, leadership was characterized by professional activists and by tactics that emphasized formal political processes. Moreover, the literature on Trefann Court, Spadina, and Vancouver’s Chinatown barely speaks to larger goals of democratic reform. While Sewell and Fraser write that the organizers had reformist goals, they note that these efforts ultimately failed. Similarly, in the case of Vancouver’s Chinatown, Anderson and Pendakur both regard the freeway fight largely as an alliance between business, professionals and academics to protect the area rather than a fight rooted in reform. While these three cases do indeed shed light on concurrent community movements that fall outside an American democratic tradition, differences in goals, leadership structure, community composition, and overall levels of success ultimately limit how much these studies can add to an understanding of Strathcona.

Chapter 3: Literature Studying Strathcona and SPOTA

A number of authors have discussed the significance of the fight by Strathcona residents to save their neighbourhood. In explaining why Strathcona was targeted for clearance, these authors tend to exaggerate the centrality of race. This focus leads to conclusions that portray the struggle of residents to save their community as a conservative, protectionist exercise, but ignore its democratic impulses.

In *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, Kay Anderson argues that the reason Strathcona was targeted for clearance through a project of urban renewal was the area's longstanding stigmatization as a Chinese space. Anderson considers Strathcona the residential extension of neighbouring Chinatown instead of a neighbourhood and community in its own right. Anderson writes that the very concept of "Chinatown" was a tool used for entrenching racial ideology through space and territory. The planned clearance of Strathcona was, in Anderson's analysis, caught up in this racial context, as was the battle to save, and later beautify, the area.²⁹ Following from this, residents' actions to save the neighbourhood are portrayed by Anderson as defensive and both catalyzed by, and organized around, ethnicity.

In an essay on Strathcona David Ley, Kay Anderson, and Doug Konrad assume the *Chineseness* of what they call a "segregated racial enclave."³⁰ Ley et. al. write that this "region of stigma"³¹ was defined by its Chinese population, and that the battle to save the neighbourhood was fought by the resident Chinese community and led by its idealistic external allies in the same mould as Fraser, Sewell, and Newbury are said to have done in concurrent community movements in Toronto. In this analysis, SPOTA is portrayed as a movement of self-interested homeowners whose motivation was economic, alongside a coalition of professionals motivated by the desire to protect a unique neighbourhood. In a 1999 Masters thesis from Simon Fraser University, Kim Livingston likewise overstates the Chinese nature of Strathcona, suggesting that the reason Strathcona residents were able to organize and mobilize effectively was because it was "the home of a segregated minority population."³² Drawing heavily from Anderson's book, Livingston condenses Strathcona's history within Chinatown's, and in doing so attributes the success of the movement to a common and unified ethnic consciousness.

In his book *Chinatown*s, David Chuenyan Lai similarly collapses Chinatown with Strathcona and ties Strathcona's existence to Chinatown's cycles of growth. In reality, the clearance schemes that centred on Strathcona did not include Chinatown at all.³³ While his

analysis does show that the movement as internally-led, Lai nonetheless overstates the centrality of race, obscuring both motivations and goals.

Understanding Strathcona in a racial context is flawed from the outset. Assumptions that Strathcona was a satellite of Chinatown are likely explained by the two neighbourhoods' proximity to one another,³⁴ and by the fact that several key figures in Strathcona were from Chinese backgrounds. In addition, when these studies were being written in the 1980s and 1990s, Strathcona did indeed have a majority Chinese population.³⁵ Historically, however, and during much of the period under study, Strathcona was regarded as distinct from Chinatown. The 1957 *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* notes that roughly 60 per cent of the families in Strathcona alone, excluding Chinatown, were of "British, European, or North American origin," and that the Chinese population made up "nearly one half" of a larger survey district that *included* Chinatown.³⁶ Chinese immigration to Canada did not grow exponentially until after 1967. Wing Chung Ng notes that between 1961 and 1965 some 2,100 Chinese immigrants came to Vancouver. In the period of 1966-1970, however, roughly 8,000 Chinese newcomers settled in Vancouver.³⁷ This increase is substantial, and does overlap with the period under study. However, this population history serves to demonstrate that Strathcona was not historically a Chinese neighbourhood. Furthermore, the *Strathcona Community Profile*, written in 1991 by the Strathcona Citizens Planning Committee and the City of Vancouver Planning Department, notes that it was not until the mid-to-late 1970s that the majority of the neighbourhood was Chinese.³⁸ While this later increase in the Chinese population of the area, and the large amount of Chinese participation in SPOTA are significant, it needs to be stressed that during the period under study Strathcona was not primarily a Chinese neighbourhood. Furthermore, those Chinese residents who did live in Strathcona during the period of study and who were active in Strathcona were generally long-time residents of Canada, many of them born in Vancouver, with substantial numbers of new arrivals not coming until later.

As a community, Strathcona was diverse and complex, and had been home to successive waves of first-generation immigrants. Indeed, the neighbourhood had traditionally been regarded as entirely distinct from Chinatown. Bessie Lee, who was one of SPOTA's founders, moved to Chinatown only in the 1960s, after changes to Canadian immigration laws brought an influx of Chinese immigrants. Lee noted that, growing up in Chinatown, children were told not to cross Gore Street, the dividing line between Chinatown and Strathcona. Due to frequent racial violence, Strathcona was considered unsafe for Chinese people. Lee noted that it was not until the 1950s that racial tensions calmed and the neighbourhood became more affordable that Chinese families such as her own began moving into Strathcona. Even then, Lee noted that most of her neighbours at that time were of Ukrainian and mixed European backgrounds.³⁹ Furthermore, in a 1972 interview with the *Vancouver Province*, SPOTA organizer Shirley Chan recalled that when her mother first started organizing residents in opposition to the redevelopment plans, Shirley had to go with her to translate for her mother, noting that most of her neighbours were Italian, Yugoslavian, Hungarian, and Ukrainian, English being the only language they had in common.⁴⁰

A large proportion of Strathcona's population and SPOTA's membership was indeed Chinese. Furthermore, SPOTA's early leadership was predominately of Chinese origin. However, it is important to note that SPOTA did not consider itself a Chinese organization, and that much of this leadership was from a younger Canadian-born generation who considered themselves to be a part of a new multicultural Canada. Chinese cultural influences are central to understanding SPOTA, but it is incorrect to regard it as a 'Chinese' organization, and important to acknowledge the multicultural character of its membership. Historian Wing Chung Ng writes that "SPOTA was not a conventional ethnic organization,"⁴¹ and that SPOTA represented itself as a neighbourhood organization rather than as an ethnic organization. Ng also notes that the membership of the organization was marked by ethnic, generational, and class diversity. Ng

stresses the internal diversity, largely generational, within the Chinese community and regards the significance of this as important as the level of ethnic diversity overall.⁴² Lai also notes that through SPOTA "the entire community was mobilized... Chinese and non-Chinese, owners and tenants, old and young, men and women."⁴³ From the outset of its formal creation, SPOTA made certain that the group's image stressed its community, not ethnic, focus. In an interview with the *Vancouver Sun* in January 1969, SPOTA President Harry Con noted that while the organization had a large Chinese membership, it represented many different ethnic groups. Con also stressed that Strathcona was a community struggle, not an ethnic one, saying that there was "an atmosphere of discrimination" not based on race, but "between the east and west ends of town."⁴⁴ The problem with assuming Strathcona's 'Chineseness' when explaining why Strathcona was targeted for redevelopment and how residents were able to organize is that this perspective obscures both the complexity of the movement and its ultimate goals. Framing the community's opposition to redevelopment around the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood places residents' activism in a protectionist context that stresses self-interest. Ley, for instance, concludes that SPOTA was a "ratepayer led" movement that "was a single-issue organization primarily composed of homeowners with strictly local goals."⁴⁵ This analysis localizes the goals of the movement and treats it as defensive and reactionary.

In *Making Vancouver: Class Status and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913*, Robert A.J. McDonald writes that the lowest levels of marginality experienced in early Vancouver were not confined to Chinese residents. Instead, McDonald asserts that the status hierarchies of Vancouver corresponded to residents' proximity to British "respectability." Thus for non-British "white" immigrants, such as Italians, or to single male workers to whom the east end was a temporary residence en route to British Columbia's resource industries, marginality and stigmatization were applied in much the same manner as it was applied to the Chinese population.⁴⁶ Race, class, and status intersect in McDonald's interpretation of what was

“marginal” in early Vancouver. From this perspective, stigmatization of Strathcona was therefore much more complex than just a response to the Chinese proportion of its population.

Anderson, Ley, and Lai also focus on a few select actors and give a disproportionate amount of credit to SPOTA’s white, professional allies, what Ley calls “the articulate external allies with a more determined style of protest [than the residents].”⁴⁷ By “external allies,” Ley is referring to the numerous students, professionals, and consultants who worked with residents. Central among those allies credited with SPOTA’s success against urban renewal, as well as its democratic drive, are Darlene Marzari, the City’s Neighbourhood Services Coordinator and later City Councillor and Provincial Cabinet Minister; Mike Harcourt, a lawyer and later Councillor, Mayor, and Premier; Margaret Mitchell, head of the not-for-profit Neighbourhood Services Association and a later Member of Parliament; the architectural firm Birmingham and Wood, which had been involved in the fight against the Chinatown Freeway proposal; and students and faculty at the UBC School of Architecture. Lai also attributes SPOTA’s success in stopping urban renewal to recently arrived Chinese residents, what he refers to as “a new type of educated Chinese immigrant,” but he ignores the grassroots nature of residents’ involvement, focusing more on the professional class of the Chinese community.⁴⁸ These approaches fail to recognize the resident-driven nature of this movement and the extent to which much of SPOTA’s success was formed out of the cultural and generational diversity of the community.

Chapter 4: Urban Renewal in Strathcona

One of Vancouver’s oldest neighbourhoods, Strathcona was characterized by a combination of some of Vancouver’s oldest buildings and by a mixed-use land base that resulted from a lack of formal planning. Strathcona was defined by a patchwork of residential, industrial, and commercial development alongside a corresponding lack of civic amenities.⁴⁹ In addition, because of its proximity to the port and to both the Canadian Pacific Railway’s and the Canadian National Railway’s western terminuses, Strathcona had a working-class and often transient

population. The neighbourhood served as home to successive waves of immigrants, to workers and their families employed by the railways and the port, to Chinese bachelors marooned by discriminatory immigration laws, and to single men working in the province's resource industries.

It is for these reasons that Strathcona became a target for what post-war city planners termed "urban renewal," a macro approach to planning rooted in maximizing land values through rationalizing land use, increasing density, and imposing modernist-oriented community planning frameworks. The answer to what planners deemed to be an economic and social problem for the entire region came in the form of the 1957 *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, prepared by the City of Vancouver's Planning Department. The *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* tied housing to health problems and to economic stagnation, suggesting that if left unresolved, Strathcona's "destructive band of blight around the city centre" would spread and destroy the economic and social health of the entire city.⁵⁰ As a solution, the *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* proposed a twenty-year plan that sought to demolish and rebuild much of the east side of Vancouver, focusing first on Strathcona.⁵¹ The recommendations of the study were accepted in principle by Vancouver City Council in early 1958.⁵² The *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* proposed the complete redevelopment of a survey area including some 4,464 households and an estimated total of 15,147 persons.⁵³ The first phase of the project, completed between 1961 and 1967, displaced an estimated 1,600 people and cleared twenty-eight acres in the construction of the McLean Park public housing project. The second phase of redevelopment saw the clearance displacement of 1,730 people between 1962 and 1964. Twenty-nine acres of land were cleared in phase 2 in preparation for the construction of schools, private housing, an expansion of McLean Park and the construction of the Raymur public housing project.⁵⁴

Early organizational efforts emerged during these first two stages of development in the form of public meetings organized by the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA). In response to

the 1957 plan, the CBA set up the Chinatown Property Owners' Association (CPOA) to represent the interests of local Chinese businesses and homeowners to City Hall. However, CPOA initially supported the first phases of development, and its opposition was confined largely to unsuccessful requests for better expropriation rates. In an interview in the late 1970s, then- SPOTA President Bessie Lee recalled that attendees at CPOA meetings supported Phase I. Lee noted that it was only after McLean Park was completed, once the City had begun the final phase of development that residents opposed the plans.⁵⁵ Strathcona resident Mary Chan, who also attended a CPOA meeting, said that members agreed to collect money to hire a lawyer to represent residents at City Hall, and that she had never heard from CPOA again. Chan also noted that it was only as development continued unchecked in the 1960s that she realized that residents would have to organize an opposition themselves.⁵⁶ Harry Con, one of SPOTA's inaugural presidents, recalled that "the Chinese Benevolent Association was not very active in these fights" against urban renewal.⁵⁷ Con stated that this lack of opposition was due to the fact that those active in the CBA were primarily from an older generation of Chinese immigrants who were not prepared to challenge authority. CPOA ceased to exist as an organization in the early 1960s.⁵⁸

In 1967 the Vancouver City Planning Department issued its "Summary Report and Recommendations" for what it termed "Scheme 3," the final and most comprehensive stage of redevelopment of Strathcona. Scheme 3 was set to begin in January 1969 with the clearance of 60 acres of housing.⁵⁹ It was with this impending development, which would see the bulk of the houses in Strathcona expropriated and demolished with less than eighteen months notice, that residents began to organize.

Chapter 5: Strathcona Area Council and the Formation of SPOTA: 1967-1968

The first formal participation in the City of Vancouver's planning process by members of the community came with the establishment of the Strathcona Area Council, or SAC, in May 1965. SAC was intended to coordinate community consultation in Strathcona.⁶⁰ However, in a

document written by SPOTA that describes the organization's formation, SPOTA noted that SAC was dominated by professionals who worked in the area and that most residents had not even been informed of its existence. The SPOTA document writes that, because few residents were invited to sit on or participate in the council, SAC "consistently failed... to involve the residents to any meaningful degree."⁶¹

With the implementation date of Scheme 3 set for January 1969, residents began to organize on their own outside of the structures established by the City. The same SPOTA document notes that this organization began to emerge after Mrs. Sue Lum, who had heard only by word-of-mouth that SAC was meeting in the neighbourhood, began to attend the meetings and discovered for the first time, in mid-1968, that her block was due to be one of the first to be demolished the coming January. Lum then contacted Mary Chan, who served as a sort of matriarch for the Chinese community in Strathcona,⁶² to seek her advice on what next steps could be taken. The two decided to embark on a door-to-door campaign to convince residents of targeted blocks to attend an upcoming SAC meeting and voice their opposition. They quickly found that few residents were even aware that SAC existed. A delegation of residents attended the next SAC meeting and, upon voicing their concerns to the council, were asked to help prepare a brief to City Council that would outline their concerns.⁶³ Shirley Chan, Mary's daughter, recalled that this meeting was the first occasion where residents were actually informed of the full scope of Scheme 3. Consequently, this meeting was the first chance for residents to voice their opposition to the project. Chan later paraphrased the pleading elderly people in the crowd:

This is my nest. We cannot afford another one. This was the nest that we built and we're old and how could you take our homes away from us? Where are we going to go? We can't get another mortgage because of age and income and so the distress was being expressed clearly.⁶⁴

Area resident Ramon Benedetti attended the SAC meeting and recalled the proceedings being more acrimonious, and tried to encourage residents to take action. Bendetti said that the planners

and consultants present were dismissive of residents and so he tried to encourage residents to start fighting the plans, stating in a later interview: "I says 'All right, arise! You people, arise! To arms, it's time! These guys are bulldozers. They're rolling over us, you know.'"⁶⁵

In response to residents' now vocal opposition to Scheme 3, SAC delegates agreed to submit a brief to City Council. Residents hoped that the brief would provide a formal voice to their opposition and would lead to meaningful consultation. However, the brief was written by SAC member and planning consultant Elio Azzara, and was finalized and submitted without the residents reading or approving it. The SPOTA paper that documents the group's formation says that the brief concentrated "on asking for fairer prices and more effective relocation assistance,"⁶⁶ and did not articulate residents' opposition to the clearance and outrage at the consultation process. The brief "failed to reflect the outright hostility of the residents towards the whole programme."⁶⁷ The residents who had attended the SAC meeting had been led to believe that a renewed process of consultation would result. But when residents attended the next SAC meeting and saw that the brief had misrepresented their case, "it became obvious to residents that SAC would not be adequate to act on their behalf."⁶⁸ Benedetti recalled that he and others at this meeting started "getting worked up," and that it was at this stage that residents began to talk about actively fighting Scheme 3. Benedetti specifically noted that it was at this meeting that a large number of Chinese residents who had previously not vocalized much opposition to the project started to get involved, recalling that "some of the Chinese people... were sitting back – and they really, they got going."⁶⁹

Also attending the SAC meeting was Margaret Mitchell, who ran Vancouver's Neighbourhood Services Organization. On seeing residents' reaction to the SAC brief and how upset they were that they were not being represented accurately to City Hall, she introduced herself to Bessie Lee and suggested residents set up their own neighbourhood organization. Mitchell exchanged phone numbers with Lee and offered her assistance in establishing this

group.⁷⁰ Over the next days, Lee, the Chans, Sue Lum, Harry Con and others began to talk about establishing this organization and consulted Mitchell on how to go about it.⁷¹ Mary Chan began the process of enlisting the support of the neighbourhood's residents, going door-to-door in the evenings to inform residents of what Scheme 3 entailed, and to raise money to hire a lawyer. Chan held a tremendous amount of respect among the immigrant community in Strathcona, having served as a marriage broker, money lender, and job finder for two generations of immigrants arriving in the neighbourhood. This status was held not just in the Chinese community, but in the immigrant community overall, with Chan helping new arrivals to Canada find jobs. Her status played a significant role in convincing many of the neighbourhood's residents to protest. Her daughter, Shirley, noted that many new arrivals in Canada, particularly in the Chinese community, were reluctant to challenge authority and came from a tradition of deference to government. Even when residents did object outright to the clearance schemes, they were hesitant to act against it because of their self-perceived tenuous residency. However, Shirley Chan noted in an interview that her mother "called in her debts," and that much of the involvement of the Chinese community came from the organizational efforts of Mrs. Chan.⁷²

Mary Chan took Shirley with her as a translator when she canvassed because Mary spoke Chinese as her primary language.⁷³ Shirley recalled in a 1972 interview with the *Vancouver Province* that when she went door-to-door, her mother needed her to translate into English not just for resident Canadians, but for the Yugoslavian, Italian, Ukrainian, and Polish residents as well.⁷⁴ Having canvassed most of the neighbourhood to ask their neighbours to attend a meeting to determine how residents were going to proceed, over 500 residents met at the Gibbs' Boys Club in November 1968. Many later recalled that they attended only because the Chans had come to their doorstep and outlined the City's immediate plans for the neighbourhood.⁷⁵ It was at this meeting that residents agreed to form SPOTA. Proceedings were translated back and forth into several languages both formally and informally by residents who had brought their children

for this purpose. They elected an executive and passed a resolution demanding that City Hall recognize the organization as the official negotiating body for the neighbourhood.⁷⁶

While the pressing concern of those residents who agreed to form SPOTA was to stop the bulldozers that were slated to start work in January, SPOTA had broader democratic goals from the outset. In December 1968 the *Vancouver Sun* interviewed SPOTA president Harry Con, who said that the organization formed because residents had been excluded from any meaningful consultation and demanded to be included in any decision affecting their neighbourhood.⁷⁷ In another interview, Con stated that SPOTA did not exist just to stop development, but instead sought inclusion in the process: residents "want the government to know our side of the story. We aren't fighting progress. All we want is fair play and a fair deal."⁷⁸

Leadership of the organization was comprised entirely of residents. At the inaugural meeting, residents elected three co-presidents, Harry Con, Walter Chan, and Sue Lum. SPOTA did attract the attention of allies such as Margaret Mitchell, Mike Harcourt, and Darlene Marzari, but these allies were not present in any sort of leadership or organizational role, but instead as friends of SPOTA organizers. Shirley Chan later said that the role of external allies was one of helping residents, not leading them, stating that "these people were willing to help us achieve what we wanted to achieve, rather than telling us what we ought to achieve."⁷⁹ Mitchell herself played a pivotal role in the establishment of SPOTA, approaching residents about forming the organization and advising them about how such a group should be structured. However, Bessie Lee recalled that her assistance in setting up SPOTA was limited to aiding organizers in identifying resources that were available to them, while the groundwork and strategizing was done by residents.⁸⁰ While the help provided by these allies should not be dismissed, it is apparent that the initiative undertaken by residents was genuinely grassroots in nature, and was both initiated and led by residents who had no activist training.

Mary Chan, Sue Lum, Bessie Lee, Harry Con, Ramon Benedetti, and Shirley Chan were not trained activists when they began the fight to save their homes from demolition. While Bessie Lee and Mary Chan had attended CPOA meetings during the first stages of urban renewal, there had not been any sort of organized opposition. These were working-class homeowners who mobilized against a planning process that had left them powerless and uninformed. Mary Chan was able to organize and mobilize a large number of residents owing to her own stature within the community, a stature as a matriarch to the area's immigrant community that was cultural in origin. Because of her sparse English, she had to take her daughter as a translator, which began the process of making Shirley an activist. They contacted residents who spoke several different languages, went to different churches, and had different cultural backgrounds. In many cases these residents had never spoken up against governments, yet they formed a community association specifically to fight three levels of government. While the plurality of languages presented an early challenge, this was overcome by drawing in younger family members who could translate. Beyond this, Harry Con noted in a 1968 article in the *Vancouver Sun* that one of SPOTA's primary goals was to strengthen relations between the ethnic communities in Strathcona. Con stressed that SPOTA was not a Chinese organization, but a community organization, and wanted to make sure that SPOTA was able to speak for and represent the entire community.⁸¹

Chapter 6: The National Task Force on Public Housing: November, 1968

In November 1968, at the same time as Strathcona residents were creating SPOTA, the National Task Force on Public Housing came to Vancouver in November 1968. The Task Force was chaired by Paul Hellyer, the federal Minister of Transportation and the Minister responsible for housing. Strathcona residents recognized this as an opportunity to take their protests over the City's head and plead their case to the senior funding partner in urban renewal. Shirley Chan noted that in the wake of the SAC brief to City Council and the January implementation date of

Scheme 3, there was no political will in the three levels of government to act on residents' behalf. Even when residents went to their traditional ally on City Council, left-leaning Alderman Harry Rankin, he said "forget it, it's too late, we're done, we've already signed the agreement, it's gone, Ottawa's got it."⁸² Chan noted that this lack of political support forced a realization among residents that they were not going to be able to depend on traditional means of protest to City Hall, in the form of briefs, letters, and petitions, and that they were going to have to speak for themselves instead of relying on political advocates.

Strathcona residents were alerted to the upcoming task force hearings by Darlene Marzari, the City's social service coordinator, and one of the neighbourhood's emergent "external" allies. Marzari was a UBC social work student who had been appointed by the city to help Strathcona residents access city services during the transition process of expropriation and displacement. In an interview in 2003 Marzari recalled that her job was essentially to ease the implementation of Scheme 3. However, as residents began to protest at SAC meetings, she only then realized that they were opposed to the redevelopment process and that her position was to help the city more than the residents. It was at the pivotal final SAC meeting where residents erupted against the city's plans that Marzari decided that she would instead use her position to help residents, and approached Shirley Chan.⁸³ Marzari saw the effectiveness that organizers such as Mary and Shirley Chan and Sue Lum were having in identifying support in the community, and recognized the upcoming hearings as an opportunity for residents to sidestep City Hall and take their case directly to the minister responsible for funding Scheme 3.

The Hellyer Task Force was mandated to evaluate the effectiveness of federal housing and urban renewal policies. The Task Force was coming to Vancouver at the same time that residents were preparing for the founding SPOTA meeting, and many residents were already engaging in intensive door-to-door organizing for the upcoming founding meeting. Having identified dozens of residents who had been negatively affected by the redevelopment process

and cases where expropriation would have adverse effects on residents, Shirley Chan, Marzari, Bessie Lee's daughter Jo-Anne, and Penelope Stewart, another young local resident and friend of Marzari's, began to organize a large contingent of residents to speak at the hearings, which took place at the nearby Skeena Terrace housing project. Residents' presentations were coordinated by Chan, Stewart, and Marzari, who ensured that a cross-section of residents from different ethnicities and generations were represented. The three also coached individuals who were to speak to the Task Force to ensure that they spoke with a unified message.⁸⁴ The SPOTA delegation's presentation climaxed with a young, teary-eyed Chan pleading to the minister: "I have grown up in that area and I love it. How can you repay me for having to move away?"⁸⁵ Chan's entire performance was planned and scripted, right down to her wardrobe. *The Vancouver Sun* reported that Chan's testimony was "an eloquent plea," and highlighted her statement: "I didn't know this was a slum until the city told me it was."⁸⁶ In addition to stacking the room with residents who would state their opposition to Scheme 3 and testify that they had been excluded from the consultation process, Chan, Stewart, Lee, and Marzari planned a more subversive strategy. First, they sought to portray Chan as a sympathetic figure to act as a spokesperson for the community. As an articulate, educated young woman, they believed Chan would counteract planners' abstractions of the area as a destitute slum. Secondly, the organizers planned to develop a relationship with the Task Force commissioners in order to sidestep City intermediaries and persuade the Task Force commissioners to let the three women take them on a tour of Strathcona. The residents involved in planning this action sought to discredit city planners' claims that Strathcona was a troubled neighbourhood. To do so they would offer evidence that it was a neighbourhood with families, community, culture, and shared histories. They hoped to convince the commissioners that the neighbourhood needed assistance for rehabilitation, not clearance, and that residents needed to be at the centre of that process.

Perhaps even more significant in demonstrating the level of strategy at play is the fact that Marzari, Lee, Chan, and Stewart had deliberately dressed Chan in a manner to catch the eye of the commissioners and gain a more sympathetic, and personal, hearing from them. Jo-Anne Lee later recalled that Chan was dressed up in the definitive fashion of the day, a miniskirt and bobby socks, with "legs down to there, up to there."⁸⁷ Marzari also described Chan "as being dressed to deceive."⁸⁸ This strategy, by all accounts, worked, with the Vancouver media sympathetically portraying Chan as bright and articulate.⁸⁹ More significantly, Chan's presentation made an impact personally on Hellyer. Marzari stated in an interview that Chan's attire and performance was instrumental in convincing the commissioners to tour the neighbourhood the following morning. So too were the open flirtations of Chan, Marzari and Stewart with the commissioners, with Marzari recalling: "it cannot be said that we didn't use our feminine wiles and our trickeries in order to get these chaps to go around the community at 6 o'clock in the freaking morning."⁹⁰ Marzari also noted that "we didn't start to laugh about it until we were much older... that we could start to talk about the use of miniskirts as a structural or strategic weapon in our arsenal... But we were conscious about Shirley wearing her headbands and her bobby sox."⁹¹ As the commissioners arrived for the tour, Hellyer asked Chan to sit with him on the bus, a move which, according to Lee, infuriated the city planners who were attending because it allowed Chan to frame the entire tour within the community's terms, rather than allow the planners to stress the area's problems.⁹² Chan, Marzari, and Stewart planned the entire tour route to go to specific houses where families were to look busy, healthy, and content, thus demonstrating that Strathcona was a community of families with a shared history. During the tour Chan, Stewart, and Marzari told the commissioners stories about particular houses and the families who lived there, and explained that the state of dilapidation of many of the buildings was due to the city's ten-year freeze on development permits and service upgrades, and not to larger social problems.⁹³

At the conclusion of the Task Force hearings, Hellyer announced a freeze on federal urban renewal funding, and the Report of the Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Redevelopment, issued in January 1969, recommended an end to federally-funded urban renewal projects and an overhaul of federal funding policies for urban redevelopment.⁹⁴ The City of Vancouver had already announced that the Scheme 3 implementation date of January 1, 1969 would be delayed pending the Task Force's findings.⁹⁵ Only a few months later the federal government froze funding for urban renewal schemes indefinitely on the recommendation of the Task Force on Public Housing.⁹⁶ In recommending a freeze the Task Force stated that there needed to be substantial involvement of the community if a city wished to qualify for federal funding. The previous process, the report stated, was "a successful example of neither public dialogue [n]or participatory democracy."⁹⁷

One of the most significant outcomes of the Task Force hearings is that by revealing the organizational and planning effort of Strathcona residents they demonstrated just how effective community activism could be. Shirley Chan noted that the success of protesting to the Task Force both awakened a new resolve in residents that activism could work, and alerted City Hall to the fact that residents could not be excluded from the process. Chan noted that one of the most positive results of the Task Force hearings was that an activist spirit emerged among many residents who had been reluctant to oppose authority.⁹⁸

Chapter 7: Cultivating Relationships for Political Capital

The successful strategizing around the visit of the Hellyer Task Force alerted Strathcona residents to the value of creating direct relationships with high-level decision makers. Residents also began to realize how to appeal to politicians' political instincts. Beyond this, SPOTA organizers also saw the value of bringing decision makers to their neighbourhood, both to confront them with an accurate understanding of the physical state of the community and to alter power relationships. I have written elsewhere, along with Jo-Anne Lee and Mayna Vancaille,

that much of the community was distrustful and fearful of City Hall, which served as the symbol of government to the community. Accordingly, residents were reluctant to approach governing officials.⁹⁹ SPOTA Executive member Jonathan Lau later described the Chinese community's perception of City Hall as the symbolic home of death, and residents were therefore highly reluctant to go to City Hall to plead their case.¹⁰⁰ However, SPOTA organizers found that this dynamic shifted when the Task Force Commissioners came into the neighbourhood and visited houses in the community. Then, residents were much more comfortable engaging with power brokers. Appearing before a committee or City Council was hugely intimidating to residents, particularly to elderly and immigrant residents whose comfort levels with English were low and whose experience with democratic representation was limited. I argue with Lee and Vancaille that the monodirectional power relationship of formal political proceedings was reversed once ministers, Aldermen, MPs and MLAs were in the neighbourhood and standing on front porches. Instead of formal proceedings or submissions, residents could engage in direct dialogue. Furthermore, while residents became more comfortable engaging directly with politicians, the politicians themselves were forced to confront the direct effects of clearance and redevelopment on the individuals standing directly in front of them.

In early 1969 SPOTA began an intensive effort to broaden its political influence by means of a brief which argued that urban renewal should be scrapped. Resources should then be diverted to a resident-initiated housing renovation and rehabilitation plan, it argued, and the community should have the final say in all planning decisions affecting the neighbourhood. SPOTA forwarded the paper, with personalized cover letters, to all area Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and all federal and provincial cabinet ministers in relevant jurisdictions.¹⁰¹ This was the first stage of a strategy to lobby the external sources of redevelopment funding directly by going over the City's head to address residents' concerns.

Strathcona activists developed a particularly fruitful relationship with Hellyer. SPOTA forwarded its brief to Hellyer, who had asked Shirley Chan to keep touch with him about the community's progress. In response to the brief, Hellyer asked for a meeting with a delegation from SPOTA, which was arranged with the help of Vancouver-area MPs Grant Deachman, Ron Basford, and Harold E. Winch. The minister was coming to Vancouver to meet with city and provincial officials in April 1969 to discuss upcoming revisions in the federal government's role in urban redevelopment, and had asked to be briefed on the community's perspective on development. SPOTA executives Harry Con, Shirley Chan, Bessie Lee, and consultants Mike Harcourt, Robert Kennedy, and Dick Lam went to a dinner meeting with Hellyer, Basford, and CMHC President M. Hignett at Vancouver's Bayshore Hotel. At that meeting the parties discussed funds and resources available to SPOTA and the possibility of receiving federal government aid for neighbourhood renovations. At the conclusion of the dinner, SPOTA received a personal expression of continued support from Hellyer.¹⁰² The next day, SPOTA received a letter from City Council responding to their brief and informing the organization that the city would be taking a new approach to Urban Renewal in light of the federal government's plans to revise its urban renewal policies.¹⁰³ Reporting on these meetings, the *Vancouver Sun* quoted Hellyer saying that he was "sympathetic to [Strathcona residents'] cause," and that "there is a question of the bonds in a community that we don't want to destroy."¹⁰⁴ SPOTA's relationship with Hellyer effected its level of influence. It had established a direct relationship, independent of the City of Vancouver, with representatives of the federal government who were directly responsible for funding urban redevelopment. In a relationship that was cultivated directly by SPOTA organizers, Hellyer himself acted as an advocate for Strathcona residents' interests, both to City Council and through the media.

Shortly after returning from the Vancouver trip, Hellyer resigned on April 24, 1969 from cabinet in a dispute over federal funding for housing. While this was a huge loss for SPOTA, the

organization immediately re-established a close relationship with Hellyer's successor, Robert Andras, and with Vancouver MP Ron Basford, who had been made the minister responsible for the Central Mortgage and Housing Commission, or CMHC, the federal agency that administered and funded social housing. In response to a SPOTA request, Andras arranged a meeting in June 1969 in Ottawa between SPOTA executive Harry Con and Prime Minister Trudeau, where Con briefed the two men on the state of the City's plans for the area. Con left the meeting with a repeat of the federal government's commitment to reorient funding towards housing rehabilitation rather than urban renewal. On the same trip, Con also met with Basford, who asked to be kept informed of all developments, and who offered any future assistance that he could provide.¹⁰⁵

In August 1969, Andras was in Vancouver to meet with City Council to provide a further update of federal government housing policies, namely the government's recent decision to continue the freeze on urban renewal funding.¹⁰⁶ Bessie Lee recalled in a later interview that Andras arranged for a meeting with the SPOTA Executive to take place prior to the meeting with City Council, specifically so that he could confront the councillors with the community's perspective when, as expected, they voiced their outrage at the continuation of the funding freeze. Lee said that this scheduling enraged the councillors because they believed Andras was giving the community preferential treatment.¹⁰⁷ At the council meeting, Andras informed councillors that Vancouver would not receive any federal funding assistance for development without the formal inclusion of SPOTA.¹⁰⁸ The next day the City announced that it was scrapping all urban renewal plans.¹⁰⁹ In a follow-up letter to SPOTA, Andras congratulated residents, writing, "I understand that consideration is now being given by the City to a program which would place strong emphasis on rehabilitation rather than demolition. I believe your association can take some of the credit for this significant change in concept."¹¹⁰ Bessie Lee recalled just how remarkable this series of events was, claiming that this meant SPOTA had been

“recognized as the fourth level of government for the area... the first time this [had] ever happened anywhere.”¹¹¹

SPOTA had firmly established itself as the representative body for the community and was widely acknowledged as an influential organization. Politicians from different parties and jurisdictions publicly recognized the impact of SPOTA's efforts. At SPOTA's invitation, Dan Campbell, the Provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and a member of BC's Social Credit government, attended a SPOTA general meeting. The *Vancouver Sun* wrote that “Campbell praised the people of the Strathcona area for their involvement and participation in the area in which they live,” quoting him as saying “it is groups like yours that make a city a personal thing.”¹¹² Federal Liberal Ron Basford credited SPOTA directly with forcing the federal government to review its national approach to housing. The *Vancouver Sun* quoted Basford at a SPOTA meeting giving credit to SPOTA for “convincing the federal government to re-evaluate its entire urban renewal policy.” Basford added that “it is not often that we see a small citizen's group bring all three levels of government to a halt.”¹¹³

Despite its often adversarial relationship with City Hall, Strathcona residents also sought to cultivate close relationships with City Councillors. As one of its first official acts as an organization, SPOTA invited all the city's Aldermen to a cocktail party in February 1969. Held at the Pender Street YWCA and attended by Aldermen Harry Rankin, Fred Linnel, City Planner Maurice Egan, and Deputy Mayor Hugh Bird, as well SPOTA consultants and future City Councillors Mike Harcourt and Darlene Marzari, SPOTA was able to extract expressions of support for both a resident-led rehabilitation approach to development and to increased levels of communication between residents and the City. Social events such as these became regular, with City Councillors in 1969 beginning the annual tradition of attending Chinese New Year parades.¹¹⁴ It was through invitations to these social events in the neighbourhood that SPOTA established direct communication with City officials. The relationship that SPOTA developed

with City Councillors became permanent, not least because of the electoral clout of a mobilized community. From the 1970 Vancouver Civic election and onward through the 1970s, candidates from all parties routinely came to Strathcona to meet with SPOTA and tour the neighbourhood.¹¹⁵ This established a relationship that allowed SPOTA to extract political promises from candidates, and established a line of communication to City Hall if those candidates won a seat.

Chapter 8: Neighbourhood Tours

Neighbourhood tours for VIPs were perhaps the most effective tools for countering negative perceptions about the area and for reversing power relationships. In the early stages of lobbying politicians, SPOTA realized that it need only show its neighbourhood to decision makers to make them realize that reports designating Strathcona a blighted slum were incorrect. Strathcona residents knew that they needed to demonstrate to officials that the neighbourhood was not a place of decay but was in fact a stable and respectable community.

At a SPOTA executive meeting prior to the aforementioned 1969 cocktail party with City officials, Shirley Chan had suggested following the approach taken with the Hellyer Task Force tour, as it had met with such success in changing perceptions of the area as a slum.¹¹⁶ At the cocktail party following the tour, Rankin and Bird suggested to SPOTA organizers that tours should be used to convince planners and developers to drop their urban renewal plans.¹¹⁷ Following this suggestion, SPOTA invited the entire City Council to Strathcona, with the media in tow, to be shown the neighbourhood first hand. Despite the absence of pro-development Mayor Tom Campbell and several Aldermen, broad support was expressed following the tour for an approach to development that would emphasize rehabilitation.¹¹⁸

More than just giving officials a guided walk around the neighbourhood, these tours were orchestrated affairs that involved a high level of internal organization. Prior to tours being given, the SPOTA executive would meet with the neighbourhood's designated block representatives to

set out a detailed tour route and identify which homes guests would be taken to, who each individual VIP was to meet with and talk to, and which particular message residents were to relay to each individual politician.¹¹⁹

Tours were intended to give Strathcona a human face, and thus to make it more difficult for city planners and politicians to argue that Strathcona was a community that required clearance and redevelopment. With reports of cabinet ministers being given tours of the neighbourhood and MLAs going to tea parties at residents' houses, it became more and more difficult to argue that the area was a slum in need of clearance. The seemingly objective statistics used in planning documents had served to rationalize the urban renewal schemes on paper. In this way, poor areas were given a rational, scientific-sounding definition as "blighted" that was easy for planners and politicians to accept as a problem. But by regularly bringing decision makers into the neighbourhood, SPOTA organizers were able to counter these perceptions and reorient the dialogue surrounding the community on their own terms.

Chapter 9: Banquets

Beginning in 1969, SPOTA hosted annual banquets every February through 1977. These events were central to SPOTA's neighbourhood strategy. Like their other tactics, banquets were a means by which SPOTA brought power brokers into the community, and the forum was usually employed as a means for getting representatives from the three levels of government under one roof and into a setting that was more informal than government meetings. Ostensibly for fundraising, SPOTA's banquets had a much more strategic purpose, and seating arrangements and evening programs were oriented around informal lobbying. VIPs not seated at the head table were interspersed throughout the room with residents, and SPOTA executives sat beside them with prepared questions that the executive had formulated and circulated in advance.¹²⁰

At the first banquet in August 1969, 340 guests, including federal ministers Andras and Basford, and a cross-party representation of federal, civic, and provincial politicians, packed into Chinatown's Bamboo Terrace restaurant.¹²¹ The use of food is a traditional Chinese political strategy intended to establish a reciprocal relationship where power structures were previously unequal. A traditional custom of gift exchange between kinship systems, known as *guanxi*, was adapted by SPOTA organizers as a means of reversing the power relationship between residents and politicians, and as a tool for exacting concessions and promises from different levels of government.¹²² This proved an effective tool for SPOTA, both as a means to enhance its relationship with politicians and as a means to demonstrate and symbolize the democratic reforms acquired in the course of the movement. Darlene Marzari later recalled just how central these banquets were to both gaining concessions and promises from politicians and realizing residents' own political awakenings:

It would probably be an awakening of our feminist instincts or at least mine, now that we come to think of it, that it had to do with food. And we laughed about it at our last meeting, but in fact, the food element was intrinsic and basic to everything SPOTA did. When the political promises were made, it had to do with food, and the timing of food. 'Cause as I remember, the banquet never started, the food didn't come, until after the promises had been made.¹²³

SPOTA members were dispatched throughout the room to corner the politicians on various issues. A memo from the 1974 banquet set out "what we want out of certain visitors," and illustrates how specific SPOTA Executive members were to sit with specific guests to extract various promises out of them. In this instance, Mayor Art Phillips was to be cornered on zoning concerns while Minister Basford was to be pressured into making funding commitments for SPOTA's bid to develop co-op housing on contentious city lots.¹²⁴ The use of alcohol also played a key role in the banquets, with archived memos noting that specific VIPs were to be plied with scotch whiskey before being pressed for political commitments.¹²⁵ At the 1969 banquet, a bottle of Johnny Walker scotch was placed on every table, and Jo-Anne Lee recalls that this was a conscious tactic suggested by Strathcona resident Hayne Wai. Lee recalled: "you

never started speeches until everyone was well lubricated so that they would lose their inhibitions and make those promises in the spur of the moment.”¹²⁶ Seating arrangements planned in advance dispersed VIP guests throughout the restaurant in an attempt by organizers to isolate them from one another, so as to make it easier for SPOTA executives to extract commitments from them.

Seating arrangements were also prepared to make certain that residents would often be sitting at the same table as the VIPs. This represented a conscious effort by SPOTA organizers to make some of the more politically inactive or deferential residents more comfortable with politicians as people, and therefore more comfortable in engaging authority. In addition, this strategy was also centred upon giving residents a broader sense of ownership of the community movement and over SPOTA. Marzari stated that the banquet strategy

... speaks to the strategy of inclusiveness, of involvement of all community, of a non-combative but yet still effective confrontation, and always with the agenda of getting things done with the community. Food was it. Food does that. So people would leave banquets, the Strathcona people would leave the banquets and be able to speak to friends, networks, classes about the banquet, about the promises made and about a community that was doing a job.¹²⁷

Shirley Chan also recalled that the first banquet in 1969 focused as much on making sure the community felt involved in the movement as it focused on building political connections and extracting political promises. Chan said that the banquet was held, in part, so residents could say “I was there.” Chan added: “The banquet provided... a first hand experience, and it wasn’t hearsay because you had gone to the banquet.”¹²⁸

These strategies further attest to the grassroots nature of this movement, and demonstrate that SPOTA’s goals centred on democratic reform. This reform included both the organizers’ efforts to change the relationship of citizens to structures of power and to expand the level of participation of all residents in local governance. Furthermore, SPOTA’s annual banquets are a key example of how cultural traditions were drawn upon and modified as a successful tactic. A Chinese cultural practice that had traditionally been used to alter power relationships between

kinship networks was adapted by a community organization for use as a lobbying tool and an organizing tool. Lastly, these banquets were not protests, and therefore represent another example of how Strathcona differs from the contemporary community activism of the time. Instead, through strategies of co-option, charm, and flattery, SPOTA's banquets aimed to influence and extract promises from the very politicians that activists were ostensibly mobilized against.

Chapter 10: Internal Communications

Strathcona's internal communications were integral to its success as a movement, not least because of the challenges inherent in trying to keep everyone informed and involved despite the language barriers and cultural differences in the community. The communications system also is indicative of how the culture of the neighbourhood was adapted to make SPOTA a more effective, inclusive, and genuinely grassroots organization."

Unlike most other residential areas in Vancouver, much of Strathcona was built without alleys running behind houses, which meant that residents' properties adjoined at the back as well as at the sides.¹²⁹ This layout allowed neighbours to communicate casually with each other over their back fences and encouraged a closeness that is absent in neighbourhoods where alleys separate yards. In an interview she conducted with Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, Jo-Anne Lee noted that even when there were language barriers, neighbours developed friendly and inherently-trusting relationships with each other simply by virtue of living in such close proximity for so many years. A friendly evening smile and wave across the garden fence between Polish residents and their Chinese neighbours over time developed the trust and communication that facilitated organizing. Lee recalled many residents of the neighbourhoods had gone through a great deal of hardship, kept to themselves, and were inherently distrustful, but that because of the layout of the neighbourhood, residents felt that "this was a safe place."¹³⁰ Shirley Chan recalls that in the early stages of organizing the community in 1968, her mother,

Mary Chan, encouraged residents to use these neighbourly relationships to find out how their neighbours viewed Scheme 3 and to encourage them to attend the SPOTA founding meeting. Shirley Chan said that her mother knew that because of this physical closeness and the relationships that neighbors built with one another, many neighbours trusted each other inherently, and that this could be used to encourage involvement in the community movement.¹³¹

SPOTA organizers recognized that this indigenous communications infrastructure would be integral to mobilizing residents, keeping residents informed of what was going on. After SPOTA was formed, executives Tom Mesic, a Croatian resident, Inez Leland, an Italian homeowner and longtime resident of Strathcona, and Mary Chan, Anne Chan, Sue Lum, and Bessie Lee set about establishing an internal communications system. The executive recognized that the over-the-fence system of communication would be essential to building the organization, and they set up what they dubbed the "chopstick telegraph."¹³² The executive went over the neighbourhood block-by-block and identified residents who could serve as block captains in charge of disseminating urgent information from the executive. Zones were organized by existing city blocks, based on which houses backed onto each other. Shirley Chan recalled that "blocks were never routed right across the street" because "we used to organize around the back fence."¹³³ Block captains were responsible for mobilizing their neighbours, getting them to meetings, encouraging them to write letters to City Hall, distributing newsletters, and informing and organizing their block when walking tours of VIPs were coming through the neighbourhood. Communication also flowed in the other direction, with block captains relaying the concerns of residents to SPOTA executives. Block captains also played a crucial organizing role in planning neighbourhood tours by identifying which households VIPs should visit, orchestrating what the other neighbours were to be doing when a delegation came through, and making certain all residents relayed the same message.

The process of identifying and organizing the block captains also called into play a number of cultural factors. Block captains were both Chinese and non-Chinese, but had to have been residents for long enough to have stature among the elderly residents in their zone. SPOTA organizers knew that the issue of respect and stature held particularly true for older residents, whom they knew would not accept direction from just any eager organizer, but who needed to know that the block captain was a long-time resident. Shirley Chan notes that her mother played the central role in both designating block captains and in ensuring that they were afforded appropriate respect by their neighbours:

They knew the community and they had to take charge of that community. And they talked to their neighbours. And if you lived on that block, then your credibility was higher. That was [my mother's] sense too. So, who lives on such and such a block? Well, so and so, well, let's have her come, let's go talk to her. They would have meetings in our living rooms, our kitchen a lot of the times.¹³⁴

In the event that a block organizer was not being met with enough respect, Mary Chan would then walk around the block with that organizer and talk to the neighbours, making it known that the particular organizer had Chan's confidence, and was therefore to be accorded the appropriate respect. This was the case not just with Chinese residents, but with all neighbours, as Mrs. Chan was held in high stature throughout the community.¹³⁵

The multilingual character of Strathcona had an ongoing impact on how SPOTA and the neighbourhood's activism was communicated. From its founding meeting in 1968, residents agreed that all official meetings had to be conducted in both English and Chinese. Jo-Anne Lee notes that meetings often lasted for several hours as proceedings were translated into English and Chinese, and occasionally into Italian and Ukrainian as well, depending on who was attending a given meeting.¹³⁶ Meeting minutes were also always transcribed in both languages, and several AGM minutes were also translated into Italian.¹³⁷ In the early 1970s, SPOTA was able to apply for and received federal government funding to pay a translator to transcribe all meeting minutes and newsletters into both languages, with the newsletter masthead including Italian and Ukrainian translations.¹³⁸

In creating the internal communications system for the neighbourhood, SPOTA organizers were able to identify and adapt the pre-existing culture of the community to ensure that residents were regularly kept informed and involved. This demonstrates both the need and the utility of having internal leadership in a community such as Strathcona, and one that understands the dynamic of neighbourhood. Shirley Chan recalls that when Margaret Mitchell was helping residents set up SPOTA, she was continually skeptical about this system of communication and was always amazed at its effectiveness, noting that no other community group that she worked with in the city was able to communicate with one another as effectively as SPOTA.¹³⁹ The communications system demonstrates once again the grassroots nature of this movement, with organizers using existing networks rather than trying to impose a system upon residents, and with each block having its own leadership figure in the form of the block captain.

Conclusion

In 1972 the *Vancouver Province* profiled Shirley Chan for the "Women's Province" section. In the interview, Chan reminisced about her first introduction to activism in the form of translating for her mother as they canvassed doors, and how these small localized efforts grew into a movement where residents managed to bring about genuine democratic reform. Chan told the interviewer that a new, broad movement of community activists was taking root, which she described as "what we call participatory democracy, and everybody is talking about it.... People are concerned about EVERYTHING, not just themselves and their own families."¹⁴⁰ Speaking about SPOTA and the new community groups that were then beginning to form throughout Vancouver, Chan noted that "citizens' organizations themselves are not new...but this is a new breed of group."¹⁴¹ What made this group new, Chan described, was that they formed not out of a conservative instinct to halt development in order to protect their neighbourhood, but instead to actively affect systemic change in politics and government.

From the outset, the movement that grew out of Strathcona residents' efforts to stop the clearance and reconstruction of their neighbourhood had the larger purpose of reforming political structures and enhancing civic engagement. It was a movement that succeeded in both these respects. Perhaps the best evidence that the activism engaged in by Strathcona residents had broader goals than just preservation lies in the fact that SPOTA remained active for years after residents succeeded in halting urban renewal, and in forcing the three levels of government to recognize citizens as active participants in the planning process. Residents formed SPOTA in November 1968. The federal government froze urban renewal funding in December 1968, while the City shelved Scheme 3 in the face of the government's indefinite extension of the funding freeze in August 1969. Alongside these developments came recognition from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments that they had erred in excluding Strathcona residents from the planning process, and that no future development would occur without the active involvement and express consent of the community.

SPOTA achieved all of these victories in less than a year. However, residents did not simply step back in confidence that they had saved their neighbourhood, but through SPOTA continued organizing the community and expanding residents' participation in the political process. This is one of the major factors that makes SPOTA unique as an organization. Sewell and Fraser write that Toronto residents who were fighting against urban renewal and freeway construction simply demobilized once the projects had been halted. They failed to garner any significant reforms. Yet SPOTA continued its activism well into the 1970s, inviting election candidates for neighbourhood tours during every election cycle, and holding annual banquets until 1977. Strathcona residents maintained close relationships with officials at every level of government, relationships which got even closer when longtime SPOTA allies Mike Harcourt and Darlene Marzari were elected to City Council. SPOTA organized regular day trips for residents to go to Victoria and meet with their MLAs and tour the Parliament Buildings, while

also continuing to successfully protest further planned infrastructure projects, from a resurrected highway proposal to a plan to build a centralized city fire hall adjacent to Strathcona School. SPOTA also became an active developer of non-market housing in the community and played a central role in establishing co-operative housing in British Columbia and helping the provincial government to write this form of land title into law.¹⁴² All of these efforts continued despite the fact that by August of 1969 Strathcona residents had received assurances from all levels of government that their community would no longer be threatened with expropriation and demolition.

Strathcona was a multi-ethnic neighbourhood with a large Asian population. Much of Strathcona did not come from cultures with democratic traditions. Furthermore, institutions such as churches, ethnic associations, fraternal societies, and unions did not figure prominently as community resources in the course of activism. Instead, ethnic traditions and the culture of the neighbourhood itself were adapted by residents to provide the core of their activist infrastructure, such as the “chopstick telegraph.”

One of the most significant factors that makes this movement in Strathcona so unique is that residents had virtually no experience with activism or political engagement prior to coming together to oppose the demolition of their neighbourhood. Unlike in the more homogenous white, working-class neighbourhoods examined in American literature and surrounding community activism in Toronto, the emergent organizers in Strathcona did not have experience in the labour movement, either. Indeed, many of the activists in Strathcona were from Asian or European cultures without democratic traditions at all. It is a testament to the genuinely organic and grassroots nature of movement that an organized, structured, and strategic opposition emerged in Strathcona despite this lack of experience in protest and opposition politics. When asked in a 2003 interview where organizers drew their resources from, Shirley Chan stated: “There was no infrastructure to begin with. It had to be built.”¹⁴³ This infrastructure was

assembled by residents who were fighting to save their neighbourhood, and to ensure that their homes and their community were never placed in the same danger again. In the process, elderly homeowners were turned into activists, and immigrants who had never questioned authority became protesters. This was a movement that emerged from a democratic impulse inside the community and was structured to encourage the political involvement of all residents of the community. Community activism in Strathcona was indigenous, creative, and representative of the very people and cultures for whom the community fought. The impacts were far reaching. As Shirley Chan said, the Strathcona struggle “changed how politics was done in Vancouver. It changed who has a voice – away from the west side person with money and influence, to a network of communities, who, if organized, could be heard.”¹⁴⁴

Notes

- ¹ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ² The research for this paper draws heavily from the files of the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants' Association in the City of Vancouver Archives. These files include minutes from bi-weekly executive meetings, SPOTA Annual General Meetings, and emergency community meetings, as well as community newsletters, internal and external correspondence, briefs to City Council, newspaper clippings, reports made to various government ministries and agencies, and consultants' reports. I also make frequent use of transcripts of existing interviews of Strathcona residents provided to me by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee of the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Victoria. These interviews were conducted in 2003 by Jo-Anne Lee who spoke to SPOTA organizers Shirley Chan, Darlene Marzari, Bessie Lee, and Jonathan Lau. The studies and reports pertaining to urban renewal by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the City of Vancouver also figure prominently in this paper.
- ³ Boyte roots the civic activism of the 1970s within the American historical tradition, writing that American society has a deeper history of popular democratic revolt as compared to European societies, which evolved in more Socialist or Social Democratic environments. This, in turn, accounts for why Boyte identifies the civic activism at the time as uniquely American. Slayton and Warren likewise identify the neighbourhood as the locus of the American Democratic impulse. See Harry C. Boyte, The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the new citizen movement (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 1980) 15-13; Robert A. Slayton, Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy (Chicago, Il and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) 227; and Mark R. Warren, Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001) 6-10.
- ⁴ Barbara Epstein, Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1991) 16.
- ⁵ Boyte, The Backyard Revolution, 9.
- ⁶ Warren, op. cit. 6-10.
- ⁷ Epstein, op. cit. 16.
- ⁸ Boyte, The Backyard Revolution, 8-31.
- ⁹ Robert Fisher and Peter Romanofsky, "Introduction," Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective eds. Robert Fisher and Peter Romanofsky (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), xi.
- ¹⁰ Slayton, op. cit. 225.
- ¹¹ Warren, op. cit. 15.
- ¹² Slayton writes that institutions such as local ethnic, social, and athletic clubs which had previously been institutions that fragmented communities ended up providing the social capital that activists and organizers drew upon in later years to mobilize the community and to develop strategies of resistance. Slayton, op.cit. 227.
- ¹³ Boyte, The Backyard Revolution, 179.
- ¹⁴ There were also smaller protests against slated redevelopment in the Don Vale and Kensington neighbourhoods, but these projects were halted before they advanced beyond the blueprint stage due to the activism of Trefann residents. John Fraser, Fighting Back: Urban Renewal in Trefann Court (Toronto, ON: A.M. Hakkert Ltd., 1972) 5.
- ¹⁵ John Sewell, Up Against City Hall (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1972) 15-29.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 22-29; Fraser, op.cit. 5-29.
- ¹⁷ Fraser, op.cit. 4.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 31.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 4.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 31-50.
- ²¹ Ibid, 256-263.
- Sewell writes: "during my term in office, citizen groups have not won one single major issue." Sewell. op.cit. 172.
- ²² V. Setty Pendakur, Cities, Citizens, and Freeways (Vancouver, BC: 1972) 59-68.
- ²³ David Ley, Kay Anderson, and Doug Konrad, "Chinatown-Strathcona: Gaining an entitlement," Neighbourhood Organizations and the Welfare State eds. Schlomo Hasson and David Ley (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1994) 118.
- ²⁴ Pendakur, op.cit. 61.
- ²⁵ Kay J. Anderson, Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980 (Montreal, PQ and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991) 206.
- ²⁶ Darryl Newbury, Stop Spadina: Citizens Against an Expressway (Toronto, ON: Darryl Newbury), 3.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 3-6.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 1-3.

- ²⁸ Ibid, 12.
- ²⁹ Anderson, op.cit. 178-216,
- ³⁰ Ley et al, op.cit. 115.
- ³¹ Ibid, 109.
- ³² Kim Livingston, "Urban Social Movements: Urban Renewal and Neighbourhood Mobilization in Vancouver During the 1960s and '70s" (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, BC, 2002) 2.
- ³³ The 1957 *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, which provided the blueprint for the City of Vancouver's twenty year redevelopment plans, included Chinatown in its study area but focused on Strathcona as a distinct and separate neighbourhood in its urban renewal plans. City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* (Vancouver, BC: December 1957).
- ³⁴ The boundary between Strathcona and Chinatown is generally regarded to be Gore Street, which divides commercial Chinatown to the west with the residential neighbourhood to the east.
- ³⁵ Strathcona Citizens Planning Committee and City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Strathcona Community Profile* (Vancouver, BC: City of Vancouver Planning Department: 1991) 42-32.
- ³⁶ The survey district referred to included both Chinatown and Strathcona. *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, op.cit. 49. Strathcona itself did not have a majority of Chinese residents until the 1970s. The largest increases in the area's Chinese population came only after Canadian immigration laws were amended in 1967 with the introduction of the points system to replace the previous system which gave preferential placement to immigrants from Europe and the Commonwealth. Strathcona Citizens Planning Committee and City of Vancouver Planning Department, *Strathcona Community Profile*, op.cit., 42-32; Ley et al, 114.
- ³⁷ Wing Chung Ng, *Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-1980: The Pursuit of Identity and Power* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1999) 23.
- ³⁸ *Strathcona Community Profile*, op.cit. 42-32.
- ³⁹ Bessie Lee interviewed by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, April 2003.
- ⁴⁰ *Vancouver Province*, January 7 1972, 20.
- ⁴¹ Ng, op.cit. 99.
- ⁴² Ibid, 100.
- ⁴³ David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns : Towns Within Cities In Canada* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1988) 131.
- ⁴⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, January 20 1969, 21.
- ⁴⁵ Ley et al, op.cit. 126.
- ⁴⁶ Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press 1996) 212-214.
- ⁴⁷ Ley et al, op.cit. 116.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 120.
- ⁴⁹ See McDonald, op.cit. 33-62.
- ⁵⁰ Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation and City of Vancouver. *Build a Better City* (1964). Film.
- ⁵¹ *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, op.cit. 11. This plan was made financially feasible via amendments made in 1956 to the *National Housing Act*, which established a cost sharing arrangement between the three levels of government, with the federal government contributing up to 50% of the cost of urban renewal schemes. Livingston, op.cit. 60.
- ⁵² Livingston, op.cit. 63.
- ⁵³ The East End Survey Area which was incorporated in the twenty year plan was larger than just Strathcona and also encompassed the predominately industrial area north of Hastings Street, and the western periphery of the Grandview-Woodlands area between McLean Drive and Glen Drive, with Hastings Street serving as the northern boundary and 5th Avenue marking the southern. Strathcona proper was identified as the first area of priority. *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, op.cit. 91 and map, "Severity of Blight," 40. The first five-year stage centered on the construction of "housing banks" for residents who were to be displaced in the subsequent mass clearance schemes, following a cyclical pattern of "the continuation of acquisition, clearance, and redevelopment of sites." *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, op.cit. 14.
- ⁵⁴ Vancouver Urban Research Group, *Forever Deceiving You: The Politics of Vancouver Development* (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Urban Research Group, 1972) 11-12.
- ⁵⁵ Bessie Lee quoted in "Strathcona Property Owners Association," *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* eds. Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter (Victoria, BC: Province of British Columbia Archives, 1979) 180.
- ⁵⁶ Mary Chan quoted in "Community Attitudes to Urban Renewal," in *Opening Doors*, 178.
- ⁵⁷ Harry Con quoted in "Community Attitudes to Urban Renewal," in *Opening Doors*, 177.
- ⁵⁸ Ng, op.cit. 97-99.
- ⁵⁹ City of Vancouver Technical Planning Board, *Urban Renewal Scheme No. 3: Strathcona. Summary Report* (Vancouver, BC: City of Vancouver Technical Planning Board, 1967) 7.

- ⁶⁰ City of Vancouver Archives, Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association files, Add Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 2. SPOTA Early History files. "The Beginning," 5-7.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 6.
- ⁶² Shirley Chan noted in an interview that "My mother you have to understand was instrumental in helping people find houses, jobs, she did it all right? So there were a lot of debts out there. So when she called her debts in, people responded." Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁶³ SPOTA, "The Beginning," op.cit. 5-7.
- ⁶⁴ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁶⁵ Ramon Benedetti quoted in "Community Attitudes to Urban Renewal," in Opening Doors, 176.
- ⁶⁶ SPOTA, "The Beginning," op.cit. 7.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ramon Benedetti quoted in "Community Attitudes to Urban Renewal," in Opening Doors, 176.
- ⁷⁰ Bessie Lee and Mary Chan quoted. in "Strathcona Property Owners Association," in Opening Doors, 181.
- ⁷¹ Harry Con quoted in "Community Attitudes to Urban Renewal," in Opening Doors, 177; and Bessie Lee quoted. in "Strathcona Property Owners Association," in Opening Doors, 183.
- ⁷² Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Vancouver Province, January 7 1972, 20.
- ⁷⁵ SPOTA "The Beginning," op.cit. 7.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Con stated in the article that "most residents feel the city is not doing the right thing." Vancouver Sun, December 21 1968, 2.
- ⁷⁸ Vancouver Sun, January 20 1969, 21.
- ⁷⁹ Shirley Chan quoted. in "Community Attitudes to Urban Renewal," in Opening Doors, 179.
- ⁸⁰ Bessie Lee quoted in "Strathcona Property Owners Association," in Opening Doors, 183.
- ⁸¹ Vancouver Sun, December 21 1968, 2.
- ⁸² Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Vancouver Sun, November 8 1968, 8.
- ⁸⁶ Province, November 8 1968, 6.
- ⁸⁷ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Vancouver Sun, November 8 1968, 8. Vancouver Province, November 8 1968, 6.
- ⁹⁰ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Government of Canada, Report of the Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Redevelopment (Ottawa, ON: Queen's Printer, 1969) 22-23.
- ⁹⁵ History: Notes on SPOTA's Formation, 1968-1970. CVA SPOTA Files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-C-6 file 1.
- ⁹⁶ Livingston includes an extensive discussion on the report of the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, released in January 1969, on pages 120-123.
- ⁹⁷ Quoted in Livingston, op.cit. 122.
- ⁹⁸ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ⁹⁹ Jo-Anne Lee, Michael Bruce, and Mayna Vancaillie, "To 'Build a Better City': Bringing Ethnic Minority Women into the Strathcona Story." (Unpublished, 2004).
- ¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Lau, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ¹⁰¹ SPOTA brief and petition to Vancouver City Council, 27 January 1969, SPOTA v.6f.3. Letters were sent to Minister of Transportation Paul Hellyer, Secretary of State Ron Basford, CMHC President M. Hignett, Prime Minister Trudeau, MPs Harold E. Winch and Grant Deachman, BC Minister of Municipal Affairs Dan Campbell, Deputy Minister J.E. Brown, MLAs R.A. Williams, Tom Berger, Herb Capozzi, Grace McCarthy, Evan Wolfe, Pat McGee, as well as all Aldermen and Civic Planning Officials. CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 1.
- ¹⁰² SPOTA Executive Meeting Minutes, 22 April 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 6.
- ¹⁰³ Letter from Vancouver City Council to SPOTA, 17 April 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 4.

- ¹⁰⁴ Vancouver Sun, April 18 1969, 1.
- ¹⁰⁵ SPOTA Executive meeting minutes, 24 June 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 7.
- ¹⁰⁶ Vancouver Sun, August 28 1969, 29.
- ¹⁰⁷ Bessie Lee, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, April 2003.
- ¹⁰⁸ Bessie Lee quoted in "Strathcona Property Owners Association," in Opening Doors, 184.
- ¹⁰⁹ Vancouver Sun, August 28 1969, 29.
- ¹¹⁰ Letter from Robert Andras to SPOTA, 23 June 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 1.
- ¹¹¹ Bessie Lee quoted in "Strathcona Property Owners Association," in Opening Doors, 184.
- ¹¹² Vancouver Sun, August 7 1969, 13.
- ¹¹³ Vancouver Sun, January 7 1970, 7.
- ¹¹⁴ Report on Cocktail party, 15 February 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 3.
- ¹¹⁵ SPOTA AGM minutes, 7 November 1976, CVA SPOTA Files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-A-5, file 7.
- ¹¹⁶ SPOTA executive meeting minutes, 15 February 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 3.
- ¹¹⁷ Report on Cocktail party, 15 February 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 3.
- ¹¹⁸ SPOTA General Meeting minutes, 3 March 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 3.
- ¹¹⁹ SPOTA Executive meeting minutes, 26 February 1969, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-3, file 3.
- ¹²⁰ An example can be found in Hayne Wai's pre-banquet memorandum, dated 26 June 1974, which detailed who was going to be cornered on what commitments, and mentioned that executives should prepare specific questions and topics of conversation with other VIPs, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-1, file 2-4.
- ¹²¹ SPOTA's first annual fundraising banquet was held 7 August 1969 at the Bamboo Terrace Restaurant, CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-1, file 2.
- ¹²² For information on the use of *Guanxi*, see E. Wickberg, ed. *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 221-243; MayFair Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The art of social relationships in China*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Publishing, 1994); and Yunxiang Yan, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- ¹²³ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ¹²⁴ The SPOTA memorandum, written to Joe Wai from Hayne Wai, is dated 26 June 1974. The first part of the memo details the answers that SPOTA wants from the various officials attending, including Mayor Art Phillips, Alderman Michael Harcourt, Minister Basford, Michael Audain and BC Minister of Housing Lorne Nicholson, as well as suggesting that questions be formulated for the other special guests. CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-1, file 4.
- ¹²⁵ CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-1, files 2 and 3.
- ¹²⁶ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan interview, May 2003.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid.
- ¹²⁹ The *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* and *Summary Report* both contain neighbourhood maps and aerial photographs that confirm this layout. See specifically "Area Identification Map" and aerial photo in the *Summary Report* and photographs included in the *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*.
- ¹³⁰ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ¹³¹ Ibid.
- ¹³² Ibid.
- ¹³³ Ibid.
- ¹³⁴ Ibid.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid.
- ¹³⁶ Jo-Anne Lee, et al. op.cit.
- ¹³⁷ CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-A-5, files 1-8.
- ¹³⁸ CVA SPOTA files, Add.Mss. 734, Loc. 583-B-7, files 1-4.
- ¹³⁹ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ¹⁴⁰ Vancouver Province, January 7 1972, 20.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁴² See CVA, Strathcona Area Housing Society files, Add.Mss. 734. Loc. 583-E-1, files 1-4.
- ¹⁴³ Darlene Marzari and Shirley Chan, interview by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Vancouver, BC, May 2003.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid.

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