

Valley residents battle city planning dept

by Allison Annesley

Concerned Edmontonians want to prevent the spending of over 24 million dollars for the demolition of 250 homes.

Residents of the five communities affected by an Edmonton Planning Department proposal to demolish the houses for the expansion of parkland have banded together to form the Edmonton Society for the Preservation of the River Valley. The city project would mean the destruction of Rosedale, Lavigne, Cloverdale, Mill Creek, and Centretown neighborhoods.

The Society took members of the media on a bus tour of the five areas last Thursday. During the course of the tour, representatives of the Society listed several points of contention to support their cause. Members of the City Planning Department were also present.

The residents complained that Edmonton already boasts a record amount of parkland in the river valley, while it lacks recreation facilities elsewhere. The cost of tearing down the valley neighborhoods, members say, would be better spent on the Convention Centre.

Spokespersons dwelled on the historical importance of the valley communities, and suggested revenue producing schemes in connection with historical sites, specifically in Rosedale. Says organizer Linda Duncan, "Rosedale could be designated Heritage Area so people could have tours." Duncan would like to see the area turned into "living history."

The first community toured was Rosedale and the bus stopped outside a city owned home which houses senior citizens. Building manager Lucy Evans complained the house, built in 1911, is not kept up properly because the city is not willing to spend enough money. Lucy and her husband Albert run the building together and give guided tours.

The community of Rosedale was founded in 1802 and was the original site for forts that were later moved up to the legislature grounds because of floods. 100 A Street is known as the last stand for Rosedale because most of its original houses still stand and are largely inhabited by senior citizens.

The Society proposes reconstruction of the Edmonton Hotel in North Rosedale. They would also like to see the old community brewery converted to a restaurant or recreational facility and the Rosedale cottages into craft shops.

On this last point, City Planning Department Official Doug Lychak noted that although the city has been approached with a number of proposals for such a project, none of them have ever been followed through.

The next community on the tour was Centretown. Resident Michael Smith explained that "people love the area and seem to live here for all of their lives." The hilltop view at 95A Street and 95 Avenue is in fact the spot from which most photographs of the city are taken.

Lavigne was next. The area was sub-divided and became a neighborhood in 1898. Of the existing 35 houses, 30 are still privately owned. The unused city owned houses, spokespersons said, incur considerable costs in upkeep.

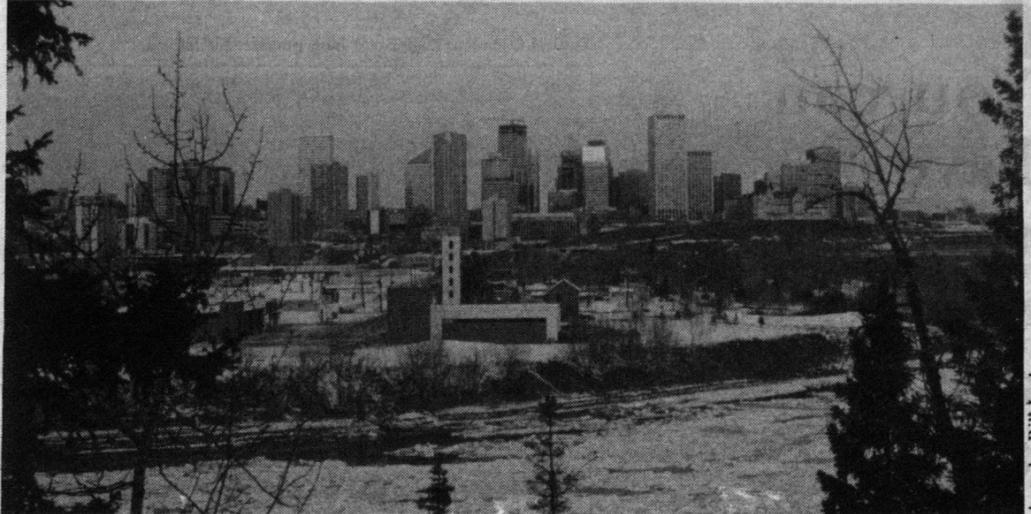
Mill Creek resident Nick Nicholson narrated the tour of his neighborhood. Thirty-five Mill Creek homes, Nicholson says are on "the city hit list."

In Riverdale, the Society wants to protect Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation housing units built by the city. Meanwhile the city has made attempts to buy the community brickyard owned by J.D. Little Property but the selling price has remained too high. Edmonton non-profit housing units in the area would also be affected.

Spokesman Alan Chew pointed out that the parks people have been consistent in their opposition to the building of a freeway in Riverdale and expressed gratitude for the support.

The Society urged all supporters of their cause to write to:
River Valley Planning Project
Planning Department
11th Floor 10020-101A Ave.
Edmonton, Alta., T5J 3G2

The deadline for letters is November 29.



The Edmonton skyline is seen from the backyard of a Riverdale home affected by the city's demolition proposal.

photo by Bill Ingles

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