

CITY OF BURNABY  
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS

RE: CITY-OWNED NICHOLS CHEMICAL COMPANY HOUSES  
8655 BARNET HIGHWAY (BARNET MARINE PARK)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Council receive and approve the Heritage Review report which identifies the Nichols Chemical Company Houses as possessing significant heritage value.
2. THAT Council request the Parks and Recreation Commission to amend the Master Plan for Barnet Marine Park to accommodate the retention of the three existing former Nichols Chemical houses within the master plan for the park.
3. THAT Council authorize Planning and Parks Department staff to review use and conservation options for the retention of the Nichols Chemical Company houses in keeping with City Heritage policy.

REPORT

The Community Heritage Commission, at its meeting held on 1998 April 09, adopted the attached report outlining the historic significance and current status of three City-owned buildings at 8655 Barnet Highway.

The Committee advised that the three houses of the former Nichols Chemical Company represent a significant reminder of the history of Burnaby's Barnet company town community. The Committee further advised that it is desirable to pursue their preservation in order to conserve these buildings within Barnet Marine Park. The Committee also noted that, in the future, these buildings may form an opportunity for re-use for compatible public uses within the established park plan.

The Committee concluded by advising that, at this time, the cost to repair these homes for residential rental remains a critical issue given the substantial preliminary estimates. However, the opportunity to complete repairs for residential rental in order to recover costs in the longer term and protect a civic asset appears feasible.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Doreen Lawson,  
Chair

Councillor Celest Redman,  
Vice Chair

CC: CITY MGR.  
DIR. ENG.  
DIR. FINANCE  
DIR. PLNG & BLDG  
DIR. PRK, REC. &  
CULT. SVCS.

TO: COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION 1998 April 14  
FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING Our File: 10.346  
SUBJECT: CITY-OWNED NICHOLS CHEMICAL COMPANY HOUSES  
8655 Barnet Highway (Barnet Marine Park)  
PURPOSE: To advise the Community Heritage Commission of the historic significance and current status of three City owned buildings.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** the Community Heritage Commission receive and approve the Heritage Review report which identifies the Nichols Chemical Company Houses as possessing significant heritage value and recommend to Council that the value of the houses be recognized.
2. **THAT** Council convey the request of the Community Heritage Commission to the Parks and Recreation Commission to amend the Master Plan for Barnet Marine Park to accommodate the retention of the three existing former Nichols Chemical houses within the master plan for the park.
3. **THAT** the Community Heritage Commission request Council authorize Planning and Parks Department staff to review use and conservation options for the retention of the Nichols Chemical Company houses in keeping with City Heritage policy.

**REPORT**

**1.0 Background:**

In 1992 the City acquired the property at 8655 Barnet Highway as part of the land acquisition program for Barnet Marine Park. The parcel was acquired with three houses that had been identified on Burnaby's heritage inventory. These houses were leased back to General Chemical, as part of the land acquisition agreement, in order that leases to long-term tenants could be honored. In 1996 two of the houses became vacant and the subject of their retention was reviewed by the Finance and Engineering Departments following an established Burnaby Policy to retain houses for rental purposes when economically feasible. A review of costs associated with the repair of these structures for rental purposes has determined the level of investment required is higher than can be recovered through the standard rental analysis.

At the Community Heritage Commission meeting on 1998 February 12, it was requested that staff bring forward a report on the heritage significance of the three-City owned houses and provided a review of preliminary cost estimates.

## **2.0 City Heritage Policy for New Property Acquisitions:**

Although acquired in 1992, the Nichols Chemical Company Houses have never been reviewed through the approved Council process for civic heritage sites. The policy for the management of City-owned heritage buildings and sites approved by Council in 1991 included the following policy statement:

*To develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory of heritage resources owned by the city which broadly reflect the cultural and developmental history of Burnaby.*

Further to this end, Council approved the following implementation action:

*Review all future acquisitions of potential heritage buildings for their heritage value, inclusion on the heritage inventory and possible further protection.*

In 1993 Council approved a three step process to review and conserve City-owned heritage sites. These steps are:

- I) Heritage Review - report to Council.
- II) Conservation Options - review options and costs in consultation with affected Departments.
- III) Conservation Actions - outline use and seek approval for costs of repair.

The subject of this report is Step One in the approved Council process. This Heritage Review is intended to determine the building's relative heritage value in the context of Burnaby's cultural and developmental history. Step Two will outline conservation options including short and long term costs of maintaining these heritage resources.

### 3.0 Heritage Review:

#### Contextual History

The Nichols Chemical Company is part of the City's oldest industrial area established on Burrard Inlet at Barnet. The impetus for its growth occurred in 1886 with the construction of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway. The first industrial plant was established by James B. McLaren and partner George Bowen, lumber barons from Ottawa, Ontario. When they began construction of the North Pacific Lumber Company in 1889 a railway station was established and named Barnet by James McLaren after his mother's maiden name. However, a world-wide depression in 1892 put a hold on its operations until 1899.

Soon after its opening, other companies saw the opportunity and potential for the establishment of industries isolated from urban centers but accessible by rail and water here at Barnet. A fish curing plant was built by the Western Canada Fish Company in 1903. In 1905 the Nichols Chemical Company, acid manufacturers based in Montreal, established their plant on a large point of land just east of the North Pacific Lumber Company. This company was later amalgamated and acquired by General Chemical and remains in operation on the original waterfront site.

The isolated nature of Barnet from urban centers necessitated that each company build houses for its employees. Like miniature company towns seen across British Columbia, these little villages of houses were built on the hillside overlooking the company's waterfront operations. The North Pacific Lumber Company had a population of over 350 by 1905 and included its own store, post office and school. Today only two of the estimated 40 homes built remain. The chemical company had a much smaller work force and its little village was made up of approximately ten houses of which three remain today on a magnificent site on the escarpment between Barnet Highway and the railway. The houses retain a spectacular view of Burrard Inlet and Belcarra Park.

#### Manager's House - #30 Nichols Drive

The largest of the remaining homes at the Nichols Chemical Company village is reputed to have been the plant manager's house. This house also appears to be the oldest remaining building at Barnet, being constructed between 1905-1910. The house is a typical example of the early large Barnet houses. This home appears to have been constructed by the North Pacific Lumber company as it shares design and construction details similar to those now demolished, but recorded in photographs. In design the house is typical of the Edwardian era as it borrows design features found in the Queen Anne Revival and Classical Revival styles. Exterior decoration includes the Doric front porch columns, bay window and elaborate mullioned windows. Asphalt shingles now cover original clapboard siding and shingles. Inside the house retains most of its original design details including an elaborate spindled staircase, woodwork and fireplace.

The overall condition of this building is good. However, the asphalt roof and flashings require immediate repair. It was constructed with a full concrete basement and has been maintained in near original condition over the years.

#### Worker's Cottage - #29 Nichols Drive

This house, although plain in comparison to its neighbor, is also one of the old homes of the town constructed circa 1912-1920. In design the house is a plain example of the Arts and Crafts style displaying simple construction and the use of rustic local materials. The exterior details are intact although its original wood shingled exterior is covered with asphalt shingles. Also, the front porch is in poor condition and a rear carport has been added. Inside, most of the building's original woodwork and features remain in good condition overall.

#### Architectural Features - #28 Nichols Drive

This house is a twin of #29 being built to the same plans. It remains occupied and has not been inspected. It appears to be in fair to good condition. Its exterior retains its original details including original cedar shingled siding.

#### Summary Analysis:

The three houses which remain are rare survivors of the unique company villages that made up the community of Barnet. They represent early industrial activity within the City and the unique aspects of company towns once found throughout British Columbia. The combination of the larger "Manager's House" with the two smaller worker's cottages illustrates the social hierarchy of company towns. Architecturally and through superior construction detail, the "Manager's House" stands out as a classic example of Edwardian design that is unique to Barnet. The two worker's cottages also have architectural features typical of the period and remain in good condition. However, it is the combination of the three homes which contributes to the site's importance as a heritage feature within the City of Burnaby.

#### **4.0 Relationship of Buildings to Barnet Marine Park Master Plan:**

The three City-owned houses on this site and the industrial buildings still occupied by General Chemical Company are located in the easterly portion of the Barnet Marine Park site. This portion of the park is not presently developed for public use as the City does not own the General Chemical waterfront site which is below the CPR line. This area remains in the Park Acquisition Program but it is anticipated that it may be up to approximately ten years before the waterfront area can be acquired and consolidated with the City-owned upland portion (occupied by the three houses) so that the entire area can be developed for public park purposes.

The existing conceptual Master Plan for the Park envisioned this portion of the park being developed for a marina and related uses such as parking. The site is made up of an upper terrace which has been reduced in size since the re-construction of the recent Barnet Highway. The three houses occupy this upper terrace and are located approximately 30 to 50 metres from the highway. The lower area is still owned and occupied by General Chemical. This area is below the CPR tracks and is used as a plant which produces alum. This lower area is level and extends out into Burrard Inlet from the tracks. This waterfront area would appear to be the most valuable portion of the site from a recreational point of view.

It is suggested that the master plan for this portion of the park be adjusted to incorporate the retention of these significant heritage buildings in the portion of the park nearest the highway.

In terms of use, it is suggested that the houses be upgraded and rented to offset the repair costs for a period of approximately ten years or until such time as the City is in a position to complete the Parkland Acquisition in this portion of the park and develop the area for public uses. At that time the use of the buildings would be assessed to meet the needs at that time and the residential rental use could be phased out in favour of public uses such as possible food services, interpretive centre, social/rental facilities, offices or other uses that would be determined to support the park program uses at that time.

## **5.0 Preliminary Repair Estimates:**

As noted, one of the houses at the east end of the site (#28) is still occupied by a tenant with a separate lease by General Chemical and is not included in these estimates. The other two houses have been vacant for about one year but were previously leased by the Company. The houses are in good structural condition.

The Engineering Department has estimated that the work required for these two houses includes general upgrades that are a standard part of the repair of City-owned properties prior to rental for residential purposes. A special requirements for these homes would be the installation of new septic systems, and installation of propane heating and hot-water system and exterior improvement through the removal of fibreboard cladding. The cost of this work has been estimated on a preliminary basis by the Engineering Department to be approximately \$175,000.00. Staff will review and refine these cost estimates as part of Step Two of the process to review potential civic heritage buildings.

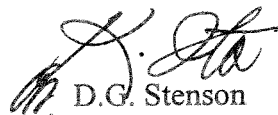
The Finance Department has reviewed the possible residential rental of these homes as the Parks Department does not anticipate the need for this property for the Barnet Marine Park in the short term (10 years). A rental analysis indicated that the rental income would be related to the appearance and condition of the completed houses. A estimated rental range in the order of \$775.00 for the two bedroom single storey house (#29) and \$850.00 for the two storey (#30) house would yield a gross rental income in the range of \$19,500.00 per annum.

In summary, the standard rental analysis does not indicate that it is economic to repair these homes for residential tenancy from established operating budgets. However, the time frame that would allow for capital cost recovery remains less than 11 years and as such it is appropriate to use heritage capital resources to bring these homes to a condition that will allow for tenancy and the long term preservation of these in a cost effective manner.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The three houses of the former Nichols Chemical Company represent a significant reminder of the history of Burnaby's historic Barnet company town community. It is desirable to pursue their preservation in order to conserve these buildings within Barnet Marine Park. In the future, these buildings may form an opportunity for reuse for compatible public uses within the established park plan. The houses are located close to the highway and would not impede access to the waterfront. Also, there is value to protect these buildings for residential rental accommodation provided that this use does not conflict with the long-term development of the park..

At this time the cost to repair these homes for residential rental remains a critical issue given the substantial preliminary estimates. However, the opportunity to complete repairs for residential rental in order to recover costs in the longer term and protect a civic asset appears feasible. In order to pursue this opportunity the approval to proceed to Step Two in the process of reviewing potential heritage buildings would be required. As part of this next step staff will review and report on all of the potential public and private funding options. Through this review staff will bring forward a further report and recommend an approach for the consideration of the Community Heritage Commission and Council.



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Director Planning and Building

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cc: Director Engineering  
Director Finance  
Director, Parks Recreation and Cultural Services

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