

# Rezoning threatens Garneau

by Don Truckey

The twenty-year struggle for control over residential development in communities adjacent to the University of Alberta is quietly but inexorably nearing a crucial point.

The City Planning Department is slated to complete its Older Neighborhood Study by early February. Recommendations from the study could have far-reaching consequences for Garneau, the community under the most pressure for high density development.

On Sunday *Gateway* interviewed Francis McCrea and Ann de Villars, two members of the Garneau Community Planning Committee (GCPC) organized by residents of Garneau to protect the single-dwelling community as it remains today after the intrusion of highrise apartments.

The recommendations of the Older Neighborhood Study may be the turning-point in the fight to keep Garneau from becoming peppered with high-rises, de Villars said. If the study calls for an overall plan of moderate development and if its recommendations become law, the Committee will be on a new footing with the Development Appeal Board (DAB). DAB has a history of ruling in favor of development in Garneau, more often than against.

The GCPC, McCrea said, feels that the number of existing high-rises in Garneau argue against the construction of more. "There has to be rational planning. Higher density, lower scale. The committee wants smaller development - townhouses, walk-ups, architecturally harmonious buildings." One developer proposed a 17-storey brick building instead of a 17-storey concrete one. The community feels that kind of concession is not enough.

Since 50 per cent of Garneau's population is affiliated with the U of A the committee

believes the university's obligations are clear. But, Mr. McCrea said, "although the administration continually says the community must be preserved, we've had no support from them. We don't want their money, but we need their political clout."

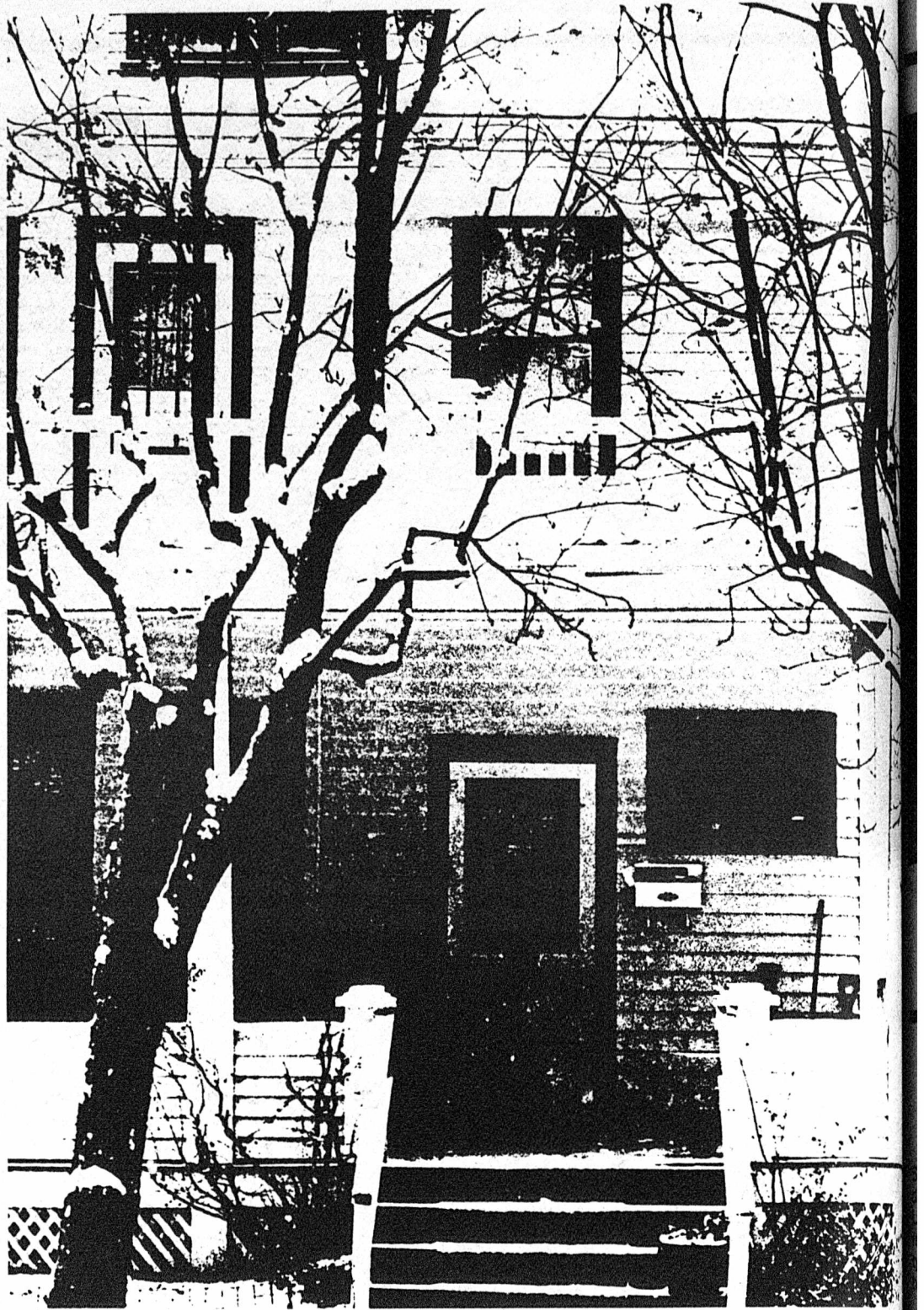
The university's interests may be far removed from the preservation of Garneau. Edmonton's Area Transportation Study is currently examining routes for a south side rapid transit link and it's known that the university wants at least a spur line, if not the main route. The university wants an overground line along 88 Ave. connecting (somehow) with the U of A hospital.

"If the rapid transit line comes to the university, all past experience in other cities indicates that a high concentration of office and residential high-rises will follow," McCrea said. "In effect, the University will have 'moved' downtown."

The committee recommends the line follow the existing CPR right-of-way after it crosses the High Level bridge. "A station at the end of the High Level is close enough to the University," de Villars said. "Students can walk that far." The alternative is an underground route through the university area, but a prospective nightmare of construction and prohibitive costs make it unlikely.

A moratorium should be placed on development until the transportation and older neighbourhood studies are complete, McCrea said, because "you can't develop and study at the same time."

But development has already been approved for at least two more high-rises in Garneau. The north side of 83 ave. was approved for construction of a block-long seven-storey condominium building; the developers may be hesitating, McCrea said, to re-plan and erect



a more economically viable high-rise.

An 11-storey building will go up on the north side of 86 ave. between 111 and 112 st. It will be a combined subsidized housing project and residence for the handicapped. This particular case met with no opposition from the committee, McCrea said, because each proposal is considered on its individual merits.

The developers, the Alberta Housing Corporation (AHC) and the Handicapped Housing Society (HHS) approached the committee and said they preferred Garneau because of the proximity of the University Hospital and the mixed nature of the community. They even conducted sun-shadow studies to decide between a short, broad building and a tall, thin one. The building

will be tall and thin.

A double-shift in Garneau's demography has contributed to the protest against overdevelopment. In the early '60s many long-time residents sold their houses to escape the incoming wave of highrises and Garneau briefly became a neighborhood of rented rooms. Now people are buying back into the district and renovating the houses.

But unless the upcoming Older Neighborhood Study calls for a halt to the gradual replacement of Garneau's single-family houses with high-rises, the Garneau committee may be doomed.

The way Francis McCrea sees it, this is the opposition:

—developers hire expensive lawyers to present their positions

to DAB

—the Board, weighted pro-development members chronically splits 4-3 in favor of development

—realtors buy rows of houses, let them decay collecting rent, then appear before the Board as angels offering to clear out the blight

—the university professes concern and offers no real support.

For the members of Garneau Community Planning Committee, who have organized financial backing have done "very badly on approval except the last two," it must seem as if Garneau is being put on a sacrificial block. As Mr. McCrea put it: "I don't see developers looking at Windsor Park." Not yet.

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