

**COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION**

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS*

**SUBJECT: CIVIC ACQUISITION OF THE "BURNABY EAGLE" NEON SIGN**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. THAT Council approve the proposed acquisition of the "Burnaby Eagle" neon sign, as outlined in this report.
2. THAT Council approve the expenditure of Gaming Funds up to \$3,700 (inclusive of 12% HST) to acquire the "Burnaby Eagle" neon sign, as outlined in this report.
3. THAT Council forward a copy of this report to the Heights Merchants Association for information purposes.

**REPORT**

The Community Heritage Commission, at its meeting held on 2012 September 06, received and adopted the *attached* report outlining a proposal for the civic acquisition of the "Burnaby Eagle" neon sign. This former landmark sign was created circa 1950 for the Eagle Motors car dealership once located in the Burnaby Heights shopping district on Hastings Street. This proposed initiative would build on the City's previous conservation of the "Swinging Girl" sign and interest on the part of the Heights Merchants Association to promote neon signage as a unique attraction within the Heights area.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor C. Jordan  
Chair

Councillor N. Volkow  
Vice Chair

Councillor R. Chang  
Member

Copied to:	City Manager Director Planning & Building Acting Director Engineering Director Finance City Solicitor Director Parks, Recr. & Cult. Services Purchasing Manager
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**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

**DATE:** 2012 August 28

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

**FILE:** 77000 05

**SUBJECT:** CIVIC ACQUISITION OF THE “BURNABY EAGLE” NEON SIGN

**PURPOSE:** To outline a proposal for the civic acquisition of the “Burnaby Eagle” neon sign.

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** the Commission request Council approval of the proposed acquisition of the “Burnaby Eagle” neon sign, as outlined in this report.
2. **THAT** the Commission request Council approval for the expenditure of Gaming Funds up to \$3,700 (inclusive of 12% HST) to acquire the “Burnaby Eagle” neon sign, as outlined in this report.
3. **THAT** the Commission request Council to forward a copy of this report to the Heights Merchants Association for information purposes.

### REPORT

#### 1.0 BACKGROUND

Planning staff have been contacted by a local private collector who is in the process of selling selected vintage neon signs purchased and salvaged from various Greater Vancouver businesses over many years. Included in the collection is the former landmark neon eagle sign created circa 1950 by Neon Products for the Eagle Motors car dealership once located in Burnaby’s Heights shopping district on Hastings Street. This report outlines a proposal for the acquisition of the sign to secure it for future restoration as a neon landmark within the City.

#### 2.0 HISTORY AND HERITAGE VALUE

Eagle Motors Limited was established by the well-known Burnaby businessman Frank McCracken at 4161 East Hastings Street in 1948. This car dealership became a successful local Heights business and was the largest Ford car and truck retailer in the province during its operation. The company had adopted the silhouette of the classic Bald Eagle in full flight to serve as a logo which was utilized in advertising and promotional materials. The eagle symbol was famously developed into a classic chrome badge with the name “Eagle Ford – Burnaby, B.C.” that was installed on all the Eagle Ford cars and trucks sold by the dealership. After a new showroom building was constructed on the site in 1950, the company commissioned Neon Products of Vancouver to manufacture a very large double-sided neon eagle (see *Attachment #1*). Typical of neon signs of the era, the eagle was painted with dramatic designs and bright primary colours on metal with blue, white and gold neon tubing serving to highlight the outline of the eagle.

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The "Burnaby Eagle" sign immediately became a landmark of the Burnaby's Heights business district on East Hastings Street. From its high perch atop the dealership building, located at Carleton Street (now Carleton Square), the Burnaby Eagle shared the night sky with other nearby classic neon signs of the era including the "Swinging Girl" sign of the Helen's Children's Wear store. Eagle Motors was a successful dealership until the recession of the 1980s, and in 1985 the business was closed. Vandalism on the site resulted in damage to the neon tubing of the sign before the leased sign was reclaimed by its owner, Neon Products Limited. Unlike so many other classic neon signs of the era that were sent by sign companies to the 'scrap-yard', the Burnaby Eagle was obtained by a local collector of car memorabilia.

The sign was moved to a private indoor storage facility where it has been carefully preserved and protected in good condition for over 25 years. The Burnaby Eagle is a large double-sided hollow sheet metal sign measuring 13.3 feet tall and 8.9 feet wide. The sheet metal and structure of the sign is in excellent condition and it retains most of the eagle's original painted image, including the dramatic wings with their blue and white painted feather pattern. The restoration of the sign's metal, paint and neon components would be required as part of any future conservation project.

Given the unique history and former landmark status of the Burnaby Eagle neon sign, combined with its iconic design, good condition and preservation, the heritage value of this object is considered significant for the Heights neighbourhood and City. The acquisition of this important neon sign artifact would serve the objective of heritage preservation and interpretation of the history of the Heights and the City's neon era.

### **3.0 PROPOSED ACQUISITION AND USE**

This proposed heritage initiative would build on the City's previous conservation of the "Swinging Girl" sign and the interest of the Heights Merchants Association to promote neon signage as a unique attraction for the shopping district and City. The acquisition of the Burnaby Eagle neon sign would secure it for future restoration and as a potential Heights neon landmark. In recent years, historic neon signs have become widely recognized for their important design aesthetic and contribution to creating lively public streetscapes. The successful restoration of the "Swinging Girl" sign has provided significant unique branding and identity to the Heights shopping district. The restoration of the Burnaby Eagle would further contribute to this community vision.

With approval of the acquisition, the sign would be relocated and secured within a civic storage facility under the care of museum staff. Future restoration and public display of the sign would require further detailed study of potential options and costs, for the consideration of Commission and Council. It is noted that the cost for the restoration and display of the "Swinging Girl" sign, which was a similar project in scope and size, was in the order of \$25,000. This work will include identifying a preferred location on Hastings Street and developing a plan for its restoration and maintenance, with the Heights Merchants Association as potential partners in the project. The future project may also include seeking other partners to assist in the funding, conservation, and maintenance of this iconic landmark.

The proposed conservation of the sign, as outlined above, conforms to a number of Burnaby's Official Community Plan goals that include civic acquisition and stewardship of significant heritage resources and the revitalization of the Heights area with public spaces and urban design that promotes its unique character, heritage and history. The conservation and use of the "Burnaby

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Eagle" sign as a landmark would also contribute to the goals and vision for the improvement of the Heights streetscape as a unique place, as articulated in the Social Sustainability and Economic Sustainability strategies.

#### 4.0 FUNDING

In the interest of providing the opportunity that this landmark neon sign is returned to its historic home, the owner of the Burnaby Eagle sign has offered the City first right of refusal for acquisition. A purchase price has been established that is considered fair market value for urban art and artifacts of this type. The purchase of the sign would include a smaller Burnaby neon sign from the M&B Grocery Store (formerly located at 6949 Royal Oak Avenue) for inclusion in the Burnaby Village Museum collection. The purchase price includes the support frame and cart for the Burnaby Eagle sign for a total cost of \$2,800. Relocation costs for moving the sign is estimated to be in the order of \$500. Council approval is sought for the use of Gaming Funds to provide for this civic heritage acquisition not to exceed to \$3,700 (inclusive of 12% HST). A capital allocation is available under the Heritage section of the Land Assembly and Development component of the 2012-2016 Capital Program. The use of Gaming Funds for this project is consistent with Council guidelines to support heritage, cultural and environmental projects.

#### 5.0 NEXT STEPS

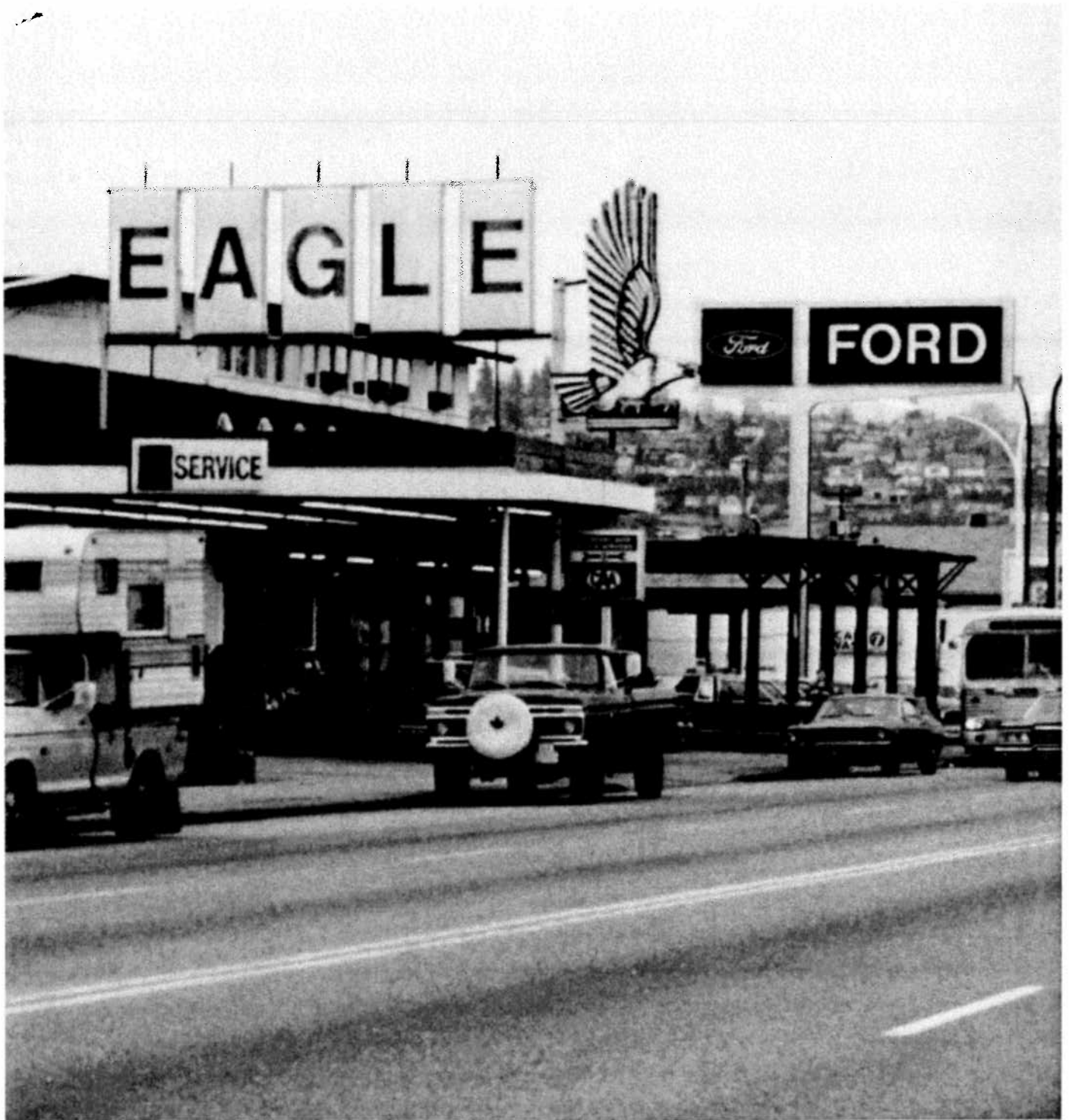
The "Burnaby Eagle" neon sign was a major community neon landmark on East Hastings Street for 35 years (c.1950-1985). The sale of this landmark sign by a private collector provides the rare opportunity for the City to reclaim this significant vintage neon sign for future restoration and public display. With the concurrence of the Community Heritage Commission and Council, staff will pursue conclusion of an agreement for the civic acquisition of the sign and its relocation to a civic storage facility, as outlined in this report. Staff would also engage with the Heights Merchants Association and other potential funding partners to develop potential options for the sign's relocation to Hastings Street as a neon heritage landmark. Future reports on this matter would be submitted for the consideration of the Community Heritage Commission and Council.

  
Lou Pelletier, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JW:sa

*Attachment*

cc: City Manager  
Acting Director Engineering  
Director Finance  
City Solicitor  
Director Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services  
Purchasing Manager



**Attachment #1**

"Burnaby Eagle" Neon Sign

Eagles Motors Limited, 4161 East Hastings Street, c.1980  
Burnaby City Archives Photo #502-1547