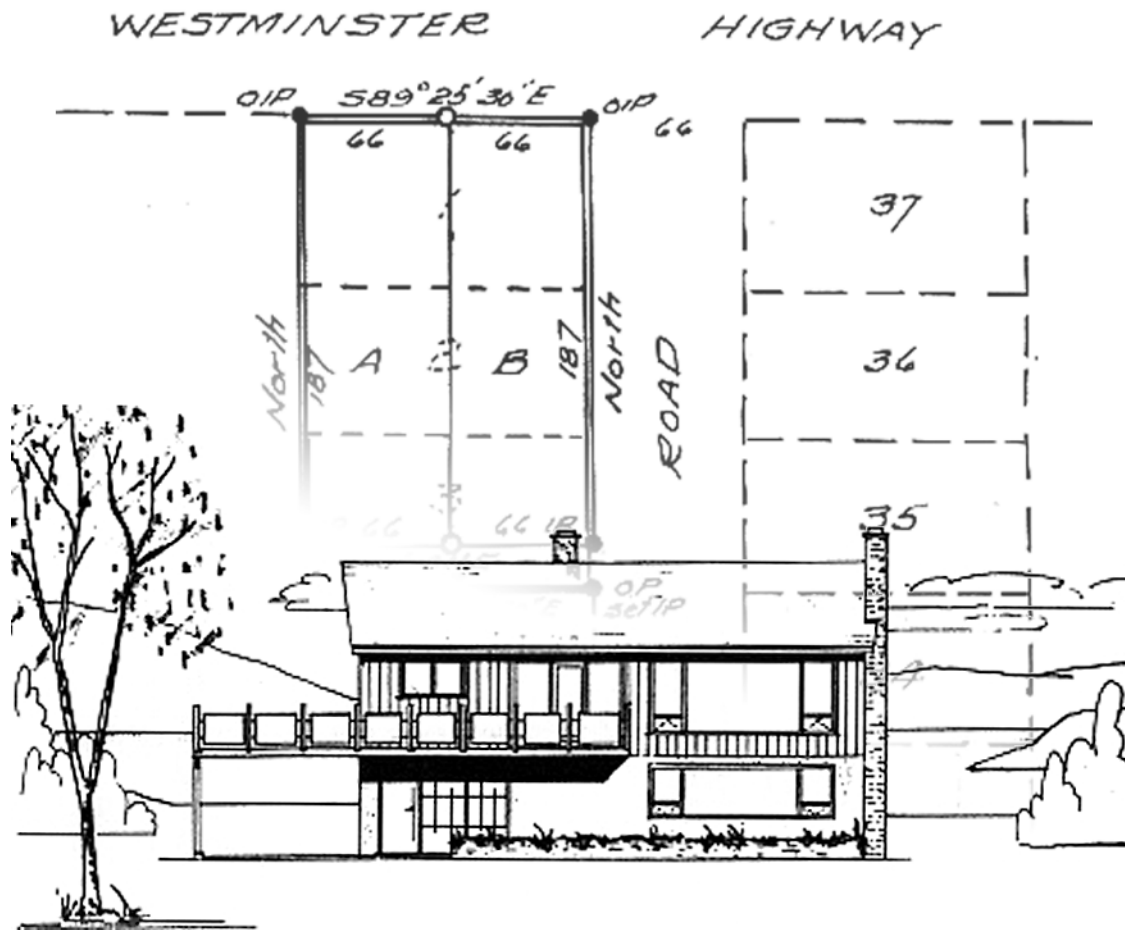


# Richmond's Suburban History



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## Introduction

Documenting Richmond’s suburban history involves taking a look at Richmond as a whole. The physical evolution of the suburban community is a fascinating account of a cultural landscape affected by its physical setting, social and economic forces, planning decisions and its people. This report offers an historical overview of a complex subject, with a focus on the 1950’s era subdivisions, and offers observations as to why some of these areas look the way they do. From a heritage perspective, the marks of human settlement – both large and small scale - that remain in the landscape are an important physical and visual history of Richmond’s suburban development.

## Methodology

The methodology used to document the history of suburban heritage resources and their character included the following steps:

- documenting the history of subdivisions in Richmond from primary and secondary research sources to create context;
- review of documents, plans, historical photographs and aerial photography to understand suburban evolution and character;
- documentation and evaluation of built form and landscape characteristics of selected suburban developments; and
- mapping the general locations and time periods of selected suburban developments in Richmond.

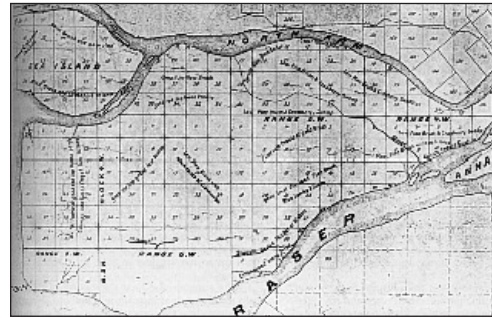
## Part 1: Physical and Historic Contexts

### The Natural Landscape

The physical characteristics of Richmond have played a role in determining how the community would develop over time. Richmond has developed under the constraints of being a city built on two islands at the mouth of the Fraser River. Most urban centres develop with a pattern of spreading outward; Richmond has been unable to access adjacent lands because of its position in the Fraser River. The river, along with its sloughs, provided transportation routes for early settlers. Settlements grew up around the perimeter of the island at places such as Steveston, London’s Landing, and Terra Nova while homes were constructed along the edges of the sloughs. The soft bog conditions and muddy interior soils were also a barrier to internal settlement until dykes were constructed, the land drained by ditches, and roads established across the island. And the high water table of the floodplain has affected the design of structures, from stilt houses to slab on grade basements.

## Richmond’s Historical Development

### Early Land Division in Richmond



Part of the Trutch Survey 1859

Richmond’s two islands were surveyed as part of the New Westminster District by the Royal Engineers in 1859 under the direction of Joseph Trutch.

The land was divided into a grid using the block and range system, each block being three miles square, or 160 acres. These blocks were then divided into thirty-six sections of half-mile squares, which was equal to forty surveyors’ chains. This initial survey was to create the boundaries for much of the subsequent land division and development of services and infrastructure in Richmond, which occurred along these original section lines. Already, a distinct pattern of development was occurring.

The earliest settlers in Richmond were Crown Grant applicants, mainly in the areas of the South Arm, North Arm and Steveston, leaving the centre of Lulu Island relatively uninhabited. Most of Richmond’s earliest farms faced outward toward the river which was the major transportation route and irrigation channel. Later, the main transportation route became the dyke which eventually circumnavigated the islands, maintaining the pattern of perimeter development.

Richmond’s first true subdivisions were Steveston Townsite and London’s Landing in the 1880’s, each consisting of small lots laid out in a grid. These areas represented the type of pocket development which occurred around the perimeter of Richmond when transportation was still mostly by water.

The construction of drainage ditches was a necessity following settlement in the late 1860’s. The low-lying land of Richmond was unsuitable for cultivation, settlement or transportation until it had been drained. The early municipal council was also inundated with requests for roads which, with their accompanying ditches, would both drain the farmland and provide access to the interior of the islands. Ditches were dug on either side of the road allowance between Crown Grant sections, and therefore followed the section lines. The material from the ditches was thrown up in the middle to form a road bed and completed with wood planks and gravel. With the completion of ditches and canals across the island, and the construction of roads, the major transportation routes were clearly delineated.

Agricultural patterns began to follow the same grid pattern, with sections of land acquired under crown grants subdivided into individual farm holdings in the first decade of the twentieth century. Most of the sections still with a single owner are in rich agricultural areas. After 1905, when the dyking commissions were created, there was a shift in settlement patterns from large plots of land to smaller parcels of acreage, and in some areas small lot subdivision. Early maps show areas that were intensively subdivided into small lots; perhaps land speculation, even at this early time, was beginning to make itself known in Richmond. Today, many of these areas do not show this small lot pattern. Perhaps these early subdivisions were later consolidated back to their original sizes. In the following years, concentrations of settlers began shifting from the original sites of settlement in Steveston, the South Arm and the North Arm at the perimeter of Lulu Island, into more central areas, now accessible by newly constructed roads.



Map of Richmond from the 1930's showing land division into sections. These sections later became major roads. CRA 1983 2 1

Richmond's original Town Hall, located on the Middle Arm on a portion of Sam Brighthouse's property, burned down in 1912. Minoru Racetrack had opened in the area between No. 3 Road, Granville Avenue, Westminster Highway and Gilbert Road in 1909, and was a major attraction in Richmond; as well the BC Electric Railway connected this area to both Vancouver and Steveston. The municipality felt that this would become the centre of the community, and in 1913 bought five acres of the Brighthouse estate at the corner of No. 3 Road and Granville Avenue. Brighthouse began to emerge as a new and growing settlement, with commercial development along No. 3 Road. Residential settlement also began in the Bridgeport area, which was close to Eburne and the Fraser River bridges. Land here was cheaper than in Vancouver; residents could work in industry, or in Vancouver and still live on affordable acreage in Richmond.

In 1941, during World War II, the subdivision of Burkeville was constructed under the Dominion government's Wartime Housing Plan to provide accommodation for workers from the Boeing Plant and other aviation industries on Sea Island. After the war, a number of subdivisions were created, and housing constructed, under the Veterans' Land Act to provide accommodation for the families of returning servicemen. It is interesting to note that as early as 1938, Richmond Council was aware of the need for planning and zoning policies to qualify for loans under the federal Housing act, and for some form of architectural control which would allow the refusal of a permit for any building considered detrimental to neighbouring buildings.



Large lot subdivision of land c. 1920

### The Post War Years

After World War II, Richmond began to experience rapid and considerable new growth. Farmers began to subdivide their lands, mainly for housing, and new subdivisions were being built quickly without the benefit of long term planning. A new generation of landowners brought with it a need for services of all kinds, and with it a need for the organized planning that had been recognized earlier. Bylaw 1134 passed in 1949 created a comprehensive Town Plan which divided Richmond into districts for the purposes of directing development. These districts were classified as one, two or multiple family dwelling districts; local business districts; general commercial districts; industrial districts; and rural districts. The document also established regulations for land use, the location, use and height of buildings, and the size of yards and other open spaces.

In 1950, Richmond was still considered a small community until the wholesale subdivision of land began during this decade. The local population at this time was around 17,500, compared to about 4,800 in 1921. In 1955, 35 subdivision projects were underway, ranging from 12 to 1400 homes. Construction of services by the municipality couldn't keep up with the pace of subdivision and housing

construction. As well, the municipality was encouraging businesses to relocate in Richmond by advertising wide open spaces for warehouses, storage space, industry, and other land consuming uses.

In response to the new waves of growth, in 1955, the landscape architectural firm of Desmond Muirhead and Associates was contracted by the Municipality to review the 1949 Town Plan bylaw and prepare amendments. This firm also acted as consultant planner for the Municipality.

The construction of the Oak Street Bridge in 1957 also acted as a catalyst in this era of growth for Richmond. The bridge was built to help provide easier access to the Vancouver International Airport and a quicker link to the United States border and the new ferry terminal at Tsawwassen. These transportation improvements also helped to transform the municipality of Richmond from a rural farming area to a suburban, developing community. Local population increased to around 42,000 by 1961, as people working in Vancouver continued to find that they could afford the suburban Richmond lifestyle and easily commute to their jobs. Like many North American towns, Richmond was becoming an automobile suburb.

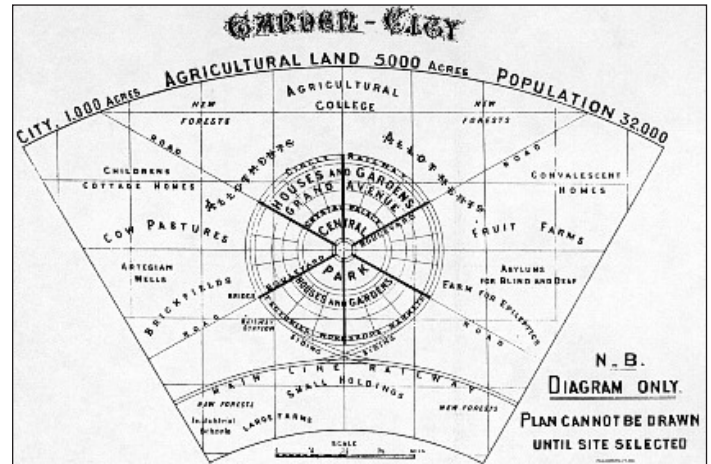
In 1962, the municipality purchased the Brighthouse family estate, part of which was developed into Brighthouse Industrial Estates, and a portion sold to the Consolidated Building Corporation to become the Richmond Gardens development. The property extended from the Middle Arm to Granville Avenue between No. 2 and No. 3 Roads, became the Town Centre planning area, and included Minoru Park and the Municipal Hall. In 1972, the Agricultural Land Reserve was established which instituted a land freeze, helping to control unrestricted development.

While maintaining its status as a city, Richmond has as well played a unique role as a suburb of Vancouver, allowing people to live a semi-rural lifestyle while maintaining their jobs in the larger metropolis. At the same time, it has developed its city centre with its own suburbs. While it's growth has been fueled by being a place where first-time home buyers could afford to purchase their own home, it has maintained its identity as a self-sufficient and independent municipality.

## History and Precedent in Town Planning

The first modern suburbs appeared in the eighteenth century in England, when wealthy merchants began to take up secondary residences within an easy carriage drive of large commercial cities. As these merchants began to live permanently outside the cities where their businesses were located, they began to create the first true dormitory suburbs, small communities spaciouly laid-out houses in a near-rural setting. These suburbs were residential districts that

excluded commerce and industry, and became the prototype of the suburban ideal which would influence development in North America. Zoning and planning controls began to be used in Europe and England to reduce crowding, create basic conditions for health and safety, and develop a more efficient urban infrastructure. North America became the beneficiary of both the garden suburb concept, and comprehensive approaches to city planning.



Howard's Garden City concept

One of the most important planning concepts to influence suburban development was the idea of the Garden City. Ebenezer Howard was an English reformer working in the late 1800's. He was concerned with the living conditions in the slums of industrial London, and felt that the growth of cities should be limited, that people leaving rural areas should be housed in new towns scattered among agricultural fields, and that land uses within cities should be segregated. Howard's Garden City concept became the basis for many suburban communities in North America, and from it came ideas such as the dormitory suburb, green belts, and separated land uses, or zoning.

The Garden City style of development evolved to ensure that its citizens were decently housed. Strong use is made of the inward looking cul-de-sac to make maximum use of the land with minimum service expenditure, and of cottages collected around natural greens. Every house had its garden. Curved roads were both aesthetic and used as a means to lower costs by following the natural contours of the individual site. Trees already established were retained, and more were planted along the roadways and at the back of building plots. Implementation of these utopian ideas combined with local zoning bylaws have resulted in both good and bad variations of the controlled garden suburb in North America.

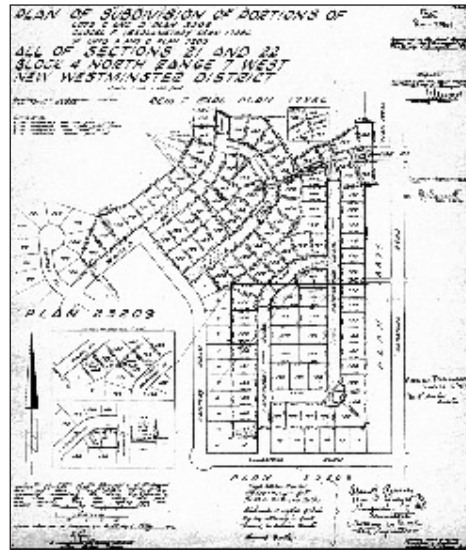
In Canada, the earliest suburbs began in the major colonial cities from the mid-eighteenth century on. These first subdivisions showed their urban roots in their form: homes built near the road and close to one another. In

the late nineteenth century, however, a new suburban spatial arrangement began to emerge. Houses were set back from the street and well away from the dwellings on either side, bordered by lawns and gardens, and separated from neighbouring houses by a hedge, fence or wall. Once adopted, this spatial arrangement was duplicated in large cities and small towns, and it penetrated deep into the nation's social structure. Initiated by the upper middle class, soon modest middle and working class suburbs came to share the same basic pattern.

Early towns in this country were planned by engineers, railway companies, or city officials who almost invariably chose the grid as the basic form. The exceptions were large pleasant suburbs, designed for the wealthy, and laid out following Howard's garden city principles. These layouts became common for other suburban developments after World War II, when crescents and cul-de-sacs were integrated into the straight lines of the grid, both as an aesthetic response and as efficient way to lay out lots and servicing. Even the working classes could aspire to a house on a leafy, curved suburban street.

After the 1925 Town Planning Act came into effect in Canada, municipal governments became more involved in the process of siting and planning subdivisions. Bylaws were passed which attempted to control various aspects of design and construction, such as lot size, building size and building setbacks. Richmond responded in 1949 by dividing the city into zones with designated land uses to control and direct development.

After World War II, the idea of the suburb took on a new meaning, and development in Richmond followed current planning thought of the day. Zoning bylaws specified street widths, setbacks and other aspects of community design, grouping specific uses in different areas. This effectively segregated the various aspects of living into different parts of the city, with the result that people used the sidewalks less and their cars more as they needed to move around the city to satisfy their various needs. The design of subdivisions responded to this and became purely residential enclaves, or automobile subdivisions. Curvilinear streets replaced the grid both as an aesthetic response to the Garden City model and as a way of responding to the local topography. Cul-de-sacs were the result of the tendency for one developer to construct an entire subdivision, and to counteract the new wider street standards which created raceways through residential neighbourhoods. The cul-de-sac effectively disallowed free circulation between neighbourhoods and strengthened the isolation of the individual subdivisions. The new zoning regulations also created urban sprawl.



Subdivision plan of Seafair Estates, 1962

Also new was the concept of borrowing money to buy a house built on speculation. The new growth both in the population of cities and in the post-war economy spurred on the new middle class who were working towards upward mobility and had a need to accommodate growing families.

Real estate developers began to develop larger tracts of land, constructing numerous homes, and to market them as both an economic investments and as a desired lifestyle. *"Welcome to a new way of life -- a better way of life -- richer for you and your family, through unique blending of city conveniences with suburban comfort and charm...to assure you the soundness and security of your home investment"* reads a marketing brochure for Seafair Estates. Developers seized on the concept of mass production and economies of scale in providing the supply of desired homes in desired areas.

In Richmond, the pattern of isolated subdivisions was perpetuated by the strong grid system of the major roads, and later on the requirements for screening new subdivisions, resulting in developments that turned their back on the street. This phenomenon, in Richmond and elsewhere, also enhanced the ability of people to choose their neighbours, surrounding themselves with people in the same socioeconomic class as themselves. Suburbs became enclaves of homogeneity in a society where consuming was becoming a way of life, and one's values were judged by objects, investments, and perceived taste.

By the 1950's, the garden suburb with its single detached house surrounded by a yard had become the pattern for new developments all designed around the automobile. Suburbs supplied good-quality living space for continually increasing populations, and were thought of as being part of a desired lifestyle, a place relating neither to the country nor the city, but with allusions to both. The idea of a healthier, more satisfying way of life was sold along with the homes. Suburbs were associated with relatively low intensity development, spacious house lots, extensive community open space, and generously laid-out streets, but also with mass-produces homes, the monotony of the curved streets, and zoning which dictated travel primarily by car.





From a promotional brochure for Seafair Estates, c. 1962 CRA Ref. files J.M. Wells Catalogue

The construction of new suburbs is primarily based on population growth, a combination of a natural population increase of new suburban households, and migration into the area. Suburban neighbourhoods may become more intensively developed over time, through reconstruction

of larger homes on existing lots or by the infill of open space with new homes. Suburban development is generally a market-driven process that local planning systems attempt to control as best they can. While many suburbs on the margins of larger cities eventually merge with that city, Richmond originated as, and remains, a separate and independent municipality.

**Planning and Development in Richmond**

The concept of planning has played a role in the development of communities dating back to Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, and others who changed the concept of urban design in response to conditions brought about by the industrial revolution. Like many early settlements, Richmond began to develop in an organic way, responding to natural conditions. Planning in the community began as a way of controlling development pressures, and had its beginnings in the 1930's. As a 1938 memo to Richmond council notes, building loans for residences were available from the Dominion government, "...but such loans can not be obtained by residents of Richmond until some form of zoning or control is put into place". Under the municipal act at that time, the municipal council had no power to refuse a permit for any building which was deemed to be detrimental to the neighbourhood. Planning decisions have had an effect on the type of community Richmond has become, and upon the form and character of its subdivisions.

The 1906 Municipal Clauses and Land Registry Acts empowered the municipality to regulate and administer subdivision plans and applications. The Town Planning Act of 1925 empowered municipalities to prepare comprehensive town plans, to pass zoning bylaws and to establish a Town Planning Commission. Procedures

relating to the processing of subdivision applications have been established in a variety of subdivision plan approval bylaws, the first enacted in 1908.

After first being proposed in 1938, a Town Planning Commission was appointed in 1947. In 1950 the first municipal zoning bylaw, Town Plan Bylaw 1134, was passed by Council. This bylaw divided Richmond into planning areas for the purposes of directing development, and established regulations for land use and construction. It established separate zones for farms and small holdings, and for residential, commercial and industrial development. While the bylaw did not allow industry to locate in residential areas, it did allow a form of down zoning which permitted residential uses in industrial and agricultural areas. The result was mixed-use development over large areas of land, which outstripped the municipality's ability to service it in an economic way.

Bylaws which have helped to guide Richmond's suburban development include:

- Subdivision Plans Approval Bylaw 131, 1908
- Subdivision Plans Amendment Bylaw 190, 1914
- Subdivision Plans Approval Bylaw 546, 1930
- A Bylaw Related to the Construction of Subdivision Roads Before Approval of Plan 971, 1945
- A Bylaw to Amend Bylaw 971 1075, 1947
- A Bylaw to Divide the Townsite of Richmond into Districts 1134, 1949
- Subdivision Plans Approval Requirements Bylaw 1316, 1954
- A Bylaw to Regulate the Subdivision of Lands 2342, 1967

From this list it is evident that subdivision form and development has been a concern of the municipality since the early part of the twentieth century.

1955 was a key year for community planning in Richmond. Both the Town Planning Commission and the Richmond Branch of the Canadian Planning Association of Canada made recommendations to Council regarding the employment of a full-time town planner. The latter group was brought into the community by Bob Olafsen and Bob McMath, with the objective of "...bringing together of people within the community who realize the need for planning, and further to foster public understanding of, and participation in, Community Planning".

The firm of Desmond Muirhead and Associates was preparing a report on the 1949 Town plan, which was reviewed by the Town Planning Commission in 1955. At this time, Clive Justice of Desmond Muirhead was acting as a consultant town planner for the municipality until one could be hired. In several cases he reminded the commission that

subdivisions up for approval should conform to municipal bylaws. This, plus some inflammatory articles in the Vancouver Sun in 1956 about lack of planning and urban sprawl in Richmond, indicates that perhaps the planning processes in place were not as effective as they could have been during this time. At a subsequent meeting, Mr. Justice told the members "...that they were going to commence on the zoning plan on April 1st and were also going to ask the Council to...declare a moratorium on issuance of building permits during the plan period". Apparently there were more than a few [loud] comments on this, as Mr. Justice stated he had said it "...merely to get their reaction". The Town Planning Commission reviewed and eventually approved the recommendations proposed by Desmond Muirhead, and noted that "The adoptions of these proposals would permit the establishment of a coordinated policy which would make for more efficient and economic administration." Also in that year, the School Board, Municipal Council and the Town Planning Commission proposed that a Civic Centre concept be adopted on the site of the present Town Hall recommending a commercial district and a large multi-use park, along with the civic functions, to provide the setting for the development of a true community focal area. This project became today's Minoru Park and Tour Centre, and in the words of a local newspaper at that time, "...the granddaddy of all Richmond planning disputes."

Single family regulations defined lot sizes and open spaces around dwellings that were generous. This protected land values and upheld the suburban ideal, but resulted in a low density that promoted urban sprawl. Lot sizes in Richmond were regulated at 66' x 125', a size that originally accommodated a septic tank, but which was unnecessary once a sewer system was in place.

Richmond's planning department was established in January 1957, when the municipality got its first town planner, Mr. William Kerr. From 1947 to 1956, Council had relied upon the Town Planning Commission for advice on planning matters. Mr. Kerr was instrumental in introducing servicing standards for subdivisions and implemented the school and park concept that gives Richmond such a distinct pattern of green space within its residential development. He was a key player in the purchase of Brighthouse Estates and of the development of Town Centre as a park and civic precinct. He also advocated residential infill to create a more compact community after the sprawl of the early 1950's, and advocated the protection of remaining farmland from residential development.

The provision of utility services such as water supply and sewage disposal had been an issue in the community for many years. Richmond had always relied on a water supply from neighbouring municipalities as part of the Greater Vancouver Water Board. However, this required the cooperation between the municipality and the cities of

New Westminster and Vancouver. Private developers soon became frustrated with the municipality's inability to keep up with servicing requirements, and began to develop plans on their own, subject to municipal approval. Two examples of this were the Hullah Corporation at their Richmond and Gilmore Park developments, and the Fraser Valley Lands development at Edgemere. Both of these developers included smaller adjacent developers and builders in their sewerage schemes, allowing them to qualify for CMHC financing and continue with their projects.

The development companies at work in Richmond in the 1950s and '60s had different ways of doing business. Some, such as Fraser Valley Lands, Richmond Realty and other real estate companies assembled the land, developed it, and sold it to individual builders. They then returned to sell the houses when they were completed. Others, such as J.S. Woods and Jack Wells were full service firms: they bought and developed the land, constructed the buildings and sold the properties. Council review and approval were required for subdivision approval, and many would have appeared before the Town Planning Commission.

Planning in Richmond has had a long and interesting past and there are many stories still to be told.

## Part 2: A Suburban Overview

There are a number of different types of subdivisions existing together in Richmond. Through subdivision plans, city plans and aerial photographs, it is possible to identify distinct patterns of development in Richmond's suburbs. Examples of these patterns still exist in the landscape today, and examples of them are shown below.

### Patterns of Development

A selection of subdivision types are described below in chronological order. Their locations can be found on the plan in Appendix 1.

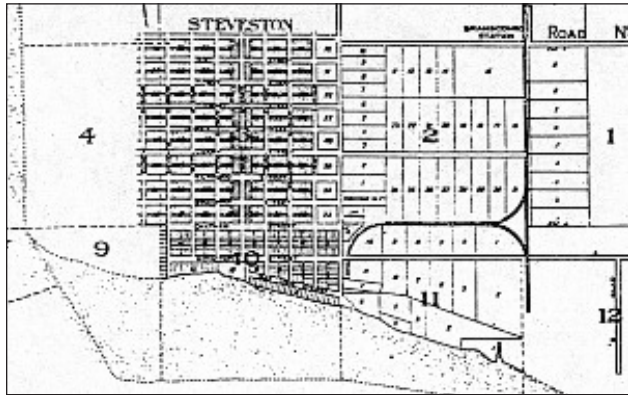
#### Steveston, 1880-82

The townsite of Steveston began as a Crown Grant of section 3-7-3 to William Herbert Steves in 1880. Between 1880 and 1890, over 100 individuals purchased land in this original Crown Grant section, currently the residential area of Steveston. It was subdivided into 237 lots. In 1882 the Steveston area grew to include section 10 immediately to the south, which developed along with the canning industry, and eventually became the commercial area of the settlement.

The layout of Steveston is a grid pattern of small blocks which were divided into small, thin, urban lots measuring between 25 and 30 feet in width. A rear lane serviced each lot. This pattern was typical of this time period, when North

American cities were being laid out in grids by engineers, railway companies and early planners. Steveston can be considered the first subdivision in Richmond, as well as its first townsite, and there were visions for a large metropolis here. It is a unique subdivision; there are no others like it in the city.

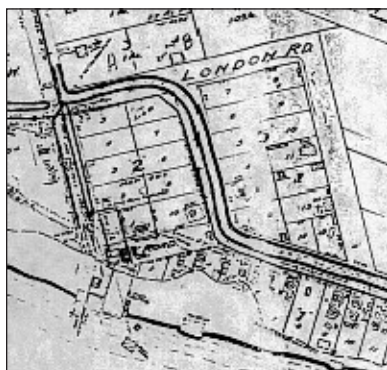
The small community of London's Landing, established in 1887 with the construction of a wharf to accommodate sailboats and a mail depot, was also laid out on a grid.



A 1909 plan of Steveston Townsite CRA 1985 153 1



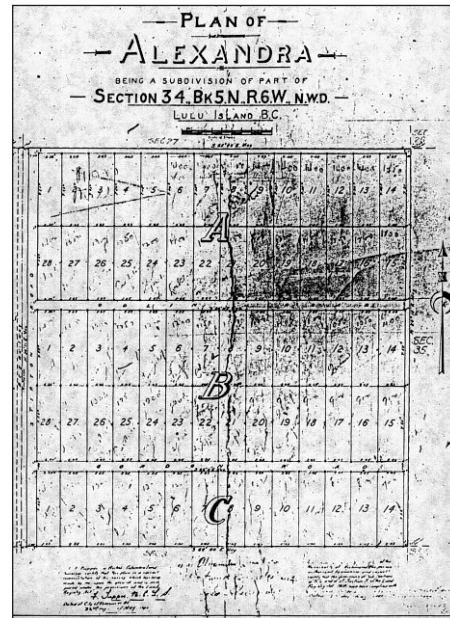
Steveston 2001



1936 Waterworks Map of London's Landing  
CRA 1991 40 24

**Alexandra, 1909**

The plan for the Alexandra subdivision is one of the earliest available in the archives. The subdivision is section 34-5-6, located in West Cambie bordered by Cambie Road, Garden City Road, No. 4 Road and Alderbridge Way. The subdivision is laid out in the grid pattern prominent in the early part of the century when the original surveyed sections were being divided into both large and small lots. Road widths are 6 metres, and there are drainage ditches on either side. Today, the lots in this area are large compared to later developments, although infill has occurred. The Alexandra subdivision contains examples of Richmond's common housing types from several different time periods. This type of development was considered by the municipality to be a 'small holdings district', with a minimum lot size of half an acre. Several similar areas can be found in South McLennan consisting of a section bisected by two or three roadways and having larger lot sizes.



Subdivision plan of Alexandra, 1909 CRA 1987 39 1



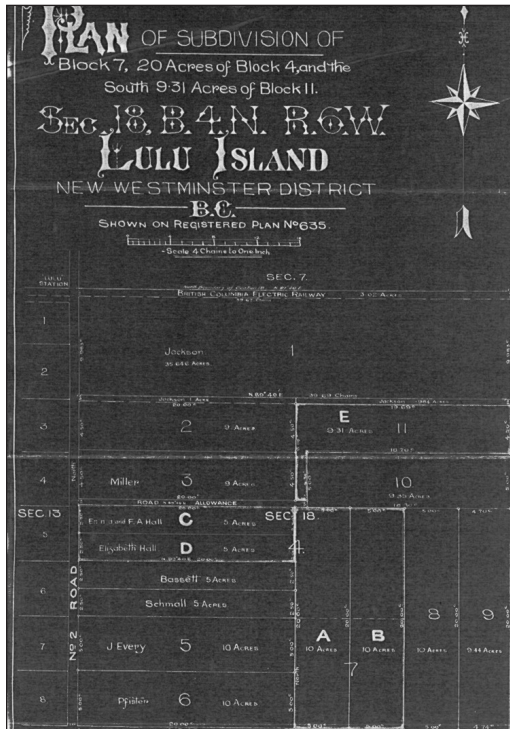
Alexandra Subdivision, 2002



Alexandra Subdivision, 2002

**Part of Section 18, B4N,  
R6W Blundell Area, 1920**

This subdivision was located in what is now Blundell, and is an example of the early division of land into large acreage lots for farming. Dwellings were constructed around the perimeter of the section, facing the arterial roads. The northern part of this section is now the Udy subdivision, developed in 1955, and the southern part is Twin Cedars, 1958-68, both constructed by Fraser Valley Lands. This plan shows the forms of large lot subdivision that was underway in Richmond in the early part of the century, as two, five and ten acre lots were subdivided for individual farms. New forms of suburban development began to erase these early large lot patterns beginning in the early 1950's. This rural pattern can still be seen in the area bounded by No. 4 and No. 5 Roads, Westminster Highway and Francis Road.



Plan of part of Sec. 18 B4N. R6W., Lulu Island, 1920 CRA 1994 2 1



Comstock Road (centre) and Gilbert Road looking West, c. 1954 showing subdivision of the original large lots into conventional subdivision lots CRA 1984 17 104



Twin Cedars Subdivision 2002

**Burkeville, 1942-1944**

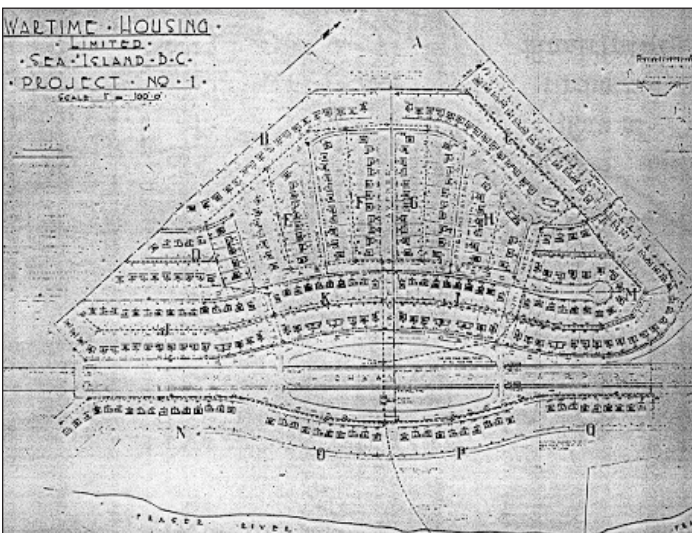
Burkeville is a planned community that was established during World War II to house workers in the Boeing aircraft plant and other local aircraft industries on Sea Island. Lot sizes are 50 x 100 feet, with small homes of between 700 and 900 square feet and 4 to 6 rooms. There were three housing designs. A grid layout was avoided; the curved streets of the site follow the lay of the land and give the community a garden suburb appearance, based upon the principles of Levittown and other American suburbs following the British model. The streets are 6 metres wide and there is access to garages from back lanes. Street trees were planted later under a local area improvement plan.



Bureville 1944 CRA 1984 17 84



Burkeville 2002



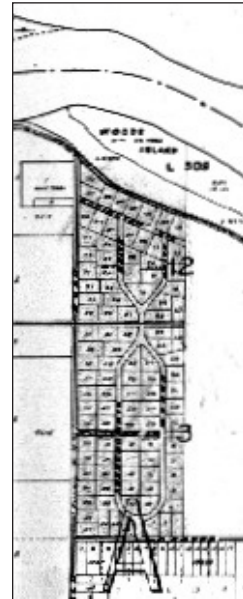
Design plan for Burkeville, 1943 CRA 1985 103 1

**Veteran's Land Act Subdivisions**

These subdivisions were constructed with grants from the federal government to house the influx of servicemen and women returning from World War II. The Veterans Land Act was enacted in 1942, with the intention of rehabilitating Canadian veterans by resettling them on the land. The scheme involved both housing and made provisions of small holdings for part time farmers. This would explain the one-acre parcels established in Richmond. There were a number of VLA subdivisions in Richmond, including Thompson, Cora Brown, Tait, Gray, and Grauer. The Tait, Gray and Grauer subdivisions were built in 1945 by the Bennett & White Construction Company.

The Thompson farm on River Road was purchased by the Veteran's Land Act and sub-divided into one acre parcels for sale to veterans. Land was set aside for a park and a leftover half acre site was given to the community by the VLA for a community building. The Director of the Veterans Land Act owned a number of lots on Sea Island according to a 1945 property plan but only the Cora Brown subdivision was developed here.

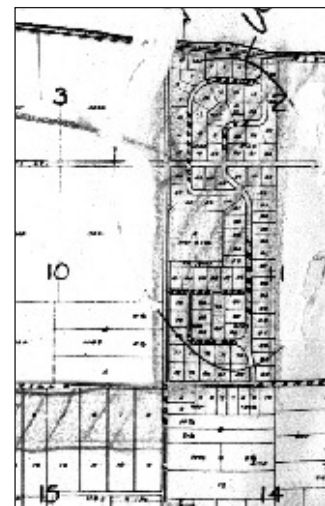
Each of these subdivision has a unique layout as seen in the following three examples. The locations of the VLA subdivisions shown below can be found on the location plan in Appendix 1.



Cora Brown subdivision



Grauer subdivision



Thompson subdivision

These subdivisions are immediately identifiable on a 1946 airphoto, in contrast to the large rectangular lots and smaller grids. The larger, one-acre building lots are evident, there is the beginning of internal road construction within a section, and the influence of the garden city style of subdivision is evident in the road and lot layout. Today, most of these areas have had their density increased by infill housing, although the occasional large lot is still in existence.

The distinctive patterns of the VLA subdivisions are lost in the many developments that now surround them. The Cora Brown subdivision no longer exists, due to airport expansion. These early, low-density subdivisions were the precursor to Richmond's urban sprawl of the 1950's.



Thompson subdivision showing original building stock and undeveloped lot on the left, a reminder of the early large lot VLA subdivisions



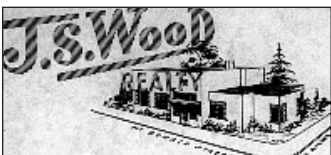
Grauer area looking South on Garden City Road 1954  
CRA 1978 37 11

### Classic Subdivisions of the 1950's

By the early 1950's the era of large scale suburbanization was underway in Richmond. The earliest subdivisions in the 1950's were individual farmers or landowners dividing up their sections or acreage. Soon larger parcels were beginning to be bought up by real estate and development companies and subdivided as one unit.

### Some of the Major Players and their Developments

There were a number of major individuals and firms involved with the suburban boom in Richmond in the 1950s and '60s. While the following are some of the more prominent names, there were in addition many smaller firms with subdivision applications under review at municipal hall. This era of development was extremely complex. There were individuals with subdivisions of four or five lots, new development companies formed to subdivide one area, and phased developments in which different companies were involved in the completion of different phases. Many of these developments stretched out over years and even decades.



J.S. Wood was a realtor and developer who was responsible for the Woods Bungalow, a housing type that, like most suburban tract housing, was economical, easy to build, and today still looks attractive. Woods used this housing form almost exclusively for most of his developments. He had a reputation for well built homes, and carried the development process through from land acquisition, development, housing construction and sales. As a result, his developments tend to be consistent in their housing style, setbacks and road layouts.

*Mowbray Road* subdivision, located at No. 3 and Williams Roads and Garden City Way, is a typical example of a J.S. Wood development. Constructed in 1958, it has narrow , 6 metre road widths, many Wood's bungalows, ditches, grass front lawns, and minimal vegetation. Street trees are sporadic, but there are some mature trees such as birch and spruce. Its layout form is almost a grid, with an internal loop road.



Woods bungalows at Mowbray Road



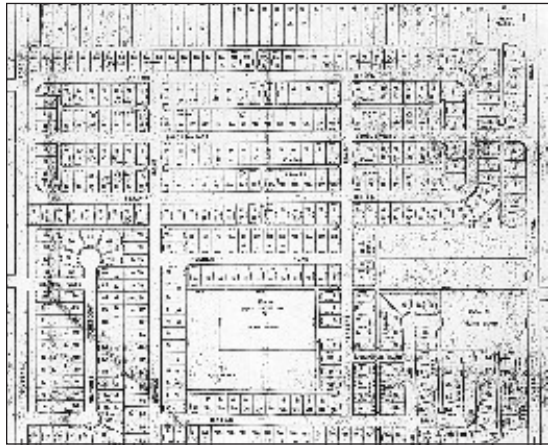
Fraser Valley Lands Ltd. was a large corporation headed by Mr. Irvine Udy which pioneered many of Richmond's early subdivision developments. Fraser Valley Lands was perhaps the largest of the early development firms, and because of the quantity of subdivisions they worked on, variations in development form can be evaluated.

*Sunnymede* subdivision was developed between 1959 and 1964. This was considered to be one of the more exclusive, upscale subdivisions, and one of the first with more expensive homes; this can be seen in the planted entry boulevards. Sunnymede has a wide road width and curb and gutter drainage with a sidewalk on one side. There is mature vegetation on private lots with landscaping to the curb, and no street trees. The homes are larger, mostly two-storey full basement, and there is a boulevard at the entry. Lower quality infill has changed the character of this subdivision to some degree.



Sunnymede subdivision

*Broadmoor* subdivision was developed over the period 1956-1969, and therefore shows several different patterns in its layout. The northern portion is a modified grid with an internal loop road with back lanes. Other portions show crescents and cul-de-sacs. There is a mix of housing types. The roads are narrow in width with drainage ditches on either side, some filled or covered over. There are no street trees, but some individual lots contain mature trees.



Broadmoor subdivision



Broadmoor subdivision

**Sewers for 600 Homes In Hullah Subdivision**

The N.W. Hullah Corporation began around 1955, and was best known for its development of *Richmond Park* and *Gilmore Park* subdivisions between 1958 and 1965. Because of a backlog in city services, the company was obliged to construct its own sewer system for these subdivisions. This system was to be designed to connect into the municipality's master sewerage system, whenever this system came into being. The homes were to be the "...latest features of modern architectural design and convenience" and the subdivision "...free from arterial and cross roads or unsightly ditches...". The historic street naming system is still evident in these two subdivisions: *Gilmore Park* street names end in "more", while those in *Richmond Park* end in "mond".



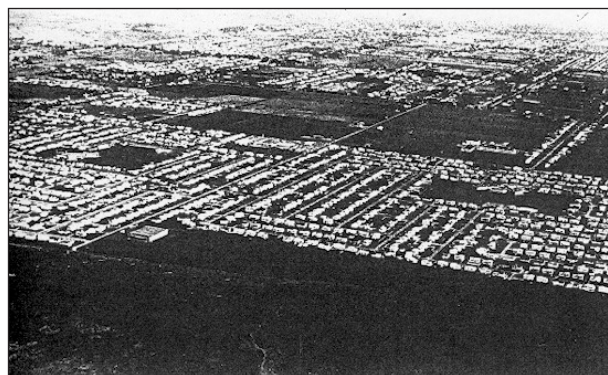
Gilmore Park



Gilmore Park



Richmond Park



Richmond and Gilmore Parks, 1965 CRA 1984 17 26

### Consolidated Building Corporation

This firm is best known for the *Richmond Gardens* development, constructed between 1960 and 1967. It was developed by an ‘eastern’ development firm which was looking for an area in which to develop up to 1500 homes. Their proposal noted that the cost of the houses would be low, and attractive to the purchaser because of savings effected by large-scale development and construction techniques. Part of the Brighthouse Estate, this subdivision was said to have been controversial, in that the dwellings were cheaply built and several had at one time collapsed in a windstorm. It has a characteristic curvilinear layout.



Richmond Gardens



Richmond Gardens



Richmond Gardens in the early 1960's

### J.M. Wells Construction

Jack Wells was responsible for the development of *Seafair* from 1963-64 and the subdivision of *Bakerview*, the south half of Section 27-4-6 from 1955-68. Both of these subdivisions occurred later in the housing boom. Seafair was marketed as a complete lifestyle as well as a place to live, with community facilities, shopping and aspects of both city and country.

Seafair is characterized by wide (10 metre) road widths, curb and gutter drainage, and a curvilinear layout with a number of cul-de-sacs. The housing types are based on a number of styles developed and marketed particularly for this subdivision. Most are variations on the split level or builder, although some are unique styles such as the ‘Scandia’; this subdivision has a number of almost west-coast/modern styles. Housing is a major characteristic in this subdivision.

Bakerview has quite a different character than Seafair. This subdivision is laid out in a grid pattern with an interior loop road. The road is narrow (6 metres) and there are drainage ditches. The housing types are more homogeneous, or ‘typical’, without the unique styles of Seafair, mostly split level with exterior stairs. There are no street trees, but individual lots contain mature vegetation. This is an interesting contrast between two subdivisions by the same developer.

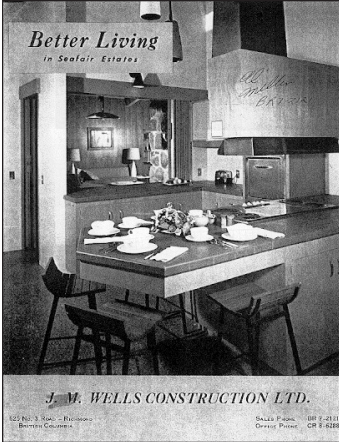


Seafair streetscape and housing



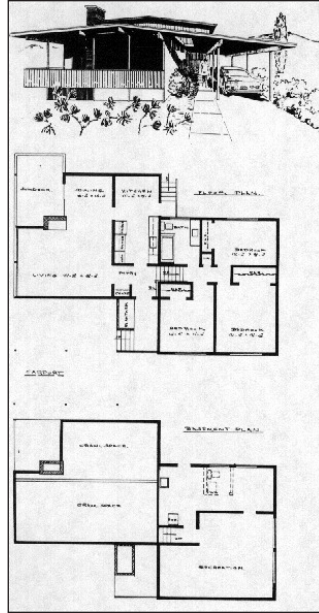
Seafair streetscape and housing





**Above:** Seafair promotional brochure

**Right:** 'Scandia' house plan developed for Seafair CRA Ref files J.M. Wells Catalogue



Montrose Gardens



Westwind

**E.H. Greczmiel Construction (Conway-Richmond Developments)**

E.H. Greczmiel represents a developer who worked during the later part of Richmond's suburban expansion. His subdivisions were developed in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and characteristically have larger homes on smaller lots. Examples of Conway-Richmond subdivisions are *Montrose Gardens*, *Westwind* and *Laurelwood*. A housing style unique to the Montrose Gardens development is a split level home with the change in floor elevation front to back, instead of side to side. Formerly the J.A. McKinney farm, Westwind was developed from 1969-72. Greczmiel subdivisions are considered to be of good quality and design, they have a distinct character, and are an example of one firm handling all aspects of the development project.



Westwind



Montrose Gardens

**Architecture and Built Form**

The post-war period, for the most part, brought a halt to the construction of the Victorian-era designed houses and introduced styles attuned to new technology and modern tastes. Ranch style houses began to dominate the construction market in the 1950's. The popularity of ranchers followed the federal government's intervention in the housing market under the successful Veterans Land Act program, designed to produce needed housing quickly and economically after the war.

There are essentially five housing styles which dominate Richmond's suburbs developed during the late 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's. These styles include the World War II bungalow, post war tract housing, the split level house, the rancher, and the two-storey full basement house. Almost all of the homes built during this time are variations on these five themes. A sixth housing style, the larger 1970's builder home, was a later addition to the housing style palette.

The development of these building styles was due in part to economies of scale which enabled developers to produce many affordable homes quickly for the newly built subdivisions. Richmond's physical landscape also created constraints which played a role in housing design. The high water table created a building style peculiar to Richmond which did not allow excavated basements; instead slab on grade basements were constructed. All crawl spaces and basements had to be above grade, as it was virtually impossible to construct them water tight. Therefore, a full basement or split level house in Richmond was a two-storey house with the main living area on the second floor. In most other areas of the Lower Mainland, basements were built below grade.

The Burkeville worker's cottage was a housing type developed during the depression and was used up until the end of World War II. The Woods bungalow and a duplex variation were early styles of post-war tract housing, symbolizing the single-family-owned suburban home that met the psychological needs of families.

In the split level and two storey full basement styles, the basement area was usually left unfinished and became a recreation room or supplemental bedroom, with the main living area on the second level. Many of them still exist today, and can be considered a classic Richmond housing form. The original split level homes had exterior stairs leading up to the front door. Later, the stairs moved inside, with the exterior entry at grade leading directly into the basement, and interior stairs up to the living area with a small kitchen at the back of the house. Another version had exterior stairs up to a half-level, and interior stairs that split up to the living area and down into the basement. Still later, seen today in Westwind, is a front to back split level design with a side entry. Two-storey full basement homes enter at grade with interior stairs and usually have a carport and balcony. The 1970's modern, or builder, homes are a product of later subdivision development when a sewer system had been installed and smaller lots and larger homes with enclosed garages fronting the street became the standard. All of these homes were available to middle class families who initially did not have much money to invest. Changes to the homes were made over time; additions and variations to the original housing styles are evident today.



World War II bungalow/worker's cottage



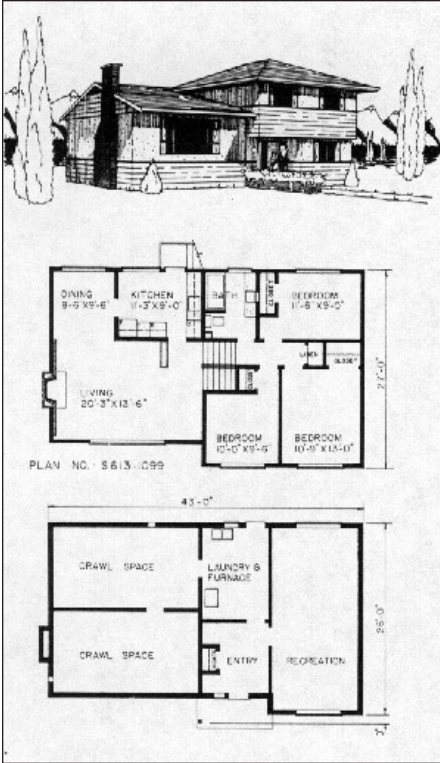
Post-war tract (Wood's bungalow)



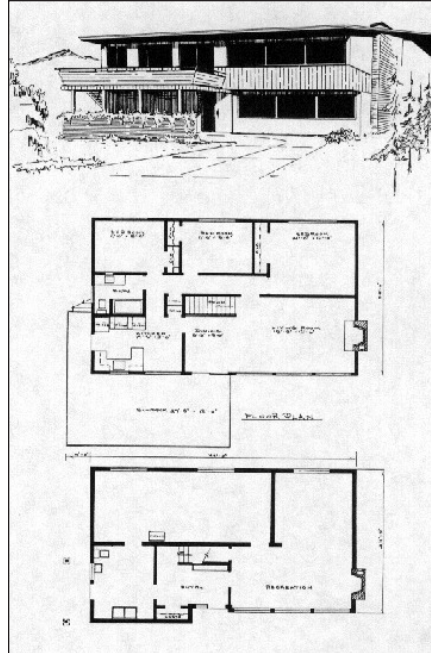
Rancher



Split level, front to back



Typical split level floor plan  
CRA Ref Files J.M. Wells Catalogue



Typical builder floor plan

### Suburban Landscape Character

While each development has its own landscape characteristics, there are several common patterns that begin to emerge in a discussion about suburban landscape character. These relate to the type of streetscape and open space design that was prominent during the development of a particular project, but also to the planning regulations and policies that guided subdivision development in the 1950s and '60s. The suburban landscape and its changes over time is a complex subject that could be explored in much more detail.

### Schools and Parks

In the early 1950s, the Richmond chapter of the Canadian Planning Commission reviewed a document entitled "Parks and Schools for Richmond". It emphasized the need to maintain breathing space during Richmond's rapid residential development, and advocated creating sufficient areas for parks and maintaining open space in the form of farmland. The municipality, under planner William Kerr, created a policy to set aside appropriate areas for schools and parks within each section of land as it was developed. New school construction was based on the school board assessment of new development projects. Each subdivision application required a review by the board regarding the accommodation of new students expected with the expanding population of families. The developer was advised if and when a new school was required, and asked to identify the land on which it would be accommodated. The distinctive pattern of green park and sportsfield space within each section, and its accompanying school, is a direct result of these planning ideas and decisions.



Two-storey full basement



1970's builder/modern

**Vegetation**

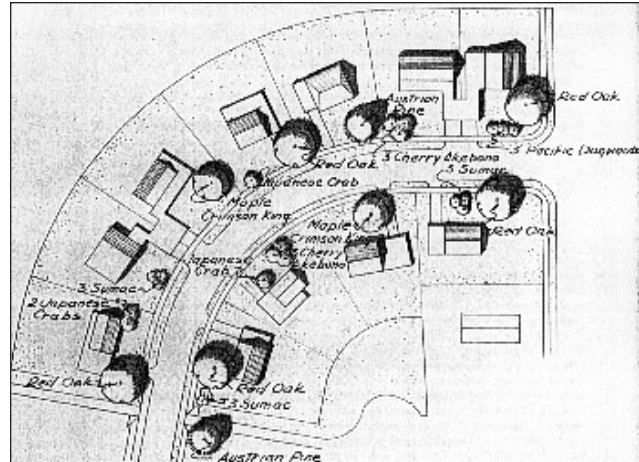
Developers were not initially required to provide street trees in their subdivisions. Any planting done was the responsibility of the owner. Later, neighbourhood associations could apply to have street trees provided under a Local Area Improvement Plan through bylaw and approval by Council. Richmond and Gilmore subdivisions and Burkeville applied for street trees using this mechanism. In later subdivisions, such as Westwind, developers planted street trees on behalf of the city, and proposed landscape treatment and screening was reviewed by the planning department. Subdivisions, and phases of subdivisions, developed in the 1960's have more vegetation over all, and are more protected by perimeter landscaping, than those developed earlier.

The major tree species found in the 1950's subdivision landscapes that were investigated include shore pine, Douglas fir, deodar cedar, paper birch, purple leaf plum, flowering crabapple, flowering cherry, Lombardy poplar, oak, tulip tree and monkey puzzle. There may be several explanations for this choice of species.

In 1958, Desmond Muirhead Associates prepared street tree planting plans for Richmond's subdivision roads and cul-de-sacs. They selected groups of varieties of trees which, when used together, would provide year-round interest for the street. The shore pine, many of which are seen in subdivisions today, was selected as a native from East Richmond's peat bogs which would give the municipality a sub-regional distinction. The firm also advocated flowering crabapple, tulip tree and purple leaf plum for spring flower and leaf colour, as well as oak, hawthorn birch and horse chestnut. They advocated tree and plant groupings as opposed to linear planting to give variation and spatial feeling to the street. Under the local improvement scheme, each block was permitted to choose one of the tree groupings; these patterns are evident along different streets in the various subdivisions.

As well, these species are typical of planting style for the 1950's, they were probably what the nurseries were supplying at that time, and what the local landscape contractors decided were appropriate and available. The monkey puzzle tree, not advocated by Desmond Muirhead, was a very popular 'theme' tree in the 1950s.

These planting patterns can still be seen in subdivision streetscapes, and in the domestic front yards and gardens. The planting shown here is a typical streetscape design prepared by Desmond Muirhead.



Planting Plan



Streetscape with 6 meter roadway, ditch and monkey puzzle tree



Streetscape with 10 metre roadway, curb and gutter drainage, and typical planting of purple-leaf plum, monkey puzzle, willow and shore pine

**Drainage Patterns**

There are three methods of stormwater drainage, each of which has an affect on the character of the streetscape in Richmond’s subdivisions. Open ditches were the original method of drainage in the municipality and are generally small in scale, conform to the street grid, and are located between the front yard of the house and the road, outside the property line. They are generally associated with 6 metre road widths, but the streets seem wider because by bylaw, the road allowance was 18 metres with a grass shoulder. Streets with culverted ditches have a similar perception of road width but lack the interest and vegetation provided by the ditches. Curb and gutter construction is associated with the later subdivisions and with a 10 metre road width. In some subdivisions, Westwind for example, street tree planting and a smaller building setback creates a sense of a narrower roadway.

**Back Lanes**

Back lanes are landscape features typical of older subdivisions. They became less common with subdivision patterns which had property access from the front of the lot and housing styles which accommodated car garages in the front facade of the house.



Typical early back lanes in Richmond

**Part 3:  
Heritage Value and Character**

It has been 50 years since the beginning of the development of Richmond’s suburbs and subdivisions, and an appropriate time to begin to look at their characteristics and assess their heritage value within the context of Richmond’s history.

Heritage value is the historical, cultural, aesthetic, scientific, social or spiritual importance or significance of a place for past, present and future generations. Character defining elements are the materials, forms, spatial configurations, uses and cultural associations or meanings that together comprise the heritage value of a place.

Together, they help us to understand the complexity of the history of the municipality, and to decide what heritage messages we want to take into the future. There is a growing interest in the more contemporary aspects of Richmond, and a realization that suburban development is an important component of the City’s evolution. It is important to identify early on the types of cultural landscapes that may become important heritage features in the future. This not-so-distant heritage is important in the ways in which it has affected our lifestyles, work, response to our surroundings, and our view of the environment. As planning perspectives change and new city forms are built, the information contained in the suburban landscape pattern will become a valuable resource for individual cities and towns as they evaluate and plan their futures.

**The Overall Character of Richmond’s Suburbs**

Richmond’s single-family neighbourhoods are typically garden suburban in form – small to large lots with small to mid-sized houses surrounded by green grass and trees. The pattern that describes most neighbourhoods today is the result of construction in the twentieth century around the streetcar and the automobile. The contemporary suburb is based on the concept of the small, single-family dwelling.

In many ways, Richmond’s subdivisions which developed after World War II follow the patterns that occurred across the country. They have felt the impacts of planning, zoning, population increases, and speculative development by large development companies.

Richmond has never had a problematic inner city core which the suburbs were designed to correct. It has made a direct and interesting transition from rural to suburban development form.

The location of Richmond on two islands at the mouth of the Fraser River limited the ability of the suburbs to sprawl outward and create edge cities around a central core. While Brighouse is the city centre, development has followed the original survey grid, and Richmond did not develop in the typical pattern of a large metropolis.

A significant characteristic of Richmond’s subdivisions is their inward focus. This is a result of the early section lines becoming major arterial roads. In some areas of Richmond, along the major roadways, the rear of the houses and the back yards front the arterial roadway, which has a profound effect of the streetscape.

An important character defining element of Richmond’s residential areas as a whole is the patterns of parks and schools. Within each section of the regular grid, there is an area of green usually representing a park with a school associated with it. This pattern was implemented fully in the late 1950’s, but is a continuation of an earlier pattern where schools were constructed in areas of new residential development according to need.

Richmond’s suburbs represent a type of cultural landscape: a place created by planned intervention, by the social forces of the day, and by people going about their everyday lives. These residential areas were developed and marketed as places where people wanted to live.

Richmond’s subdivisions are part of the evolution of Richmond as a community and tell a story about a particular period in its history. Richmond’s subdivisions are a product of their own time, the result of a combination physical setting, social development, planning decisions, and politics. As planning concepts change over time, these subdivisions will be an indicator, as historic sites are, of the conditions and thinking of the time in which they were created. Richmond contains a mix of early, young and mature suburbs, each of which has its individual characteristics.

**Primary contributors to character include:**

- Housing types
- Street trees and/or mature vegetation
- Road widths
- Type of drainage
- One developer/builder or several builders

**Secondary contributors to character include:**

- Lot size
- Subdivision layout
- Ditch infill

**Character Defining Elements of Individual Developments**

**Early Subdivisions**

**Steveston**

- distinctive character which first appeared during the farming era and continued with the establishment of the canning industry

- archetypal ‘main street’ pattern of commercial development
- grid pattern of small blocks divided into long thin lots between 25-30 feet
- 6 metre roads, square blocks, back lanes and residential ditches

**Alexandra**

- represents the transition from Crown Grant farmland to large lot subdivision or smaller agricultural holdings,
- 6 metre road widths
- adherence to the original grid pattern, large lots, ditches
- mix of housing types ranging from early Craftsman style homes, to bungalow, split-level and new larger housing styles
- strong sense of place

**Burkeville**

- curving, narrow streets
- wartime bungalow housing styles
- street tree planting

**Veterans Land Act Subdivisions**

- original unique road layout
- original narrow road widths – 6 metres of roadway, ditches on each side
- infill housing of different ages and styles
- some large lots remain, particularly in the Thompson subdivision

**Subdivisions after 1950**

These are subdivisions which were developed during the post-war housing boom and after. The look of each subdivision has much to do with the process by which it was developed, and by the individual who developed it. Those companies, such as Conway Richmond, J.S. Wood, and Jack Wells, who saw the process through from land acquisition and development, housing design, construction and sales developed areas much more consistent in plan and built form. Other firms developed and sold the lots to individual builders, later selling the houses once they had been constructed, resulting in a less homogeneous area.

**1940-1960 subdivisions**

These subdivisions include Gilmore and Richmond Parks (Hullah Corporation), Twin Cedars, Broadmoor, Sunnymede, Athlone and Edgemere (Fraser Valley Lands), and Mowbray Road (J.S. Woods)

**Broadmoor, Fraser Valley Lands 1956**

- grid layout
- originally ditches, now curb and gutter
- many builders/mix of housing types

**Sunnymede, Fraser Valley Lands 1958-65**

- wide curving streets
- curb and gutter
- many builders/mix of housing types
- entry boulevard

**Gilmore Park, Hullah Corporation, 1956**

- narrow road width - 6 metres
- filled in ditches, therefore larger front yards, and no planting at the curb
- some street trees
- smaller homes – some bungalows

**Richmond Park, Hullah Corporation, 1958-59**

- wider roads - 10 metres
- originally ditches, now curb and gutter
- mature vegetation, street trees in recognizable groupings
- larger homes

**Mowbray Road, J.S. Wood, 1958**

- one major housing type evident - Woods bungalow
- narrow road - 6 metres - and ditch
- little mature vegetation
- one developer – consistency/harmony
- grid layout, straight streets

**1960-1970 subdivisions**

These later subdivisions include Seafair and Bakerview (J.M. Wells), Richmond Gardens (Consolidated Building Company) and Montrose Gardens and Westwind (E.H. Greczmiel).

**Seafair, J.M. Wells Construction, 1963-64**

- one developer
- choice of several housing styles
- consistent housing styles
- wide road - 10 metres, curb & gutter

**Bakerview, J.M. Wells Construction, 1959-65**

- older subdivision, ditches, narrow road width - 6 metres
- consistent housing types
- curved layout
- no street trees, little vegetation

**Richmond Gardens, Consolidated Building Company, 1963-67**

- unique street layout
- wide road standard - 10 metres - gives the subdivision a less compact feel

- one builder (Consolidated), and a mix of housing types – a series of one type of house, then another, although most are split level or full basement
- no street trees, some mature vegetation

**Montrose (1966-75) and Westwind (1969-72), E.H.Greczmiel**

- both consistent with the company’s policy of buying and developing the land, designing the buildings, supervising the construction and selling the homes
- street trees in the boulevards, mature vegetation
- consistency in the overall subdivision
- mix of lot sizes
- larger homes in a newer style; Montrose has unique front to back split level

**Conclusion**

This document is an overview of the City of Richmond’s suburban history and the built form that has resulted from development in the recent past. The City and the Heritage Advisory Commission were interested in the more contemporary aspects of Richmond, realizing that suburban development was an important component of the City’s evolution, and was a type of cultural landscape that may become important heritage features in the future.

Documenting Richmond’s suburban history involved taking a look at Richmond as a whole. From a heritage perspective, these marks of human settlement that remain in the landscape are an important physical and visual part of Richmond’s historical development. This not-so-distant heritage is important in the ways in which it has affected our lifestyles, work, response to our surroundings, and our view of the environment.

As we move forward, the lessons we have learned from the way we have developed our land become important. This type of information can connect both residents and visitors with their immediate surroundings, promote an understanding of Richmond’s city form, provide an historic connection to both the past and future history of Richmond as a city and community, and identify early on areas of importance in Richmond’s suburban development for future use as research and development tools.

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Ms. Lorraine Palmer, Conway-Richmond Developments

Mr. Jack Lowe, Richmond Retired Teachers' Association

Mr. Bob Ransford, Richmond Heritage Commission

Mr. Graham Turnbull, Richmond Heritage Commission

Mr. Scott, realtor

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