



Heritage Vancouver

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March 27, 2017

Neal Wells, Manager, Communications and Engagement

Dear Neal Wells,

We are writing regarding the proposed replacement/renovation work to the historic UBC War Memorial Gym and Thunderbird Stadium as we are concerned that these important community and heritage assets will be demolished or altered in an unsympathetic way.

The War Memorial Gymnasium has a richly storied history both from an architectural and community building perspective that would be lost forever should it be demolished. Heritage Vancouver Society (HVS) strongly supports the retention and potential adaptive reuse of this important heritage asset (Option B).

Thunderbird Stadium has also played an important intangible community role in the history of UBC and the province as a whole, particularly due to its use as an entertainment and sports venue. This role is facilitated by the unique integration of sky views, landscaped bowl and distinctive cable-stayed cantilevered roof structure. HVS supports the retention of these design elements, particularly within the context of better physical links to the UBC community.

HVS is a longstanding independent voice for heritage in Vancouver with the perspective that significant and irreplaceable aspects of Vancouver's tangible and intangible cultural heritage are worth protecting for future generations because they provide the community social benefit. While we acknowledge that we generally limit our positions and comments to the City of Vancouver we believe that Vancouver and the UBC Point Grey campus have historically had a strong architectural and community relationship. As such we are weighing in on these two projects as they represent a wave of building style that migrated to Vancouver.

The UBC War Memorial Gym in particular was one of the first large International Style buildings in the region. The demolition of this important building would be devastating to the architectural and community histories of both Vancouver and UBC. Based on the heritage impact assessment from CEI (dated March 2016), it is feasible to retain and renew War Memorial Gym. We agree with that approach including proposed alterations to some original features, such as the gym floor.

With respect to War Memorial Gym's community legacy, you are likely aware that the building was built to remember students and others who gave their lives in the Second World War. A large portion of the project funding was raised by the student body itself in keeping with the independent pioneering spirit that originally founded the Point Grey campus and continues today in the student-led creation of the new

Student Union Building. In fact, this pioneering spirit, which we understand to be one of the original themes of the thematic framework, is evident in the design, social life, such as activism, and the deliberate placement of the gym as a landmark outside the early historic boundaries of UBC Vancouver Campus.

The gym has also served as a space of remembrance at the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, serving as a physical and symbolic link from the UBC community of today with the generations that came before. We find these two aspects of the gym's history to be extremely significant and considerable efforts to sustain this cultural remembrance into the future should not be overlooked in favor of more substantial efforts to maximize research and recreational utility; one need not happen at the expense of the other. Particularly in this case, the significance of the past can be made relevant to the future by extending the concept of war to those wars and conflicts afflicting the world today. For example, perhaps the University could promote, activate, and program part of the gym and hall as a central space for students to gather around news of war, conflict, peace negotiations etc. as the prevalence -and additional threats- of conflict in the world continue to have great impact on everyone.

From a broad perspective of campus character, it is also a 'signature building' of exceptional design that strongly contributes to a memorable experience for entry at the Westbrook Mall at University Boulevard gateway including the transit node. The architecture of the building is equally historically important as it was one of the first examples of a large building in the International Style in the province with its radical, stripped down style that resulted in a beautifully daylit and highly advanced sports facility for its time. And given all of the above, this modern heritage landmark is irreplaceable; it must be renewed not replaced.

We are pleased to see that UBC Campus and Community Planning has prepared statements of significance for each project and strongly encourage the project team to closely follow these recommendations when considering new work. HVS shares values with the principles in the UBC Vancouver Campus Plan and we congratulate UBC on preparing a plan with a thematic framework for heritage conservation and highly recommend it be used to guide future decision making on the many important heritage assets that are a part of both the UBC and Vancouver architectural and community legacies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stewart Burgess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stewart" being more prominent than the last name "Burgess".

Stewart Burgess, Vice President, Heritage Vancouver Society

Cc

Joanne Proft, Manager, Community Planning and Transportation
Gerry McGeough, Director, Planning and Design (University Architect)