

\$63 million pricetag for Burrard Bridge sidewalk expansion

Some opponents of plan propose separate pedestrian bridge; others say both ideas are a waste of money

By Jackie Wong

When the Burrard Street Bridge opened in June 1930, Vancouver's mayor celebrated by driving a maiden voyage across it in his car. These days, if Vancouver city councillors tried to bike across the bridge together in an act of civic fellowship, they might risk getting run off the curb and into traffic. And not only because of the bridge's notoriously narrow bike lane.

The city's proposal to widen the sidewalks on the Burrard Street Bridge has been a topic of hot debate, both in City Hall and on the streets, since suggestions for improving pedestrian access began in the late '90s and early 2000s. Now city engineers have designs in hand for a sidewalk-expansion project that is expected to cost from \$57 to \$63 million — an amount that doesn't sit well with Vision Vancouver councillor George Chow.

"If we're going to spend anywhere close to that money, we should do something more important," Chow says. "When you spend \$57 [to] \$63 million and you're also, in so doing, destroying the heritage look of the bridge, I don't think it's very good value for the money."

Chow placed his desire for other options on the table last week, when he came forward with a recommendation that City staff take a closer look at lane reallocation and a possible pedestrian bridge.

"The cost of doing this sidewalk expansion is so expensive that I would say the pedestrian bridge would be more attractive," Chow says. "The NPA hasn't been very creative [in tackling this project]."

But NPA councillor Kim Capri is keeping faith that City staff will find the best solution for bike and pedestrian congestion on the bridge — even if the answer costs \$63 million — and she advises the public to do the same. "The NPA was consistent with their decision," says Capri, adding that the idea of a pedestrian bridge has already been nixed by the City. "We've done this; I'm getting a sense of deja-Vision."

Tom Timm, general manager of engineering services for the



Transportation critic Bev Ballantyne thinks spending tens of millions to build a new pedestrian bridge on Burrard is "ludicrous."

PHOTO: DOUG SHANKS

City of Vancouver, echoes Capri's disdain for revisiting a pedestrian-bridge idea already explored in the 2001/2002 False Creek Pedestrian and Cyclist Crossings Study. "Pedestrian bridges were eliminated from the process," says Timm. "There were cost issues as well as functional issues around why a separate pedestrian bridge was not considered to be a viable option."

Now, Timm's team of engineers has the multi-million-dollar blueprint at the ready, waiting only for the green light from city council.

When considering the cost of bridge expansion, David Rawsthorne, of the City's neighbourhood transportation branch, cautions that a pedestrian bridge wouldn't cost much less than the current proposal for widening sidewalks. In 2001, city council floated the idea of building a separate pedestrian and cyclist crossing under the Burrard Street Bridge. At the time, the estimated pricetag was \$11.9 million. "The comparable cost for sidewalk widening at the time was \$10.1 million," says Rawsthorne. "So, it's not fair to compare \$11.9 million to [today's estimate]; you need to compare \$11.9 million to \$10.1

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"Anybody who I know that's got kids — they're very scared of taking their kids across the Burrard Street Bridge [on bikes]. I've heard lots of stories about people and their close calls."

million."

Meanwhile, transportation critic Bev Ballantyne says both ideas — building a pedestrian bridge or expanding the sidewalk — are ridiculous. "If they think \$63 million is going to be expensive, it's absolutely ludicrous to make another crossing," she says, adding that the current Burrard Bridge debates merely tread old ground already visited in the late '90s. "This has all been done before. It's an insult to the Vancouver residents who've opposed this in three different capital plans."

Ballantyne recalls the 1996 trial period in which a vehicle lane was closed on the Burrard Street Bridge as a possible solution for mitigating pedestrian, bike, and car traffic. "In the course of a week, vehicle capacity was significantly lighter," she says, recalling that the trial came to an early stop after frustrated drivers started calling the mayor on their cellphones. "When you reduce vehicle space, it disappears."

Bonnie Fenton, Vancouver's bicycle advisory committee chair, shares Ballantyne's recommendation to close traffic lanes instead of widening sidewalks for pedestrians. "The easiest and quickest option is to reallocate lanes," she says. "I really don't think it would be chaos in the streets for motorists either. I know it seems like kind of a crazy thing, but I really don't think it is."

In any case, Fenton says bike commuters are getting tired of waiting for the bridge situation to improve. "These things have been visited and revisited for a long time now, but I think it's time now to do something," she says. "We need to make it safe, and it's not. Anybody who I know that's got kids — they're very scared of taking their kids across the bridge [on bikes]. I've heard lots of stories about people and their close calls."

Fenton urges the city to try closing a traffic lane one more time before spending up to \$63 million on the sidewalk-widening project. "Do a trial so it's safe for people now," she says.

Vision Vancouver backs the idea of a six-month lane closure

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Is a pedestrian bridge a good alternative to sidewalk expansion on the Burrard Street Bridge?



Alicia Dmytruk, 29, infrastructure engineer (visiting from Edmonton)
 "Whatever's cheaper, really. Both of them would accomplish the same purpose. Personally, when I walk or bike, I don't necessarily like being next to all the traffic, so I might prefer a separate bridge that doesn't have the noise and death risk."



Aly Lalani, 21, student
 "I think [the idea of a pedestrian bridge] is pretty hippie. I mean, the majority of people drive, and the inconvenience of that for a few, whatever, pedestrians — I think they're managing with the sidewalk that they have."



Jamie Tedhorn, 24, film costumer
 "I think both [the sidewalk expansion and the pedestrian bridge] seem ridiculous and unnecessary. I think that it's fine the way it is. There's not really that much high traffic that pedestrians can't get across there. It would be a pain in the butt for traffic to expand the bridge as it is, and it would be an expensive and unnecessary project just to make the pedestrian bridge."



Kevin Bosch, 39, musician
 "The span [of a pedestrian bridge] would be so small, so easy to make it happen. It would be more of a direct route for the bikers, as opposed to having to go all the way up, then down and around. This way they could stay at sea level and get right across to Kits... I can't see that costing \$63 million."

trial. A City staff report on the estimated costs of the current sidewalk-expansion project is expected to appear before council by the end of May. "When you actually do a trial, some traffic will be diverted to the Granville Street Bridge, which is underused," says Chow, adding that NPA councillor and mayoral hopeful Peter Ladner will have the swing vote in council as to whether or not the sidewalk expansion goes through. "I think the [current] decision not to do a trial lane closure is because of the NPA, because of Councillor Ladner's flip-flop position."

Chow adds that other City projects could be sacrificed if the current \$63 million proposal gets the go-ahead from council. He says the bridge expenditure could take away from projects like building housing for seniors, developing Strathcona's library, and improving the Trout Lake Community Centre. "Certainly we don't want to spend the \$63 million, because we have other priorities," Chow says. "It would be crazy to spend \$63 million when people are

Moved in today, kicked out tomorrow?

West End restaurateur faces possibility of eviction just weeks after opening

By Jackie Wong

On a recent Friday morning, John Henderson arrived to work at his new West End restaurant when he found a rezoning-application notice nailed to its front. The notice, dated May 2, was posted just two weeks shy of the grand opening for Maxine's Hideaway, located in the heritage house at 1215 Bidwell that until recently was a restaurant called Balthazar.

"Man, that was quick," Henderson recalls thinking when he saw the rezoning application. "This [restaurant] is a recent endeavour of my wife and I. When the application went up, it was a bit of a surprise to me."

Henderson, an investment banker, bought the lease for Maxine's Hideaway on February 1 of this year, and was excited to launch a new business in a building with such an interesting history. The Spanish-villa-style structure housed Maxine's beauty school and girls' boarding house in the 1920s (Henderson named his restaurant for Madame Maxine); the dirty '30s brought bawdier behaviour, when the lower floor of the school was used as a brothel. According to Sarah Reeder and John Mackie's 2003 book, *Vancouver: The Unknown City*, two tunnels led out of the building, one connecting to the boathouses in English Bay for rum-running during the U.S. prohibition, the second granting private brothel access to the sugar tycoons at B.T. Rogers mansion on Davie Street (now home to Romano's Macaroni Grill).

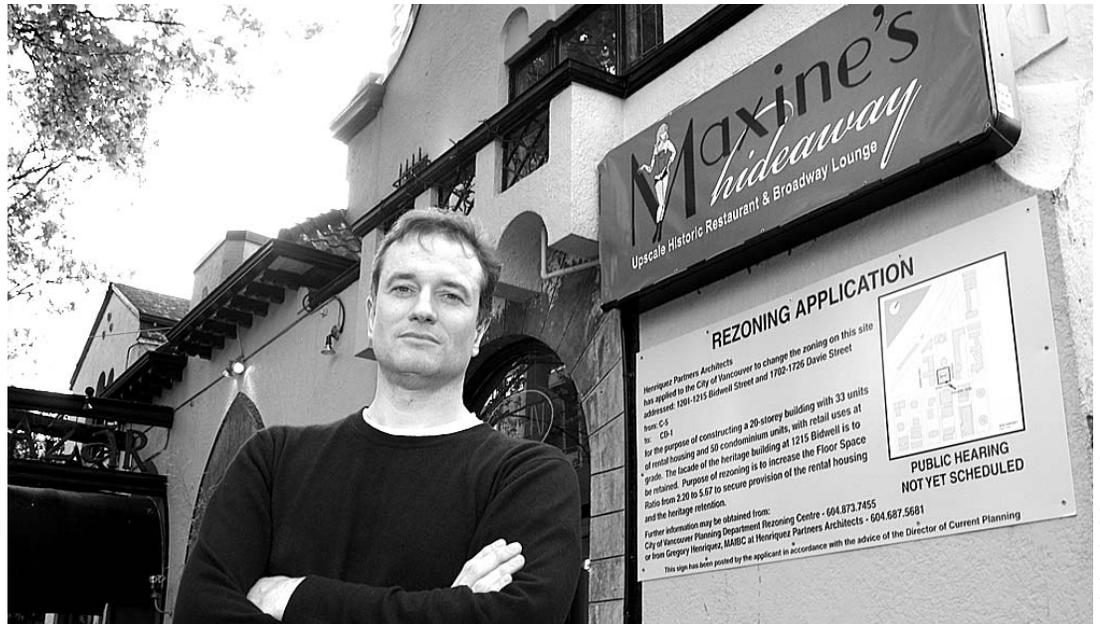
Henderson and his wife, a dancer, aim to honour the building's history in both name and character. Maxine's Hideaway operates as a restaurant-lounge featuring weekend dinner-theatre performances by the Candy Girl Cabaret. "We absolutely love the live theatre/dinner lounge aspect," says Henderson. "There was no place in Vancouver that would offer this."

Despite his optimism for the future of his business, Henderson wasn't blind to the fact that the lease includes a demolition clause, which allows the property owner, Millennium English Bay Properties, to pull the plug on its tenants at any time. "We'd love to see it stick around," Henderson says. "But, quite frankly, from my own limited experience, the track record [in Vancouver] hasn't been very good in maintaining heritage buildings."

The building, which is on the C-list for heritage protection — relatively low on the scale — will see a redevelopment led by Henriquez Partners Architects. The current proposal includes the erection of a point tower with a three-storey podium at its base. A 50-unit condominium structure is proposed for the point tower, with 33 units of rental housing in the podium. The other parts will be used for commercial space.

"This is a LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] gold project," says architect Gregory Henriquez, referencing a top distinction for environmentally-friendly buildings. According to Henriquez, the new development would feature geothermal heating, solar hot-water tubes, and rainwater harvesting.

Henriquez welcomes Henderson's return to the space after redevelopment is complete. But given the speed of such projects, Maxine's Hideaway might have its current



John Henderson found a rezoning-application notice posted to the front of his restaurant before he'd even held a grand opening.

PHOTO: DOUG SHANKS

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home for a few more years. "These things don't happen overnight," Henriquez says. "There's a long approval process."

Michael Naylor, the rezoning planner for the project, echoes Henriquez's sentiments. "Even if we go to public hearing fairly early in the next year, [Henriquez Partners Architects is] not likely to be at a point with the redevelopment permit until late 2009," he says. "They wouldn't get permission to do a demolition permit until they have a building permit."

But Don Luxton isn't sure if the redevelopment project should happen at all. As the president of Heritage Vancouver, Luxton thinks that the future demolition of Maxine's Hideaway would be another blow to the already sparse supply of heritage buildings in the West End. "We don't want to lose any more [heritage sites]," he says. "It's [prescient] to think that we're going to be developing more density in the West End when it's already dense."

West End Residents Association president Brent Granby wants to embrace the change, but on the condition that there's an adequate public-consultation process. "Everyone in the West End should know about it," he says. "Every project needs to demonstrate that commitment, to be in dialogue with the community. Things need to change, and we

need to engage that change."

A public open house on the redevelopment project is scheduled for Tuesday, May 20, in the Pacific Room at the Best Western Sands Hotel (1755 Davie) from 4-8 p.m.

WEA director leaves COPE to support Gregor Robertson

By Jackie Wong

Aron Jasper, a longtime director of the West End Residents Association, made a bold political move this week when he dropped his COPE membership and joined Vision Vancouver.

"It was to get on Gregor Robertson's team," says Jasper of his decision. "He is the only person coming forward for the Vision mayoralty race that really would be able to unite all the progressives in Vancouver."



Aaron Jasper

Jasper made the switch just a few days shy of the May 15 deadline for Vision membership sign-ups. Everyone who signed up before that date is eligible to vote in the June 15 mayoral nomination meeting. There are three bids for the mayor's chair from the Vision front, including Vancouver-Fairview MLA and Happy Planet co-founder Gregor Robertson, park board commissioner Allan De Genova, and Vancouver city councillor Raymond Louie.

"The political reality is that if we don't make sure [Gregor] is Vision's mayor candidate, we won't have anyone to vote for," Jasper says. "[Gregor's] demonstrated that whether it's environmental issues or merchants or renters, he seems to be able to bridge those gaps, bring everybody together under one tent."

Vision Vancouver councillor and West End resident Tim Stevenson was pleased to hear Jasper's news. "I know that he's been wrestling with this decision for some time," Stevenson says. "Aaron is a very dedicated community member and resident of the West End. He's been acknowledged as such. He'll be a real asset to Vision."

Stevenson, who has publicly announced his support of Gregor Robertson for mayor, says he has high hopes for Jasper's future with Vision. "I'm hoping that sometime he would run in elected office with us," he says, adding that Jasper tried to get a park board nomination with COPE in 2001.

For Jasper, the decision to support Vision wasn't due to any bad blood with COPE. "This is not a time to get hung up on partisanship," he says. "The thing we need to focus on is looking beyond that. There are more issues of commonality for what we're striving for in terms of livability, sustainability. We all need to get progressive people together in Vancouver." ■

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Suburban cowboy: In addition to a charmingly pastoral monicker, Cloverdale has been blessed with a long-running annual rodeo. The 62nd Cloverdale Rodeo and 119th Country Fair (May 16-19) bring professional cowboys and cowgirls to an area where most *In the City* staff have never been. However, the promise of a real honest-to-goodness country fair like the ones on *Little House on the Prairie*, coupled with the "Pug Chuckwagon Race" (in which the cute little canines pull miniature carriages), has convinced us to wrangle ourselves up a Stetson and ride Southeast to the Exhibition Fairgrounds (at 176th & 60th, in Surrey) as fast as we can. Tickets are \$10-\$30, including fair admission, and are available from Ticketmaster.ca

Car crazy: If horses in Surrey aren't your thing (and who could blame you?), stay closer to home and catch one or both of the vintage car exhibitions in town. The All British Field Meet of Classical Cars features more than 400 classic cars from the glorious isle, displayed on the Great Lawn of the VanDusen Botanical Gardens (5251 Oak), 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Admission \$6-\$12 at the gate. If you like your car shows a little less upper-crusty, visit the Vintage Show and Shine this Sunday (May 18) at The Whip Restaurant Gallery (209 E. 6th) from 1 p.m. onwards. A benefit for Children's Hospital, the Show and Shine features vintage cars, trucks, bikes and even bicycles belonging to local aficionados, as well as a beer garden sponsored by R&B Brewing. Nothing says summer like muscle cars and microbrews. So we've heard...

Sweet relief: The Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter is seeking female volunteers to run its 24-hour rape crisis line and transition house for battered women and their children. Free training classes last six weeks. Interested parties should call 604 872-8212 to book a preliminary interview.