

# Restrictions on development urged to protect heritage homes

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BY MALCOLM CURTIS  
*Times Colonist staff*

As Ross Sinclair looks out from his 100-year-old James Bay home, his gaze focuses on a muddy vacant lot where another vintage home was recently demolished.

It's on Victoria's Avalon Street, where 10 of the 15 single-family homes are designated heritage buildings. Yet there's nothing to stop anyone from knocking down the houses that aren't designated and replacing them with inappropriate stucco duplexes, says Sinclair.

"You could have a two-storey concrete block with a flat roof — there's nothing in the bylaws to stop that," he says from the porch of his freshly painted two-storey home designed by Samuel Maclure.

Sinclair is one of a group of homeowners in the Avalon-Huntingdon Place neighbourhood who have pushed for the creation of a heritage conservation area to control developments.

Such an area was proposed in James Bay's neighbourhood plan 10 years ago but it has taken until now to implement. City council agreed this week to send the proposal to a public hearing that will likely be held next month.

The conservation area would not prevent development. It would merely put tighter controls on what kind of buildings could be constructed.

*Please see JAMES BAY, C2*

# James Bay: Conservation-minded

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Any development proposal — even minor modifications to existing homes — would have to be vetted by the city's heritage committee and council itself.

The proposed conservation area covers a little more than a block, extending from the south side of Toronto Street to the south side of Avalon Road. On the west side, it includes the James Bay Inn, on Government Street, which faces one end of Avalon from Sinclair's home.

The area also includes a 30-metre strip of land along the west side of 350-360 Douglas St. along Huntingdon Place. This land is used mostly for parking for two apartment towers built in the 1960s before activists put a halt to more high rises in the neighbourhood.

Now, residents fear that under the existing zoning a developer could build townhouses on the lots without any design controls.

Redner Jones, an Avalon Road resident who is fixing up his 1892 home, supports the heritage area, even if it means going before a council committee to get approval for his restoration work.

"By designating the street we won't destroy it by

(allowing) horrible stucco and steel things," says Jones.

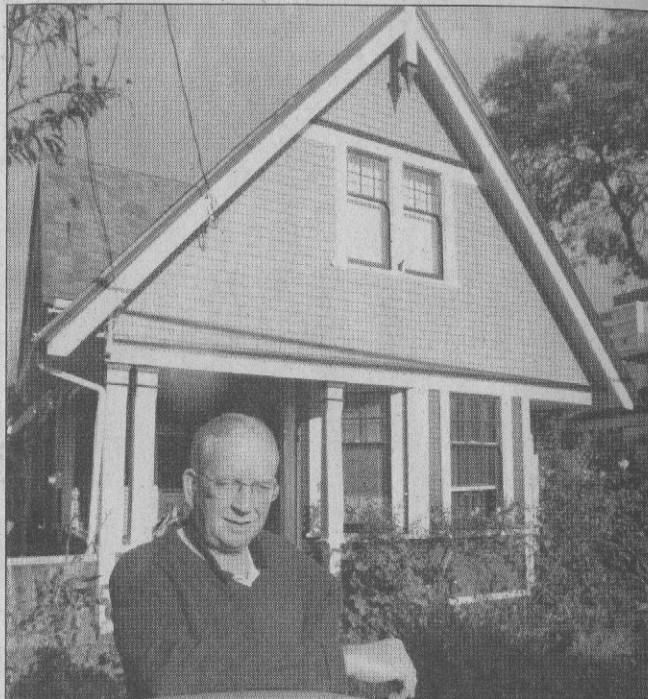
He is one of a growing number of owners of Victorian and Edwardian homes who are restoring them by undoing past alterations. Many homes in the areas had asbestos shingles or stucco cement stuck over the original wood siding. Other alterations that have changed the character of buildings include replacement of wood windows with aluminum or vinyl ones.

The changes were well-meaning, often geared to improving energy efficiency or reducing maintenance. But now people are beginning to realize that a properly restored home has greater value.

The conservation area, if it is approved, won't be established in time to affect the land in front of Sinclair's home. A developer is going ahead with a 4,000-square-foot duplex and neighbours are happy with the design, even if the size is larger than existing homes.

It's lucky the developer was co-operative but residents can't always count on that and that's why the extra protection is needed, Sinclair says.

If approved, the conservation area will join others in Victoria already established on James Bay's Battery Street, in Old Town, Chinatown and Victoria West's Catherine Street.



Ross Sinclair, in front of his 100-year-old home on Avalon Street, wants to see some form of design control. Ray Smith/TC