



THE WEST VANCOUVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
680 - 17th Street
West Vancouver, B.C., V7V 3T2

July 20, 2020

West Vancouver Mayor & Council
West Vancouver, British Columbia

Re: Navy Jack House

The Navy Jack House is an historic house, built around 1873, 13 years before Vancouver was incorporated as a city. Indeed, it is the oldest continually inhabited house in West Vancouver and in the Lower Mainland.

Yet to our great surprise we were informed recently that Council voted in an *in-camera* session in June to demolish this historic home. This was done without consulting or informing its own Heritage Advisory Committee and the West Vancouver Historical Society and without meaningful public consultation. The reason given is that the house is in poor shape and would be costly to restore. This decision was apparently based mainly on an online survey of 500 citizens chosen at random. Such surveys may be accurate on purely quantitative issues but are not valid on qualitative issues such as this one. It is possible that many of the 500 respondents knew little or nothing about the Navy Jack House and its heritage value and were not qualified to render an informed opinion. Surveys can be drafted in such a way as to obtain the desired answers, as appears to be the case here. Council should have sought the opinion of people who are knowledgeable on the subject, including its own Heritage Advisory Committee.

Council was advised that the building had deteriorated so badly that it could not be restored. This is not true. Don Luxton, a foremost heritage expert, and Brenda Clark, architect and planner, reported that the infrastructure is sound. In a recent inspection, several members of the Heritage Advisory Committee and Historical Society found that much of the outer shell of the house was added by Lloyd and Betty Williams, who lived the house from 1971 to 2017. These sections give the house a dilapidated

appearance, particularly as the house and garden have been poorly maintained by the district during the three years since Lloyd Williams' death in 2017.

The point is that the “nugget” of the original Navy Jack house remains. We inspected the basement and discovered that the foundation of the original house is intact and that the support beams are solid and in good condition. It is very likely that the original house could be uncovered and would resemble what we see in photographs taken in 1914 and 1920. John Lawson, “father of West Vancouver,” and his family lived in the house from 1901 to 1928, which was frequently used for civic celebrations and weddings.

The Historical Society proposes that the outer surface of the house be removed and that the original house, once revealed, be assessed by a task force for its heritage value, the cost of restoration, and future use. If the house can be restored to its original state, many uses come to mind, for example a nature house, as has been discussed in the past. The restored house could also be the anchor of a waterfront heritage walk from the Ferry Building to the Silk Purse, to a new fish rearing pond on Lawson Creek proposed by Streamkeepers, and then to the Navy Jack House. The walk could continue to Memorial Park and the rearing pond there, then over the Esquimalt Bridge over Lawson Creek to the Gertude Lawson House, and then under the canopy of heritage chestnut trees on 17th Street to John Lawson Park.

The restored Navy Jack house and the waterfront heritage walk would attract grants and tourist revenues that would help pay for restoration. Patrick Weiler, our MP, is already exploring sources of funding. The Ferry Building has recently received a restoration grant from the federal government of \$1.8 million.

We are asking Council to delay a final decision so that genuine public consultation and discussion can take place and the means explored as to how we might save this historic asset.

Rod Day
President,
West Vancouver Historical Society