

Heritage Advisory Commission 2019 - 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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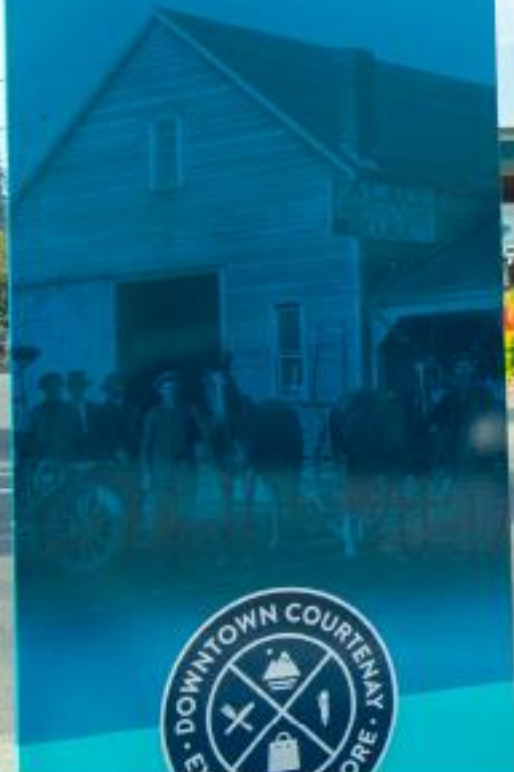


Up Close HISTORY



Public Health
Public Health and Sanitation Division

The City of Courtenay was established in July 1915. The City was on the cusp of the old 19th century and the new, modern 20th century. Horse power was shifting to the automobile. The town was enlarging from the small cluster of businesses at the edge of McBee's Orchard. Within a few years houses would be built to accommodate the influx of people that would arrive after the Great War.



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Cover Photo: Downtown Courtenay Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage *(photo by Kim Stallknecht)*

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Introduction

Message from the Chair

It is my privilege to be Chair of the City of Courtenay Heritage Advisory Commission. It is a very daunting task to follow in the footsteps of legendary Chair, Lawrence Burns, former Fire Chief, who also has been named Citizen of the Year and awarded Freedom of the City of Courtenay. In 2020, Lawrence was also given a well-deserved honour the “Distinguished Service Award” by Heritage B.C.

While the world was in “lockdown”, our very diverse and capable members spent time researching and preparing for the City’s many Heritage projects. This annual report covers Heritage Commission activities from 2019 – 2022.

Since our last report, we have welcomed our newest member, Glen Greenhill, whose family has long roots in the valley. He also brings with him crackerjack enthusiasm and a skillset that we did not realize we were lacking!

Judy Hagen

Chair

City of Courtenay Heritage Advisory Commission



Lower row L-R: Judy Hagen (Chair), Lawrence Burns, Tatsuyuki Setta (Staff), Cliff Piercy
Upper row L-R: Ross Dingwall, Glen Greenhill, Linda Grant, Julie Fortin

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Commission Members

The City of Courtenay Heritage Advisory Commission has been active since 1980. The Commission's mandate is to advise Council on heritage matters, and to undertake and provide support for heritage conservation programs in the City.

There are currently eight active members serving on the Heritage Advisory Commission and one City staff appointee. Members are listed below with the date that they joined the Commission in brackets.

Judy Hagen (January 1995)
Lawrence Burns (June 1996)
Ross Dingwall (November 2015)
Julie Fortin (January 2002)
Linda Grant (January 2006)
Deb Griffiths (September 2008)
Cliff Piercy (September 2008)
Glen Greenhill (May 2019)

City Staff appointees: Erin Ferguson (November 2010 - 2017), Tatsuyuki Setta (October 2017- 2022),
Dana Beatson (September 2022 – Present)

Key Projects 2019 - 2022

History of downtown businesses since 1915

Until the Pandemic squashed any chance of regular meetings, the Commission had been carrying on with an ongoing project to record the history of the various downtown businesses since 1915. The south side of 5th Street has yet to be finished and it is recognized that this is a formidable task. The finished work should be easy to read by anyone seeking information about either a business or a location, so the Commission has decided to compile their efforts into two files.

1. A list of addresses to name the business that have operated in a specific place. An interesting problem is that phone books and advertisements in the early years did not indicate addresses, so members had to search photos or read newspapers. Often a newspaper report, such as a fire, will give the needed clue. As members we rely on rather eclectic discussions to figure out who owned a business or who was employed there. Commission members report back the following month having talked to people who owned or worked in the downtown. It does help to have a former Fire Chief and a downtown business owner on the Commission!
2. A list of individual businesses. We have found various businesses that have opened in the City often move to another location, or moved into an adjoining space.

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City Clocks

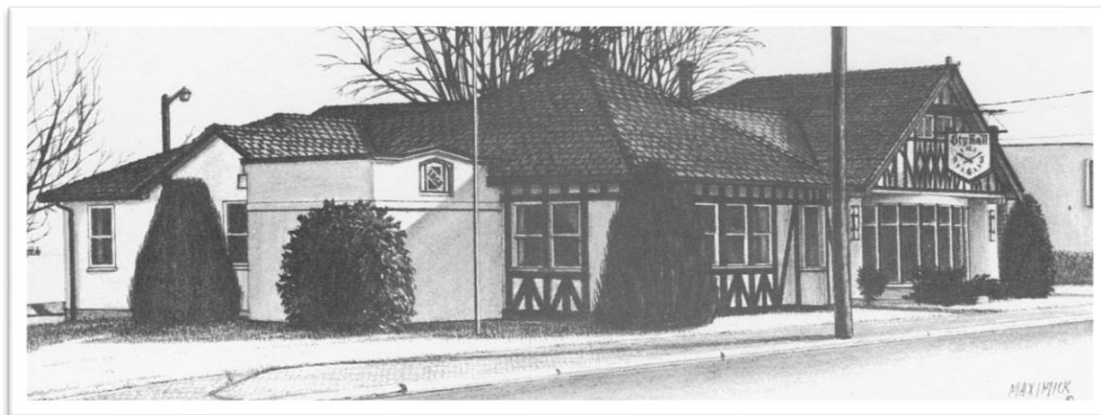
In 2022, the Commission was able to meet again in City Hall for regular meetings. A more recent project the Commission has undertaken is the City Clocks project. Old clocks from both the previous City Hall and Civic Theatre are being explored for restoration and re-installation. With this project there has been wonderful co-operation among City staff who have provided technical support to complete the project.

It seems like a long time since Commission members went out to the City Public Works Yard on what was one of the worst days for weather in 2016 to view the old City Hall clock. When the City Hall clock was removed from the embers of the old building whoever boxed the clock did a marvelous job of keeping it in a secure form and the Commission felt that the clock could be restored. The work is being carried out by Vancouver Clock Maker, Ray Saunders.

When the clocks are eventually installed they will have been the co-operative effort of City staff, the clock repairman, the funding provided by City Council and the persistent dream of the Commission members.



The City Hall clock and the clock from the Civic Theatre are shown at left. The clock on the old City Hall building is shown below.



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Advising Council

We are always delighted to be given a task to advise Courtenay Council.

The former Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services, came in to ask the Commission about the colour of the stain for the Native Sons Hall. That was a discussion that took everyone down memory lane. Shortly after several Commission members set up a time to meet with City Public Works staff where “memorials” including trees and benches were discussed as well as the ongoing maintenance costs to the City.

As it happened I was first to donate to the memorial benches. For years I talked to Jim Stephenson about a bench outside the pool as parents needed a place to sit while waiting for their children. In the years since, many parents have stopped to say “thank you” to me. I know it is because they understand how important it is to have a place to wait while their children continue to play in the waterpark.

I say this because the Commission misses our time working together on projects. We love the camaraderie and the stories that come out all of which help to preserve the history and heritage of our City.

Even though we have not always been able to gather together in person, at times, Lawrence Burns and I have been able to answer questions that come from City staff. It often means many phone calls, but the Commission does try to provide answers and enjoys the work. I was also asked to submit an article to the Evergreen Club about Florence Filberg Centre for their anniversary.

One puzzling question that came in to City Hall was about the naming of the Anfield Mall beside Anfield Road. The Commission could not be positive as to the source of the name but had a map which indicates the original use of the name. I was able to find a great deal of information about the Anfields who were the grandparents of the woman who had inquired, but no one could confirm why the name had been placed on that road and subsequently the name for the Mall.

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Downtown Courtenay Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage

When the City asked the Commission for advice about wayfinding and interpretive signage in support of the Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association, members of the Commission met in the Chair's back yard to maintain social distance guidelines during their discussions. In total, the Commission had three meetings in the summer of 2020.

Members discovered that in spite of the Museum not being available in the early days of the pandemic, members collective memories and personal ownership of photos allowed the Commission come to an agreement and members were able to advise on the "Up Close History" component of the signs.



Public Engagement

Heritage Week

Heritage Week, an annual promotion of the Province of British Columbia, gives the Commission a chance to present a chosen theme to the community. For 2019, the theme was LIVE, WORK, LEARN AND PLAY. The Commission decided to have four panels to feature how Courtenay has become the centre of commerce in the Comox Valley.

The panels included:

- A panel featuring “AGRICULTURE” with a focus on Comox showing the early arrival of European and the settlement of farms;
- A second panel on “MINING” showing the various communities that worked on the seams of coal that were mined and brought to Union Bay to be shipped. That panel lists Cumberland, Bevan and Union Bay;
- A third panel featuring “LOGGING” with the development of Merville and Black Creek; and
- The fourth panel featuring “COURTENAY” which became the centre of the Comox Valley after the arrival of the E&N rail line, the dredging of the river, and the rise of commercial enterprises on both sides of the Courtenay River.

When the annual Heritage Week Day usually held in Cumberland was cancelled, the Commission still wanted to display the research, so arrangements were made with the libraries in Courtenay and Comox to have the panels displayed for two weeks and they were also displayed at the Lewis Recreation Centre.

For 2020 we decided to have panels reflecting a 20/20 vision of the City of Courtenay featuring the City in both 1920 and in 2020. The Commission had completed work on the panels in 2020 just as the City held an open house for citizen input on the new proposed Official Community Plan (OCP). The Commission was pleased to display the panels which were received with great interest.

When the pandemic closed down City Hall to the public, the Commission was unable to complete the work on the remaining panels which included beautiful photos from member Glen Greenhill taken just days before we had to fold our tent. The Commission will be completing the project and believes that it will be a record that will be very important for future years.

Samples of panels are on the following page.

A sample of the 2019 and 2020 panels

THE TIE THAT BINDS

A Community spirit arises where people
LIVE ❀ WORK ❀ LEARN ❀ PLAY

A look at communities in the Comox Valley
from 1862 to 1962

Since 1862 when the first European settlers arrived at Comox Bay and established small farms, a number of diverse communities have been established because of their employment opportunities. Where men found work, their families came to live, their children were enrolled in schools and the hours of leisure were spent in a number of activities such as Lodges, music and sports.

It is these four activities; where they LIVED, WORKED, WENT TO SCHOOL, and spent their LEISURE time that a community spirit arose and remained with the people long after the communities disappeared and remain now only as a name on a map.

COURTENAY The Business Community

While other areas of the Comox Valley grew quickly, Courtenay was late in developing. The deep forest deterred the early settlers from farming the area on the west side of the Courtenay River so it was the east side around the straght that businesses gradually moved from the wharf in Comox to better serve the farmers along the Upper and Lower Prairie roads.

It was not until Joseph McPhee had cut a towpath across the river that Courtenay developed. With the decline of coal production and the imminent arrival of the ESN Railway to 1914 with a connection to Nanaimo and Victoria, businesses in Cumberland began to open a second store in Courtenay which was incorporated as a city in 1915. The population was 800. By 1941 the population had risen to 1737.

The Courtenay River became an important transportation link with barges bringing cargo up river to

the wharves of companies who had large storage warehouses. After the First World War the centre of commerce was shifting to Courtenay. The opening of the Native Sons Hall in 1928 provided the whole Comox Valley with a large building suitable for many activities from A to Z.

Modern transportation since the end of World War II has provided water access for everyone to connect to a large centre. When the smaller communities of the valley no longer lived in isolation Courtenay became the new centre of commerce. In 1963, all senior high students graduated from Courtenay High School.

Today many of the thriving communities based on farming, mining and logging are ghost towns. They are only names among those on a map of valley schools: River, Headquarters, McAdams, Nkray, Nob Hill and Puntledge Townsite.



Map of Schools: *For our Children*, a History of Comox Valley Schools

Original 5th Street Bridge circa 1895

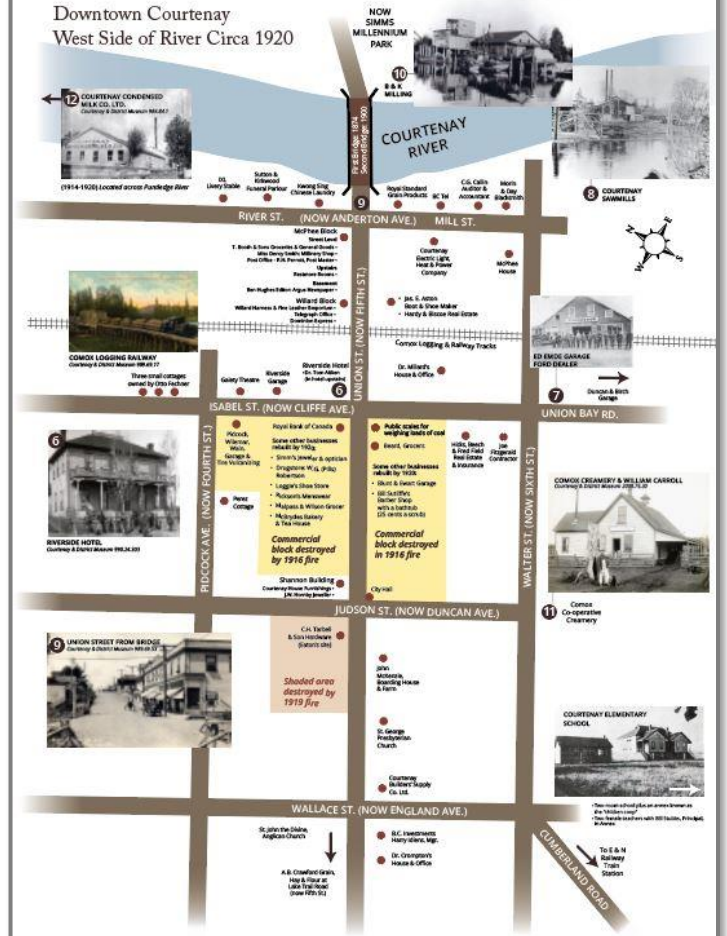


Aerial of part of Courtenay, circa 1950



2020 VISION: BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

Downtown Courtenay
West Side of River Circa 1920



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Budget

The Commission's operating budget is allocated annually and is guided by work plan priorities. The Commission's annual operating budget is approximately \$5,000.

Partnerships

The Heritage Advisory Commission receives assistance from staff from numerous City departments and the Commission works closely with Courtenay and District Museum staff. The Courtenay and District Museum provides ongoing support to many of the Commission's initiatives including providing free meeting space, research assistance, photographs and editing work. The Commission is also working with the Museum to provide an 'Accessible Archival Space' to ensure that heritage records are safely stored and accessible.

Without the generosity of these partnerships, and the assistance of many members of our community, the Heritage Advisory Commission would not be able to undertake the breadth of activities that they have over the years.

The involvement of a City staff member on the Commission has been of key importance for administrative support, technical and legislative advice, communications materials and to guide Commission work planning. Tatsuyuki Setta, prior to leaving the City in the summer of 2022 served as the City staff appointee for five years. Tats was a pleasure to work with and the Commission wishes him the best of luck on his future endeavors.

City staff continue to provide administrative assistance and technical and legislative advice to support the Commission in their work plan priorities.

In-Kind Contributions & Additional Support

In addition to the annual operating budget, the Commission receives assistance in the form of City staff time and additional City resources related to meetings, heritage planning, plaque installations, graphic displays, and other commemorative projects.

The Commission also receives in-kind support from the Courtenay and District Museum for research assistance, use of photographs in the Museum's collection, and meeting and storage space.

The Heritage Advisory Commission meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of every month from September until June. In addition to these meetings, the members spend considerable time on workshops, research, and various heritage projects.

The total in-kind contribution hours reported for Commission Members for 2019 - 2022 is 372 hours. During the pandemic Commission members reported fewer in-kind hours in 2020 and 2021 due to the lack of regular Commission meetings.



CITY OF
COURTENAY

Heritage Advisory Commission