

A year-long battle in which Ian Marcuse (right) and residents of a Grandview neighbourhood tried to block development on a three-lot green space called Salsbury Garden has come to an unsuccessful end. Photo-Dan Toulgoet

## **Salsbury saga nearing end**

By Mark Hasiuk-Staff writer

Residents of a Grandview neighbourhood gathered around Salsbury Garden Wednesday night to reminisce about old times, in what appears to be the final act in a year-long drama involving a plot of land, a land developer and a vocal community activist.

Salsbury Garden is a three-lot green space at the southwest corner of Salsbury Drive and Napier Street that's home to a forested garden and two small cottages built in the early 1900s. For decades, it has been used by locals for community gatherings like family barbecues and Halloween parties. Niebuhr Construction purchased the land in February 2005 with the intention of building two duplexes on the property.

Ian Marcuse, who lived in one of the cottages for 16 years before Niebuhr evicted him, is the public face of the Friends of Salsbury Garden—a group of concerned citizens who lobbied city officials to stop the redevelopment.

Marcuse's fight effectively ended last month when the B.C. Supreme Court ruled that third parties—including citizen groups—had no right to appeal to the Board of Variance about city planning decisions on land developments and construction projects.

The ruling gave Niebuhr construction the green light to begin demolishing the cottages and garden. Marcuse said his opposition to the redevelopment was more about ideology, and less about saving the garden from Niebuhr's bulldozers.

"We didn't think we had a chance in hell to stop this," he said. "It was about taking a stand and saying that there are certain

aspects of community worth saving. Enough is enough-we are losing so much valuable green space to development."

During his campaign, Marcuse attracted the support of local politicians, including NDP Vancouver East MP Libby Davies and COPE party officials, and secured 1,600 names on a petition. He hopes to spur other like-minded citizens to action and criticized the court ruling that ran counter to his political ideals.

"The community does have a lot of power, and if we get organized we can save these places," he said. "The court supported a system I don't necessarily believe in, that places capitalism and private rights over the common good."

But Marcuse ultimately blames Richard Niebuhr, owner of Niebuhr Construction, who he said ignored the important role Salsbury Garden played in the community. "Niebuhr is from Richmond. He has no connection to this community and this project was only about one thing-making money."

On Tuesday, Marcuse served Niebuhr with a summons to small claims court over the \$1,700, equivalent to two months rent, he says is owed to him as part of a wrongful eviction suit he won in May. The animosity between the two men intensified after Marcuse shrugged off suggestions by Niebuhr that recent vandalism to a chain link fence surrounding the Salsbury site was "probably" connected to Marcuse's campaign.

"It's a sad state of affairs when some people decide to handle things in that manner," said Niebuhr. "Most people appreciate that we went through the proper steps and followed the letter of the law. I'm just concerned that this kind of thing is going to continue."

Marcuse denied any prior knowledge of the vandalism and noted that his lobbying group's email list reaches more than 200 local residents. "I don't think pushing over a fence is that big of a deal," he said. "I do know there is frustration in the community. Call it what you want-civil disobedience, a political statement or vandalism."

Marcuse now lives in co-op housing on East Third Avenue where he plans to cultivate a community garden behind his residence.

Niebuhr has not yet received a permit from the city to begin construction but he expects to complete the demolition of Salsbury Garden before the end of the year.

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