

Times Aug 23 / 77

PLANNERS EYE \$6M HOTEL

A proposal for a major hotel costing about \$6 million, to be built on property overlooking the Inner Harbor one block west of the legislative buildings, has been submitted to city planners and advisory committees for discussion.

The hotel of about 150 rooms would be built on the Belleville-Oswego-Quebec-Pendray block by a Victoria-based group associated with Flag Inns, a chain of independently operated hotels in Australia and New Zealand.

Don Ray, managing director of two Gorge Road motels, the Coachman Inn and Canbury Inn, and president of

Flag Inns of North America, said today the principals in the proposed development are himself "and a group of Australians."

Technically, there is no obstruction in the path of the project because the property is already zoned for hotel-motel use.

But Ray and his architect, Ben Levinson of the Victoria firm Orme and Levinson, both said it will require "sensitive" treatment because located on the site are two former mansions which have been recommended for heritage designation.

The buildings are the tourist

attraction known as Judge Hunter's Haunted House, 327 Belleville, and the Captain's Palace restaurant, 309 Belleville.

Preliminary plans call for the retention of the latter on its present site, but the relocation of the Hunter building to the western (Pendray) side of the block, where it would form part of a so-called "heritage precinct" of similar old homes.

A spokesman for the city's Heritage Advisory Committee said today the matter was discussed at the committee's meeting last week, and although members would prefer to see the building remain

where it is they apparently had no strong objections to the move.

Ray said the future of another building on the property, the tourist attraction Land of the Little People, has not been determined. But he added: "If we can save it we probably will."

Levinson said the hotel building would be L-shaped in plan, wrapped around the Captain's Palace. It would have a "stepped back" design along the lines of the nearby Laurel Point condominium block, with a height of five or six storeys. Parking would be underground.

Alderman Fears Lawsuits Over Heritage Wording

Victoria's heritage program is in jeopardy and the city could face millions of dollars in lawsuits because of badly drafted provincial heritage legislation, Ald. Bob Wright charged today.

Under the legislation, the owners of heritage buildings could demand compensation from the city if they suffered financially from heritage designation.

"We don't quarrel with the concept of compensation, but Victoria doesn't have a heritage fund (to pay the bills), and the risk we're talking about could run into the millions," said Wright.

The legal bind in which the

city has been placed has frozen the designation of 32 commercial downtown buildings and council could back down on one of the structures that is facing demolition.

Wright said that Recreation and Conservation Minister Sam Bawlf's Heritage Conservation Act is so poorly put together there seems to be no way the city can save two old houses now facing demolition on Belleville Street.

The houses at 321 and 327 Belleville, which operate as tourist attractions known as Judge Hunter's Haunted House and The Land of The Little People, stand in the

way of a new hotel proposed by A.J. Butler and Belleville Developments Ltd.

Judge Hunter's Haunted House is on the list of 32 buildings the city approved for heritage designation several months ago.

Wright said lawyers for Butler have demanded that demolition permits be issued immediately, and because of Bawlf's legislation the city is in no position to go to court to block demolition.

The developers first applied for permits on Jan. 30 but the city held off, Wright said, in the hope that some way of saving the structures could be found.

"But we are at risk if we refuse the permits any longer and, in fact, our solicitor (city solicitor Jakob de Villiers) tells us they could go to court and get the permits immediately."

Wright said that the situation on Belleville is an immediate crisis, but that in the long run the city's entire heritage program may be destroyed by Bawlf's badly worded legislation.

"It puts our whole heritage program in jeopardy — it puts the whole city in jeopardy financially," said Wright.

"We've petitioned the minister for changes but we've got no indication he will."

Wright said that the main problem lies in the area of compensation.

"The act tries to compensate the owner for any possible economic loss — but if the owner feels the compensation is not fair he can take us to court and claim the difference. That's a blank cheque."

Wright said that in the Belleville Street case, where a multi-million dollar hotel project may be affected by the city's actions, Victoria could be hit with a claim for \$2 million or more.

In addition, he said, there are the 32 commercial down-

town buildings that are awaiting official designation as heritage structures.

"If we designate them now, any time up to a year from now the owners can take the city to court," Wright said.

He said that the Belleville Street matter will be dealt with in a planning committee meeting Tuesday and indicated it's unlikely the city will try to hold up the demolition permits any longer.

"We're not prepared to make a decision where the taxpayers could be faced with having to pay for our boo-boo," said Wright.

Belleville houses typify city's heritage dilemma

By HUBERT BEYER

Colonist Reporter

The city of Victoria's ambitious program for the preservation of commercial heritage buildings is in jeopardy and to prevent its total collapse, the planning department is proposing a scheme that would compensate owners of such buildings for economic losses suffered as a result of designation.

Under the proposed scheme, property taxes for all designated commercial heritage buildings would be frozen when designation takes place.

TAXES WOULD REMAIN unchanged from then on, and so would the assessment, regardless of improvements done to the property.

To minimize the cost to the city, the planning department recommends that city council ask the provincial government to finance half the cost of the program out of its newly-established heritage fund.

In a report to the city's Heritage Advisory Committee, the planning department cites the possible cost of such a program.

BASED ON the 35 commercial buildings already designated, plus the 31 proposed designations tabled last year, the tax shortfall for the two-year period from 1975 to 1977 would have been \$47,615.

Victoria Ald. Robert Wright, who serves on the Heritage Advisory Committee, says the only way to salvage the entire commercial heritage program is to introduce a compensation scheme.

"The bottom line is this: Either the provincial legislation is changed, which is unlikely, or we bring in a compensation scheme. Failing those alternatives, we might as well forget about heritage," Wright said in an interview Monday.

The problems into which the city's commercial heritage designation program has run are exemplified by the uncertain fate of two buildings on Belleville, now accommodating tourist attractions—Judge Hunter's Haunted House and Land of the Little People.

THE BUILDINGS, along with all other property bounded by Oswego and Pendray, Belleville and Quebec, are owned by International Travel Inns Ltd.

International Travel Inns has leased the land to Belleville Developments Ltd., which plans to tear down the two old homes and build a hotel on the site.

The only old structure to be spared at the moment is the Captain's Palace, next door to the other two houses. It is tied up by a long-term lease.

The city's Hallmark Society has embarked on a campaign to save the buildings from demolition because they are "a unique entrance to the city" from the Inner Harbor, but city council believes it cannot designate the buildings as heritage structures without running the risk of being sued.

"Claims for economic losses if we go ahead with the designation could be astronomical," Wright said.

AND THAT'S WHY city council tabled the designation bylaws, along with 29 others last fall, he added.

The problem, Wright said, was that according to the provincial Heritage Conservation Act, the owners of designated buildings may have a right to fair compensation for any economic losses they incurred as a result of designation.

The provincial government could solve the problem by simply changing the legislation but there were no indications the government was willing to do that, Wright said.

The other possibility, he said, was to introduce some compensation scheme which would be universally applied. Individual owners of designated buildings, he said wouldn't be able to enforce any additional claims beyond those provided for in the compensation scheme.

Wright said he feared that it was too late to save the two buildings on Belleville, but that wasn't the city's only worry.

"That's only the tip of the iceberg. Unless we do something, the whole commercial heritage program is down the drain, because what applies to the two Belleville buildings also goes for all the other commercial heritage buildings," he said.

WRIGHT MADE IT CLEAR that he didn't want to see the two houses torn down any more than the Hallmark Society, but he didn't see any way out.

Belleville Developments has applied for demolition permits to take down the two homes and Wright said the city could no longer refuse to issue them.

But he had a parting shot for the owner and the developer:

"Any sensitive architect would be able to incorporate the two homes into the design for a hotel on the property behind it," he said.

THE TRUTH WAS, he added, that neither the owner nor the developer had any intentions of saving the buildings.

Times 16 May

Bid Fails to Save City Heritage House

An attempt to save an old building on Belleville Street by heritage designation failed today in a meeting of Victoria council's planning committee.

Ald. John Hayes and Bill McElroy were defeated on a motion to designate 327 Belleville and to simultaneously proceed with a compensation bylaw.

Mayor Mike Young and Ald. Bob Wright argued in favor of issuing a demolition permit to a developer who plans a multi-million dollar hotel for the site.

Outcome of the vote swung on Ald. Larry Ryan's ballot. Ryan said he decided to vote against heritage designation because of the arguments he'd heard during the meeting.

Wright had informed the committee that unless a permit was issued, the city would be at risk for compensation to developer E.J. Butler of Belleville Developments Ltd.

Butler wants to demolish both the houses at 327 and 321 Belleville, which are tourist attractions known as Judge Hunter's Haunted House and the Land of the Little People respectively.

The house at 321 has no heritage value and no members on council spoke in favor of trying to preserve it.

Hayes, however, said the structure at 327 is valuable and council should go to court if necessary in an attempt to save it.

"We didn't embark on the most ambitious heritage pro-

gram in North America by being wishy-washy about it ... you don't get a second chance on a heritage building."

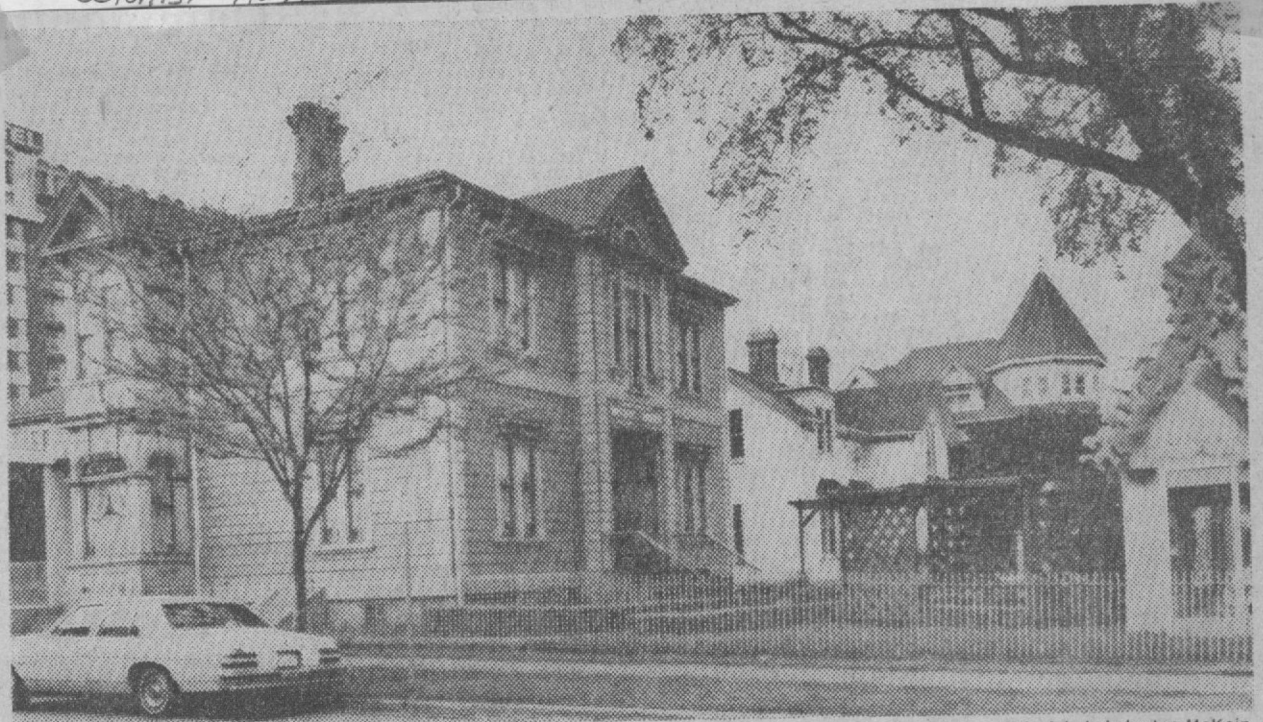
"It's not a case of being wishy-washy, but of being responsible politicians looking at both sides," said Wright. "These houses are not the ones to go to war on."

"These will go, and then the next and the next," charged McElroy.

When Hayes put his motion to designate the building and proceed with the drafting of a compensation bylaw, Wright commented: "I can just see it. New York and Victoria go bankrupt."

Later in the meeting, committee voted to issue demolition permits immediately for both houses.

Colonist May 15 '78



—Colonist photo by Ian McKain

If they're designated, claims for commercial loss could be high

Colonist May 18 1978

Civic Scene

by Hubert Beyer

Who is in control of the city's future?

Those of you who labor under the illusion that city council is, stay with me. By the time you reach the end of this column, your child-like faith in the system may be slightly shattered.

At the very least, you may be forced to admit that in certain cases, the vested interests of a minority override those of the public.

I would like to draw to your attention the three old homes on Belleville, housing a restaurant and two tourist attractions.

They are the Captain's Palace, Land of the Little People and Judge Hunter's Haunted House.

Forgetting for a moment the relative merits of tourist attractions, the Captain's Palace and Judge Hunter's House are excellent examples of Victoria's early building heritage.

The fact that they are at the waterfront, in clear vision of the ships coming into the Inner Harbor, makes them even more valuable as reminders of the past.

So, what's the big problem? Why doesn't city council designate the buildings as heritage structures and make sure they'll still be around a hundred years from now?

Because the city fears that the owner or the developer of the city block on which the houses stand might sue the sickly taxpayers for a healthy sum of money.

Here's a brief outline of the problem:

The entire city block bounded by Oswego and Pendray, Belleville and Quebec is owned by International Travel Inns Ltd. It has been leased for 75 years to Belleville Developments Ltd.

Belleville Developments wants to build a hotel on the site. To get maximum exposure on Belleville, the firm wants to demolish two of the houses. The third one, the Captain's Palace, might also have been in danger, weren't it for the saving grace that it's tied up in a long-term lease by the present operators of the restaurant.

By now, the familiar North American picture of confrontation between developers and the public emerges. You will forgive me for saying that with few exceptions, the public has been on the losing end of that battle.

The city may, of course, designate the buildings as heritage structures, but the provincial Heritage Conservation Act contains a provision for legal redress if the owner of a designated building suffers financial losses as a result of the designation.

And it's the compensation aspect that scares the devil out of some members of city council.

They fear that the developer might be able to make a case in court for having lost millions of dollars in prospective earnings because the designation torpedoed his hotel project.

What I don't understand is how a developer could possibly claim that the financial success of a million-dollar project to be built on an entire city block stands and falls with a house on a sixty-foot lot.

The city solicitor advised council to approve the applications for the demolition of the two buildings. He would be a bad solicitor if he had done otherwise. The legislation has never been tested in the courts and as long as there is a chance the city might lose, he must caution the politicians.

But in the end, it had to be a political decision. Council may take a risk. In fact, they have to take risks if they want to govern in the interests of the people. Caving in to pressure is often the easy way out, but not always in the public's interest.

I can understand the developer's wish to get rid of the old homes which only cramp his project, but I can't understand a city council accommodating him.

And I don't buy Ald. Robert Wright's warnings that a responsible politician can't take that risk.

If that attitude had prevailed six years ago, we'd now have three 20-storey towers on the Reid site, one of them in the water, and James Bay would be covered wall-to-wall with three-storey frame apartments.

The whole affair is nauseating. It shows that developers can still thumb their noses at the city, the elected officials and the people. Financial gain still overrides the aspirations of the public. And if that isn't a sad spectacle, I don't know what is.

What a great opportunity for the developer to show a little consideration for the people's wishes. Any self-respecting architect would give his eye teeth to design a hotel which not only tolerates the two corner buildings, but capitalizes on them.

Failing co-operation from the developer, city council should have told him in no uncertain terms what he could do with his plans to tear down a heritage house.

But instead, the aldermen approved the applications for the demolition of the two homes, Wright and the mayor because they fear a massive law suit.

The strangest behavior in this controversy was displayed by Ald. Larry Ryan. He didn't even address himself to the pros and cons of designating the houses. He simply went along with the mayor and Wright because the senior staff had recommended so.

As things stand, the question of who runs the city is still open. City council's claim to that role rings a little hollow.

Heritage Act Defended

By MARK HUME
Times Staff

Recreation and Conservation Minister Sam Bawlf denied Tuesday that his heavily-criticised heritage legislation is to blame for Victoria's Bellville Street dilemma.

criticism levelled at his bill by city hall.

He said Mayor Mike Young and city solicitor Jacob de Villiers both saw the legislation in its drafting stages and had been asked for input. They made no complaints at the time and the act underwent no major changes between then and when it was introduced in the house.

The bill has been criticised for having a loophole in the compensation area that leaves Victoria open to lawsuits by those who suffer from heritage designation to a building.

A house there slated for heritage designation by Victoria is about to be demolished.

Bawlf said the act is adequate but is not being used properly by city council.

The minister also said that he has been surprised by the

De Villiers said today that he had seen the legislation and had written a confidential report on it for Young.

"But my attention wasn't focused on compensation at that time and no comment was made on that aspect."

De Villiers added that subsequently he wrote Bawlf's office suggesting a number of changes — changes that have not been forthcoming.

The clause in question states council may grant compensation to the owner of a heritage building and the compensation shall be deemed fair.

But nothing is said about

compensation to a tenant. And in the Bellville situation the developer is not the owner.

E.J. Butler, of Bellville Developments Ltd., has leased the property for a period of 75 years from International Travel Inns Ltd.

Butler plans a multi-million dollar hotel for the site now occupied by the two old houses at 321 and 327 Bellville. The house at 327 is awaiting heritage designation.

De Villiers says under the act council could compensate the owner through a grant, loan, or tax relief — but that wouldn't stop Butler from launching a lawsuit demanding millions in compensation.

"I'm not criticising the minister," stressed de Villiers.

"I'm just saying the act contains a loophole and the loophole should be closed."

in Demolition Dilemma

But Bawlf feels otherwise.

He says the act gives city hall all the clout it needs to save buildings worthy of heritage designation without worrying about lawsuits.

His denial of any faults in the act came shortly after the city backed down on a demand by Butler for a demolition permit for the houses.

Ald. Bob Wright said there was no alternative but to issue the permits because of weaknesses in the legislation.

But Bawlf said that Wright had not carefully read the legislation.

He said under the act the city can work out covenants and easements with developers.

He said the heritage house could be left standing, for example, and some form of compensation negotiated with the developer. One alternative would be to allow

slightly higher density in return for saving the building.

"And they've had months to enter into that type of arrangement," Bawlf said.

"Ald. Wright has overstated one side of this thing — designation is not the only tool at their disposal."

Bawlf said his comments are not meant as a criticism of council's actions regarding the Bellville houses but are rather meant to set the record straight concerning the role his legislation played in the matter.

"I'd like them to take a broader view of the legislation and to be aware of the other approaches there," said Bawlf.

The minister added he would be taking no action to save either of the buildings because they do not rate as provincial landmarks.

In another development, Plaza Restaurant owner

Harry Loucas offered to move the house at 327 across the street to the corner of Quebec and Oswego. But he said he'd make the move only on condition that council allow him to operate it as a restaurant.

The building at 327 is now a tourist entertainment known as Judge Hunter's Haunted House. It is on the city's list of 32 commercial buildings deserving heritage designation.

The structure at 321 Bellville operates as the Land of The Little People, and the city's heritage committee has ruled that its demolition would be of no cultural loss to the city.

NEW SEASON FILMS

Bawlf chides city for silence on Heritage Act

By HUBERT BEYER
Colonist Reporter

Recreation and Conservation Minister Sam Bawlf said Tuesday Victoria city council could save a heritage house on Belleville from demolition without running the risk of a million-dollar law suit.

Bawlf said designation of the house at 321 Belleville wasn't the only way to ensure its preservation. A 90-day demolition freeze could be imposed during which the city could negotiate with the developer.

Bawlf said the city was interpreting the Heritage Conservation Act too narrowly. He also said the city had ample opportunity to register objections to the act before it

was introduced in the Legislature last year.

Both Mayor Michael Young and city solicitor Jakob de Villiers had been given draft copies of the legislation for their perusal before it was introduced in the house, the minister said.

Bawlf made his comments at a press conference an hour after city council's land-use committee approved permit applications for the demolition of Judge Hunter's House at 321 Belleville and the Land of the Little People at 327 Belleville.

The demolition permits were granted after a heated debate and a close vote.

The mayor, aldermen Robert Wright and Larry Ryan voted in favor of granting the

permit; aldermen John Hayes and William McElroy voted against the motion.

The city solicitor had recommended approval of the demolition permits. He said the city had no legal right to withhold them and doing so might result in claims for financial losses by the developer.

The two houses, of which only Judge Hunter's House is considered of any heritage value, are part of an entire block of land owned by International Travel Inns Ltd. which has leased the property to Belleville Developments Ltd.

Belleville Developments wants to tear down the two old houses to make room for a major hotel project that is to occupy the block bounded by

Belleville and Quebec, Oswego and Pendray. Only the Captain's Palace is to remain. It is relatively safe now because the operators of the restaurant have a long-term lease.

The mayor and Wright warned that refusal to issue the demolition permits for the two houses might cost the city a lot of money because it would enable the developer to claim compensation.

Even if he never intended to build a hotel on the site, he could claim that the delay cost him his financing.

Hayes, on the other hand, argued that the city should take a chance and designate at least one of the buildings. He said the developer could incorporate it into his design.

Ryan didn't address himself to the issue at all. He said he voted in favor of granting the demolition permits because the senior staff had recommended it.

Bawlf told reporters at the press conference that the city had had several months to resolve the issue. Designation, he said, wasn't the only way to save at least the one house.

The city could have negotiated with the developer for retention of the house, the minister said.

"And compensation doesn't have to be in cash; it can be in the form of development rights," he added.

He took strong exception to statements by Wright blaming the provincial legislation for the dilemma in which city council is now.

"Ald. Wright has told only one side of the story. The legislation gives the city all the clout it needs to preserve that house," he said.

And the minister appeared particularly displeased by suggestions from the city hall administration that the Heritage Conservation Act was sloppily-drawn-up legislation.

Both the mayor and de Villiers, he said, had a chance to voice any concerns before the bill was introduced in the house but they didn't at the time, Bawlf said.

Wright, meanwhile, accused the minister of "telling us a bunch of b.s."

He said the city had tried to negotiate with the developer but had no positive response.

"It takes two to negotiate.

What does Bawlf suggest? That I take the developer into my basement and hammer the daylight out of him?" he asked.

Wright said the two houses, Judge Hunter's House and the one accommodating the Land of the Little People, which isn't considered to be of high heritage value, would probably be moved to new locations nearby.

One party, he said, was interested in having Judge Hunter's House moved onto an empty lot for restaurant use. The other one, he added, might serve as a residence for someone in James Bay.

Wright said the developer had agreed to pay \$2,500 for the relocation of each house, but added that both would probably be operated as tourist attractions until fall.



Bawlf

... house could be saved

Times May 25/78

Heritage Houses

Once again, several important heritage houses are going to be destroyed with little protest: 321 and 327 Belleville Street. It shows just how little importance city hall puts on heritage in this city, as well as the appearance of the Inner Harbor. Amidst the bureaucracy at city hall are timid and apathetic people. Ald. Bob Wright is quoted as saying "the city's entire heritage program may be destroyed by Bawlf's badly worded legislation," yet also "these are not the houses to go to war on." He is not only hypocritical and refuses to take blame; he actually voted against designation.

As a part of a team which researched and photographed heritage buildings for 10 months in the Victoria area, I found information on both these structures which proves their historical and architectural significance: 321 Belleville was built in 1875 by Graham James Clark, a Scottish Cariboo pioneer. (He operated a planing mill and sash and door factory at Fort and Langley.) It later became the CP ticket office. 327 Belleville was built in 1877 by Alexander Blair Gray, another Scot. James Syme was the architect and this is his only building left. It was for years the home of Chief Justice and Mrs. Gordon Hunter.



Judge Hunter's house (left), mansion next door threatened by demolition.



Not only are these two of the oldest homes in the area, they lend character to an otherwise unsightly and motel-cluttered Belleville Street. If these houses are not historically important, which are? And just how long will it be before the Captain's Palace and others, go? Should these two be demolished, I see little hope for the rest of our heritage structures. Victoria City Hall is proving itself a dismal failure in this regard. — Mary Ann Baxter, Victoria.

Save Homes Bid Snuffed In Tie Vote

By MARK HUME
Times Staff

Victoria council split right down the middle Thursday night before deciding not to take any action on two old Bellville St. houses now facing demolition.

The houses at 321 and 327 Bellville, which are seen by some aldermen as symbols of the city's progressive heritage program, could be torn down at any time.

Council members who chose not to stand in the way of a developer — who wants the houses out of the way so he can build a hotel — say Bellville St. is not the place to fight a battle over untested heritage laws.

Aldermen John Hayes, Murray Glazier, Robin Blencoe and Bill McElroy unsuccessfully argued that the house at 327 — which is on a city list of 32 commercial buildings awaiting designation — should immediately be named a heritage site.

Opposed to that move were Aldermen Bob Wright, Bill Tindall, Larry Ryan and Mayor Mike Young.

Hayes' motion for designation (which would have halted the developer from demolishing the most valuable of the two houses, but which might have also precipitated a million dollar lawsuit) was defeated by a tie vote. A majority was needed for the motion to pass.

At the heart of the debate was the question of whether or not the city should take a chance on standing up for the houses, knowing that if the matter goes to court the main line of defence would be new provincial government heritage legislation that has been roundly criticised as badly drafted.

In a brief but emotional speech Hayes said: "If we don't retain these two properties we may as well let our whole heritage program go to hell."

He argued that Recreation and Conservation Minister Sam Bawlf had made repeated public statements standing by his Heritage Conservation Act.

"The minister feels his legislation does hold water and I feel that if we are pursued by the developer the minister will come through," said Hayes.

He added that Victoria did not establish what is probably the most comprehensive heritage program in North America by backing down whenever there was a possible lawsuit in the wind.

"We must do everything we can to save these houses," argued Hayes in pleading with other members of council for their support.

Wright, however, said the city would be irresponsible to take a position which could force it into court.

"I believe the minister would be happy if we had to stand up in court and fight," said Wright.

The legislation has never been tested in the courts.

He said he is a strong supporter of the heritage program and didn't want to see the Belleville houses fall,

"but this is not the place to do battle."

"If ever there was a group of buildings we were going to dig in our heels and fight for these are certainly two," McElroy said.

McElroy said aldermen had to weigh the risk of a possible lawsuit against what the people of Victoria wanted and he believed they wanted the two old houses protected.

Blencoe supported McElroy, adding that "If he (Bawlf) says this legislation is going to stand up . . . then I'm going to support him, and if it turns out he's wrong then he'll have to make some retroactive legislation pretty quick."

Tindall reminded council, though, that if Bawlf's legislation didn't hold up in court and the city got hit with a million dollar bill, then the aldermen would be answerable.

"If it doesn't work out we have to face the people," he said.

The main problem with Bawlf's legislation is a clause that states council may grant compensation to the owner of a building given heritage designation and that that compensation shall be deemed fair.

But nothing is said about compensation to a tenant. And in the Bellville situation the developer is not the owner.

E.J. Butler, of Bellville Developments Ltd., has leased the property for a period of 75 years from International Travel Inns. Ltd. He has made it known he either wants the houses at 321 and 327 torn down or moved, to make room for a hotel.

Glazier told council it would be a shame if the buildings were either demolished or relocated because the Belleville block is one of the first things visitors entering the city from the Inner Harbor see.

The block is immediately across the street from the docks used by the Princess Marguerite and the Black Ball ferry.

Belleville Homes Reprieved

Three old houses on Belleville which were facing demolition — despite the heritage value of two — will be saved because the Black Ball ferry now docks on the south side of the harbor.

A planning commission report approved by Victoria city council Thursday said developers have decided the buildings are worth saving because of an increased tourist flow in the neighborhood.

"The recent relocation of all ferry facilities to the south side of the Inner Harbor has enhanced the demand for tourist attractions and food facilities adjacent to the ferry terminals," said the report.

Pembroke Management Ltd. plans to renovate the three old buildings at 309, 321 and 327 Belleville. The houses are commercially operated as the Captain's Palace Restaurant, Land of the Little People and the Hunter Haunted House.

The Palace and Haunted House are listed by the Heritage Advisory Committee as worthy of designation.

Pembroke's plans call for improvements to the buildings, addition of a gift shop between 321 and 327 Belle-

ville, and the re-opening of a restaurant behind 327.

Demolition of the buildings seemed imminent when a new hotel was in the works for the block bounded by Belleville, Oswego, Quebec and Pendray.

Although that proposal never materialized the planning commission report indicates a large development may still come forward.

The report said Pembroke has suggested it may want to move the three buildings at a later date.

Saving Belleville Street

More than the small number of dedicated heritage buffs in Victoria should be pleased that the houses at 309, 321 and 327 Belleville Street in the city have been preserved from demolition. They are better known as Judge Hunter's haunted house, the Land of the Little People and the Captain's Palace restaurant.

They are some of the last remaining examples of the type of housing that once dominated that area of James Bay along from the

legislative buildings, and together form a complementary architectural ensemble. The two tourist attractions housed in 309 and 321 Belleville, while garish and ugly to some residents, have at least preserved the buildings from the usual fate, while the redevelopment project allowed there by the city includes tough restrictions on altering the buildings any further.

Now, if only a similar solution can be found for the property at the

eastern end of Belleville Street — the old St. Ann's Academy — where a miniature replica of central London and the Thames, complete with 14-foot Big Ben, has been proposed for the grounds.

It is provincial government property now, and B.C. need not defer to Victoria's wishes, but such a bizarre addition to the city's tourist attractions would be highly unpopular. It should go no farther than the current speculations.

▼ REAL ESTATE

Belleville block gets a facelift

By Norman Gidney

Times Colonist staff

The 300-block Belleville Street is getting a facelift from its owner, hotel proprietor Rita Wilson, who is opening up the property to tourists and passersby.

Next week, Out of the Churn opens in the middle of a new mid-block plaza created out of the lawns and gardens, between the various buildings.

It's an ice cream parlor that will sell Mario's Gelati from a marble counter, the first piece of a puzzle that includes decorative courtyards, a long pergola and a future rooftop conservatory.

Wilson acquired the neighboring Captain's Palace (now the Gatsby Mansion) and the Judge's Manor properties last year, then hired de Hoog d'Ambrosio architects to come up with a new plan.

"We're rezoning the entire block," says Wilson, who has added the other tourist attractions to her Ramada Huntingdon Manor.

"We're trying to bring back the block to the architecture of its time. . . . We're going to have history tours here."

The two much-modified heritage homes on the east side of the block bounded by Belleville, Pendray, Quebec and Oswego streets had a succession of not too tasteful tourist attractions.

Now Wilson is moving the block upscale. Besides ice cream at \$3.85 a cone, she wants to lease four more ground-floor spaces to high-end tourist retailers. Merchandise would be \$20 and up.

"We're hoping to get those on-stream by mid-July," she says.

Renovations will reduce the bed-and-breakfast rooms in the Judge's Manor and Gatsby to a total of 17.

Stonemasons have created a piazza in the lawn and gardens between the houses on Belleville.

Still to come is a closure of the vehicle driveway off Belleville, replaced with a long pergola from one side of the block to other, decorated with vines and flowers.



JOHN MCKAY/TIMES COLONIST

Rita Wilson in the new courtyard under construction by Huntington Manor.

Arches at each corner of the block will draw people into the property — for an ice cream, full-course meal, pricey souvenir, or just a shortcut to the next street.

Wilson's looking for a gardener-cum-sculptor who can bring back the trees and shrubs shaped like birds and animals that the former Pendray mansion was once famous for.

And at the rear of the Captain's Palace-Gatsby Mansion, Wilson plans an open-air summer arts and craft market.

Next year, depending on the cost and the success of this year's first phases, Wilson plans

changes to the Ramada Huntingdon, the first major renovation since the 116-room hotel was built in 1981.

The ground-floor restaurant would be moved and more tourist-retail space would be built along with another entrance from the hotel to the plaza.

She figures the 300-block Belleville, directly across the street from the Victoria Clipper terminal, occupies a key place in the harbor tourist district, and the improvements are bound to draw more business.

"We're right in the middle of 13 hotels with guests who are looking for dining, who are looking for ice cream, for shopping," she says.



DARREN STONE/VICTORIA NEWS STAFF

Rita Roy-Wilson plans to develop the entire 300-Block of Belleville Street in James Bay

Belleville Street undergoes facelift

■ The owner of a hotel in James Bay has gotten the green light to link her business with heritage homes, to create a new attraction within Victoria

Jeanine Soodeen

Victoria News staff

When opportunity knocked on Rita Roy-Wilson's door, she answered.

Now she's moving forward with a plan to develop the entire 300-block of Belleville Street in James Bay.

Roy-Wilson owns three heritage buildings on the block, as well as the Ramada Huntingdon Manor on Quebec Street behind the heritage homes, in an area between Oswego and Pendray streets she likes to call Belleville Park.

More and more people may also start calling it that soon.

Roy-Wilson purchased

Huntingdon Manor in James Bay in 1981.

"I looked out on this property for the next 16 years. It was in a continual state of disarray. An opportunity came up to purchase the rest of the block," Wilson says. She grabbed it.

"It is a really, really wonderful piece of real estate. I was delighted to purchase and develop it," is how she explains her plans for the area, which have now been given the stamp of approval at City Hall.

City councillors endorsed the project last week, with the approval of the Belleville Park Tourist Zone, a special development zone created specifically for the block. The new zone will allow greater flexibility in zoning to allow for the linking together of three 300-block heritage buildings and the Ramada Huntingdon.

"What's wanted is the flexibility to combine densities," says Douglas Koch, Victoria planning manager, adding the new zoning will blend uses of the previous zoning.

Coun. Pam Madoff says the

zoning will not only make the development process easier for the developer, but also ensure the heritage significance of the buildings in the high traffic area is maintained.

"It's one of the most important streetscapes in the city. It's absolutely critical we know what's going on," Madoff says. "I'm concerned we might have lost character. By approving this we can move forward."

The rezoning will be the subject of an upcoming public hearing.

Roy-Wilson's vision for the area is for Belleville Park to become a hub of activity. Still being developed, the image for the project is slowly taking shape, and will officially be revealed at a grand opening in September.

"I really wanted it to be like a village. It's really exciting if you could see the vision for the whole block," Roy-Wilson says.

Architect Frank D'Ambrosio says that with the buildings under one ownership, a comprehensive plan is underway to restore the 309, 321 and 327

Belleville St. heritage houses and redo the landscape.

"This will allow the uses to work together. Everything is slowly changing and improving," he says. A major difference is the new courtyard planned for the area between the Huntingdon Manor and the heritage homes. Once completed, D'Ambrosio says the courtyard will be a display area for performing arts.

As well, a lane from Pendray Street leading into the courtyard will be designated as an artists' lane.

The architect says the project's key focus is the restoration of the heritage buildings. Purchased in poor condition, the buildings have been renovated to include a bed and breakfast and smaller shops and boutiques.

The entire project will be color-coordinated when the Ramada Huntingdon Manor on Quebec Street is painted white to match the older buildings on Belleville Street. "It'll tie the whole block together. They belong together," Roy-Wilson says.