

Neighbours (l-r) Donna Clark, James Thompson and Ian Marcuse share a moment in the Salsbury Drive garden they helped save from the developer's ball. Photo-Dan Toulgoet

## **Friendly ruling for Salsbury Garden**

By Naoibh O'Connor-Staff writer

Grandview residents are celebrating after successfully quashing a developer's plan to build two duplexes on a property on the southwest corner of Salsbury Drive and Napier Street.

Known as Salsbury Garden, the parcel of land is owned and being developed by Niebuhr Construction. It houses two matching 1907 workers' cottages, a large forested garden close to 100 years old, and a small cob house.

A group calling itself Friends of Salsbury Garden launched an appeal of the company's development permit through the Board of Variance-an independent civic body that hears and decides on appeals dealing with zoning, development permits and parking matters.

The Friends argued the property has heritage value and provides much-needed green space on the East Side.

After the four-hour long appeal was heard last week, the Board of Variance ruled in the resident group's favour.

Ian Marcuse, who's lived in one of the rental houses on the property for 16 years, said conservationists who attended the hearing were shocked, albeit pleased, by the ruling.

"We were surprised. There was a lot of tears, there was a gasp, there was laughter and it was quite exciting," he said. "Our power has come from the community passion around this. We don't have the money to buy it and our understanding was the developer wasn't doing anything too outrageously outside of the guidelines and technically we were probably hooped."

The Board of Variance does not have to disclose reasons for its decisions, so Marcuse isn't sure what tipped the scale in the Friends' favour.

However, the decision means Niebuhr Construction could submit a reworked application to the City of Vancouver, although it would be subject to the same approval and appeal process.

"We would still like to work and find a win-win [solution] in this-something that will work for the developer as well," Marcuse said. "Our main argument all along is it's a valuable green space in the neighbourhood and we'd like to protect it."

Marcuse said the developer could consider building on the footprint that already exists, try to restore the old houses or work with the city for some kind of land swap. "We'll have to wait and see what [Niebuhr Construction's] plans are, but we wouldn't want to see them build much more into the garden," Marcuse said.

"The developer still owns the property and we don't know what will happen at this point, but this decision certainly validates the idea that there is more value in this than just tearing [the garden and houses] down and putting up new buildings. I'd like [the owner] to see that the community really cares about this and we're still willing to work with them to find a solution. We would like this to work for the developer, too."

Niebuhr Construction could not be reached for comment by the Courier's deadline.

The city had offered to buy the land from the company, but Richard Niebuhr told the Courier in a previous interview that the offers-one written and one verbal-didn't reflect the value of the land and the time, money and effort already invested in the development application.

Niebuhr also said the company had tried to assure the property's tenants that as many trees as possible would be saved and that landscaping plans included replanting 122 plants.

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