

Mount St. Angela's – the dilemma

by Nick Russell

The battle to save Mount Saint Angela's illustrates the dilemma facing heritage advocates. Should we compromise? Or should we say that it must all be preserved, as is, where is? Indeed, is Hallmark, as the leading heritage campaigner in Greater Victoria, bound to take the high road, and argue for total preservation (and face frequent disappointment), or should it encourage people to find imaginative ways to preserve and protect our built heritage? Should we hang tough, or admit we can't save everything? Where does Realism meet Capitalism?

St. Angela's College is one of Victoria's most important structures –designed in 1865 by Wright & Sanders, the city's first and arguably most influential architecture firm (Pt Ellice, the Carr House, Fisgard Light, the Synagogue, etc.)

It may be argued that developers have already ruined the Burdett streetscape with the dense towers currently being constructed at Burdett/Vancouver/McClure. But if we concede defeat every time that happens, then we might as well throw in the towel entirely.

As one Hallmark member wrote to me recently:

“We simply cannot entertain the proposal for a five-storey concrete tower on the property, nor any place else on Burdett St. A ‘line in the sand’ must be drawn at Quadra St.”

So, what can we entertain? If a potential developer puts forward a proposal –as he has-- for saving the College and two of its surrounding heritage buildings, but removing the 1911 extension at the rear and putting



two blocks of townhouses behind the college...all blessed by a respected heritage consultant... should we simply say, NO! ?

Of course Preservation and Protection are our first goals. Of course we want to see this charming cluster protected for all time, with its fine buildings, its relaxed ambience, and its great view-lines. So, where's the Fairy Godmother when we need her, to buy it all and preserve it for ever? And lacking that divine intervention --to put it more prosaically-- when does “density bonus” trump the Humboldt Valley Precinct Plan?

The Hallmark Board has concluded that it is our role to advocate for all the heritage components on the Mount Saint Angela's site –the original building, the 1911 extension, and all three contiguous houses: Nobody else will speak for them. This does not mean we are uncompromising and unrealistic, but simply that, as the letter-writer sagely said, somebody has to draw a line in the sand. 🏠