

COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

**SUBJECT: HELEN ‘THE SWINGING GIRL’ NEON SIGN – INTERPRETIVE
PLAQUE, 4142 HASTINGS STREET**

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT Council approve the design and installation of a new heritage interpretive plaque for Helen ‘The Swinging Girl’ neon sign, as outlined in this report.

REPORT

The Community Heritage Commission, at its meeting held on 2014 May 08, received and adopted the *attached* report seeking Council authorization for the design and installation of a new heritage interpretive plaque for Helen ‘The Swinging Girl’ neon sign in the Heights commercial precinct. The installation of the heritage interpretive plaque will complete the heritage conservation plan for the neon sign, as previously approved by Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor C. Jordan
Chair

Councillor N. Volkow
Vice Chair

Councillor R. Chang
Member

Copied to:	City Manager Director Planning and Building Director Engineering
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TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

DATE: 2014 May01

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

FILE: 77000 20
Reference: Heritage Interpretive Plaque

**SUBJECT: HELEN 'THE SWINGING GIRL' NEON SIGN – INTERPRETIVE
PLAQUE, 4142 HASTINGS STREET**

PURPOSE: To authorize the design and installation of a new heritage interpretive plaque for Helen 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign in the Heights commercial precinct.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** the Community Heritage Commission recommend Council to approve the design and installation of a new heritage interpretive plaque for Helen 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign, as outlined in this report.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

In September 2007, Council approved the acquisition and conservation of Helen 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign as a Heights landmark. Upon the completion of its restoration in 2010, the sign was relocated to a public road right-of-way adjacent to 4142 Hastings Street and mounted onto a new free-standing pole to serve as a heritage landmark. The neon sign was subsequently protected under a Heritage Designation Bylaw. Under the Council approved heritage conservation plan that formed part of this civic project, a revised interpretive plaque was to be manufactured and installed with the sign after its relocation. The final design and content of this new interpretive plaque has now been prepared for the review and approval by the Community Heritage Commission and Council.

2.0 'HERITAGE ON THE HEIGHTS' INTERPRETIVE PLAQUE

It is noted that the original sign at this location, installed in 2004, was one of seven approved "Heritage on the Heights" signs created by the City in partnership with the Heights Merchants Association. The original sign recalled the tale of the old Municipal Office formerly located in the Helen's store, and the history of Helen 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign. The new proposed interpretive plaque is intended to replace this sign and update the existing story of 'The Swinging Girl' sign and its restoration and reuse as a heritage landmark.

To: Community Heritage Commission
From: Director Planning and Building
Re: Helen 'The Swinging Girl' Neon Sign – Interpretive
Plaque, 4142 Hastings Street

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The new interpretive sign panel will be attached to the base of the existing metal pole supporting 'The Swinging Girl' sign. It will incorporate a photograph of the original Helen's sign with accompanying text to describe the historic significance of the neon sign and its conservation by the City of Burnaby with the ongoing financial cooperation of the Heights Business Improvement Association. The plaque will also incorporate a photograph of the ceremony unveiling the newly restored sign by Mayor D. Corrigan in 2010. Additionally, the plaque will provide a graphic of the City's heritage designation plaque which signifies that the neon sign is a civic heritage landmark (see *Attachment 1*).

Funding for the protection and installation of the sign was previously approved by Council through the 2014 Annual Operating Budget of the Community Heritage Commission. The sign will be maintained through the Community Heritage Commission's heritage site interpretation program.

3.0 NEXT STEPS

The installation of the heritage interpretive plaque will complete the heritage conservation plan for 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign, as previously approved by Council. The primary intent of the heritage interpretive program is to provide the public with an opportunity to learn about the City's rich history and heritage resources. This report is submitted for the consideration of the Community Heritage Commission.



Lou Pelletier, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

HL:sa

Attachment

Copied to: City Manager
Director of Engineering
City Clerk



Helen "The Swinging Girl"



Helen and Elgin Arnold watch Mayor D. Corrigan officially light the restored neon sign at its re-dedication as a heritage landmark on May 6, 2010.

Mrs. Helen Arnold first opened Helen's Children's Wear on Hastings Street in 1948. Her first neon sign was in the store window and featured a stork with a baby bundle. In 1955, after the old Burnaby Municipal offices moved out of 4142 East Hastings Street, Elgin and Helen Arnold purchased the property and completed extensive renovations to transform the space into a commercial storefront.

As part of the renovations, Helen Arnold enlisted the assistance of her friend Mr. James Wallace, owner of Vancouver's Wallace Neon Company, to build and install a new sign for her expanded business. Mr. Reeve, one of the neon company's designers, conceived and created the neon sign in 1956 composed of a swinging girl in a blue dress with the name "Helen's" above it. The swinging motion of the girl is enabled by means of a small electric motor hidden in the sign's hollow core.

"The Swinging Girl" neon sign immediately became a landmark of Burnaby's business area along East Hastings Street, now known as the 'Heights'. With the loss of so many examples of neon signs since their heyday in the 1950s, 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign gradually became known

as one of the best surviving examples of kinetic neon art in British Columbia. "The Swinging Girl" neon sign survived because of the ongoing commitment of Helen and Elgin Arnold to ensure that it remained as the company's logo and business icon, despite ongoing maintenance and operation costs since it was installed in 1956.

In 2007, Helen Arnold decided to retire and close her famous store. Given the heritage value of 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign, Burnaby Council approved a project, under the Community Heritage Commission, to preserve the sign for future generations as a landmark for the Heights neighbourhood. The City purchased the sign from Sicon Signs as a neon heritage landmark with the cooperation of the Heights Business Improvement Association. In 2010, Council approved the listing of Helen 'The Swinging Girl' neon sign on the Community Heritage Register and ensured its legal protection through a by-law as a civic heritage landmark. In honour of Helen Arnold, the swinging girl was given the name 'Helen' as part of its official heritage designation.

