

**Valuing and Assessing Intangible Heritage in  
Vancouver, British Columbia: The Case of Wong's  
Market**

by  
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## **Abstract**

Vancouver, Canada and other North American cities are home to historic neighbourhood retail stores which local residents cherish. Despite their value to communities, many are not recognized as official heritage sites. This thesis uses the case study of Wong's Market, a neighbourhood retail store and apartment at 5993 Main Street in Vancouver to illustrate how these often-nondescript places have heritage value despite lacking government recognition. Using the methods of media analysis, archival research, document analysis, and expert interviews, this thesis explores the intangible heritage values associated with places, how heritage value is assessed according to the City of Vancouver's current processes, and how inconsistencies between current policies and processes reveals challenges in the evaluation of intangible heritage. While existing literature on heritage evaluation models highlights the complexity of assessing the intangible heritage associated with places, I employ theories of place attachment to demonstrate that the tangible and intangible are interconnected. This interconnectivity offers a new rationale for conservation of tangible heritage places. My findings reveal a disconnect between the policy and practice of heritage evaluations in Vancouver. Because it is more predictable to evaluate tangible heritage than intangible heritage, tangible evaluations still offer a worthwhile avenue to accommodate heritage into a streamlined process, as well as to safeguard places that are meaningful to communities.

**Keywords:** heritage evaluations; Vancouver heritage; heritage buildings; intangible heritage

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Research Question

This thesis seeks to answer the following two questions:

“What is the tangible and intangible heritage value of Wong’s Market (5993 Main Street, Vancouver)?”

and

“To what extent do established processes for recognizing and protecting heritage sites in the City of Vancouver leave out neighbourhood retail stores, despite residents’ well-known attachments to these places?”

Implicit in these questions is another question: “How would official recognition by the City of Vancouver of the heritage value of historic neighbourhood retail sites like Wong’s Market transform the heritage landscape in Vancouver?”



Figure 1. Wong's Market, January 7, 2022. Photo by the author.

## 1.2. Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the intangible heritage values associated with places. Using the case study of the Wong's Market building, a neighbourhood retail store and apartment that is vacant at the time of writing (February 2023), this thesis contributes to understanding how heritage value is assessed according to the City of Vancouver's current processes, and examines how inconsistencies between current policies and processes reveals fundamental challenges in the evaluation of intangible heritage. I became aware of the Wong's Market building through my professional work in heritage planning at the City of Vancouver. I selected this specific building as the case study for this thesis because I was inspired by its nondescript appearance, combined with its fascinating history and the interest it has garnered from some community members calling for its preservation. I therefore found it to be an exemplary case to explore tensions in current debates and practices in the heritage field.

Vancouver contains approximately 160 retail sites within its residential neighbourhoods. These places mostly emerged in Vancouver prior to the widespread use of zoning to separate land uses in the 1950s. They offered and offer a place for local residents to purchase food, coffee, and other essential goods within close walking distance from their homes. They are small businesses where patrons can get to know the storekeepers, as well as enjoy spontaneous social interaction with neighbours. Although zoning prevented the introduction of new retail spaces in residential areas from the 1950s until 2020, many of the pre-1950s spaces remain today. Those that remain continue to be cherished by Vancouver residents (Hunter, 2019, p. 7), not only for their ongoing utility, but also because of the emotional attachments local residents have to these places.

Despite neighbourhood retail stores' possessing both use value and cultural value, the continued survival of these businesses and the buildings that house them is uncertain. Consumers today have nearly limitless choices as to where to purchase the goods neighbourhood stores offer. Large chain stores and online shopping are competition to neighbourhood stores. Additionally, the Vancouver neighbourhoods where stores are located have high property values and, in some cases, stagnant population growth. These factors may threaten the viability of the businesses and deter

new entrepreneurs from taking them over when existing proprietors retire or move on to other occupations. Recognition by the City of Vancouver of their heritage value may allow access to planning tools that would provide incentive for the conservation of these stores, such as development bonuses or grant funding (City of Vancouver, 2023).

Concerning the preservation of neighbourhood retail stores, one important factor to consider is the notion of intangible heritage. My research explores the interconnectedness between tangible heritage, such as buildings, and intangible cultural heritage. For the purposes of this study, Wong's Market is considered to have "intangible heritage" qualities because of its inherent worth as a community resource. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (United Nations Educational, 2021). Land use planning tools available to recognize and protect heritage in the City of Vancouver apply exclusively to real property under the Vancouver Charter (Province of British Columbia, 2021). This means that these planning tools can be applied to buildings, but not to "intangible" aspects of heritage, such as community values. Additionally, heritage policies applicable to Vancouver have historically privileged architectural values over other community values. Historic neighbourhood retail buildings are often considered to be architecturally nondescript. Mechanisms to encourage protection of culturally-significant businesses are therefore limited within the existing policy and regulatory framework in the City of Vancouver.

While some historic neighbourhood retail stores have been placed on the Vancouver Heritage Register (VHR), many others have been overlooked to date. The VHR is the City of Vancouver's listing of sites deemed to have heritage value by City Council. Heritage designation protection of buildings, monuments, and landscape resources is dependent upon inclusion on this list (City of Vancouver, 2022a). The oversight of some neighbourhood retail stores is primarily because they have insufficient architectural value as defined by the VHR's Evaluation Methodology (City of Vancouver, 1986). Buildings with high architectural significance, or those associated with prominent, often elite figures or events in the city's history, have greater likelihood of gaining a high score through this methodology (City of Vancouver, 1986). This is because a large proportion of the points are allocated to architectural history in the scoring system.

In addition, the points allocated to cultural history favour famous events and people over places associated with ordinary citizens. Historic neighbourhood grocery stores, by contrast, are typically places that are representative of the lives and cultures of ordinary citizens, and sometimes those from historically marginalized communities. Despite their lack of grandeur, they are appreciated by many community members (Hunter, 2019, p. 7). Proposed closures and demolitions of neighbourhood retail are met with opposition from community members (Johnston, 2019). For them, seemingly unexceptional places may have rich histories and are highly valued by residents.

The case study of the neighbourhood retail store commonly known as Wong's Market is an excellent example of this rich history. This nondescript building is located at 5993 Main Street. Although the store closed for business in recent years, the building still stands at the time of writing (February 2023). The building has undergone extensive renovations over time, and is designed in a vernacular style. It originally opened as the Winnott Post Office and General Store (Henderson's Greater Vancouver Directory, 1911) in 1910 after the BC Electric Railway line was installed on Main Street to 50th Avenue (Kluckner, *Vanishing British Columbia*, 2005, p. 38). Like many historic neighbourhood retail stores in Vancouver, Wong's Market is located in one of the city's "streetcar suburbs," the result of development of the city outward from the downtown core following the introduction of streetcar service.

In the late 1930s, the store was purchased by George Fukuhara and his family. Born in Vancouver in 1908, George was a Canadian of Japanese ancestry. In 1942 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, the Canadian government seized property from people of Japanese ancestry, including those who were Canadian and born in Canada. The Canadian government deemed them to be enemy aliens and forcibly removed them from their homes. People of Japanese ancestry in Vancouver, including the Fukuharas, were sent to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia. The Fukuharas never returned to their home and store at 5993 Main Street (Kluckner, *Vanishing British Columbia*, 2005, p. 39). After World War II, the store continued to exist for decades, first as a chain grocery store, and finally as a convenience store called Wong's Market, before closing sometime in the late 2010s.

Wong's Market is an example of a place that has no formal recognition by the City of Vancouver, but which has been identified by Vancouver citizens as being an

historically-significant place worthy of conservation. Wong's Market has been written about in a book on the city's history (*Vanishing British Columbia* by Michael Kluckner) and has been featured on Seniors' Stories, a website of interviews with senior citizens from East Vancouver (Seniors Stories, n.d.). Additionally, the Vancouver Heritage Commission passed the following motion outlining its historical, social, and economic value on October 5, 2020 calling for the City of Vancouver to recognize Wong's Market as a heritage site:

MOVED by Commissioner Bakshi

SECONDED by Commissioner Shen

WHEREAS

1. The two storey store-apartment building at 5993-5995 Main Street recently known as Wong's Market was built in 1910 and was one of the first buildings in its area;

and

2. The building has a significant cultural history, including its ownership by a Japanese-Canadian family and its seizure from them by the federal government in 1942; and

3. The building was until recently a surviving example of an Asian-run grocery in suburban Vancouver, but is currently empty and boarded up; and

4. The City has a policy wherein it encourages retention of historic commercial operations including old grocery stores in residential zones as a means of achieving complete communities and food-friendly neighbourhoods.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT the Vancouver Heritage Commission asks staff to initiate a Heritage Evaluation for the property with a view towards encouraging its retention and restoration (Vancouver Heritage Commission, p. 6)

What this motion reveals is that some members of the Vancouver community, including its heritage community, cherish Wong's Market as a cultural heritage resource.

While Wong's Market closed in recent years and remains vacant, suggesting the business may have experienced challenges, population growth may result in increased viability for a similar business in the future. With Metro Vancouver projected to

experience substantial population growth in the next couple of decades (Metro Vancouver, 2018, p. 3), many of the City of Vancouver's low-density neighbourhoods are also projected to become denser. The area within walking distance to Wong's Market is no exception; under the Vancouver Plan adopted by City Council in 2022, this area is expected to accommodate more housing units and job spaces over the next three decades and beyond (City of Vancouver, 2022b, p. 53). As Vancouver neighbourhoods become more populous, failing to examine the contribution that historic neighbourhood retail stores make to communities would be a missed opportunity to recognize them through listing them on the VHR, and incentivize their retention and continued use.

An increase in residents near historic neighbourhood retail could mean the viability of neighbourhood retail business will be bolstered, since there will be more potential customers nearby. Vancouver's West End is an example of a neighbourhood that was built out with houses and other smaller buildings in the early 1900s, but was redeveloped to significantly higher densities during the mid-20th century. This neighbourhood has retained some of its original neighbourhood retail stores, which are viable businesses highly appreciated by residents and tourists.

Opportunities for communities to develop greater historical understanding of historic neighbourhood stores help address the gap between communities' reported interest in these places and their formal recognition through established heritage planning processes. As the case study of Wong's Market illustrates, these places offer many so-called "intangible" benefits. They also provide physical reminders of governments' historical wrongs (at all levels) against systemically marginalized ethnocultural groups (such as Canadians of Japanese ancestry). They also contribute to a neighbourhood's uniqueness and can foster a sense of place among local residents. These insights are reflected in recently adopted Government of Canada and City of Vancouver policies that explain how these jurisdictions define heritage. They enshrine the goal of recognizing heritage that reflects the diversity of the City and the country. Further, heritage listing may present an avenue to redress the marginalization of groups when done meaningfully in consultation with these groups. Using the case of Wong's Market, this research identifies some of the lost opportunities to address inconsistencies between current conceptualizations of heritage and the City of Vancouver's current evaluation processes.



Chapter 2, the conceptual framework, examines the literature on tangible and intangible heritage and explains how theories of place attachment can offer a new rationale for understanding the complex interconnections between tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. Literature on the subjective and contested nature of heritage and existing heritage evaluation models exposes the complexities of heritage and the many challenges faced by those who attempt to achieve evaluation in a streamlined fashion. Chapter 3 outlines my research design and methodology, detailing my use of methods including field observations, archival research, media analysis, expert interviews, and document analysis to address the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the research findings, in which I argue through media analysis, establish the heritage value of neighbourhood retail stores in North American cities. Within the context of the policy and regulatory frameworks surrounding heritage evaluations in Vancouver, this chapter then traces the history of Wong's Market and itemizes its specific claims to heritage value, including through interview data from heritage professionals in Vancouver. By means of a systematic application of relevant heritage evaluation models, Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the potential official recognition of Wong's Market's heritage values. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with policy recommendations for organizations responsible for heritage evaluations, such as the City of Vancouver. It identifies avenues that these bodies could pursue to capture the tangible and intangible heritage embodied by places like Wong's market: places that are cherished by local people.

## Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework

I employ three bodies of literature to frame the identification of the tangible and intangible heritage values of Wong's Market (5993 Main Street, Vancouver) and to uncover the reasons for its exclusion from established processes for recognizing heritage in Vancouver: definitions of tangible and intangible heritage and the interconnectedness between the two; the subjective and contested nature of heritage; and heritage evaluation models.

First, literature on definitions of tangible and intangible heritage establishes those concepts' meanings, and how they have informed past and present heritage planning practice. Theories of place attachment reveal the connection between tangible and intangible heritage. This interconnectivity offers a robust new rationale for conservation of tangible heritage places. In recent years, scholarly and professional heritage literature has also emphasized the importance of conserving intangible heritage. Place attachment theory discusses how people become attached to places through social connections and carrying out their cultural practices in spaces. These practices are akin to intangible heritage. Place attachment theory helps us understand the manifold ways that culture happens in spaces. Tangible heritage is thus necessary to support intangible heritage. This critical connection between intangible and tangible aspects of heritage helps clarify and resolve some inherent challenges for cities in recognizing intangible heritage.

Additionally, literature on the subjective and contested nature of heritage establishes how scholars conceptualize heritage, and how these conceptions influence heritage planning practice. Exploring theories that inform heritage planning provides insight into the disconnect that can occur between how government bodies have defined heritage significance and the actual places that are of importance to people in a community. My case study of Wong's Market lays bare this disconnect, so it is important to explore the role of government authorities in guiding the discourse around what constitutes heritage within a given jurisdiction. Further, this body of literature discusses how certain stories of place can be included or excluded in official government representations of heritage, and how this can leave out places like Wong's Market that are associated with systemically marginalized communities, such as Asian communities

in Canada. Insights from these literatures help to explain why Wong's Market was excluded from official heritage recognition to date.

Finally, literature on heritage evaluation models helps to illustrate the challenge of finding an evaluation system that is able to capture the complexities of a place's tangible and intangible heritage values, and at the same time be applied in an unbiased manner using limited resources. These models identify the difficulties of aligning heritage evaluation processes with a community's heritage values in a systematic fashion. This problem is particularly acute within the context of contested and subjective heritage values.

The literature on heritage evaluation models has established the complexity inherent in evaluations in contemporary, pluralistic societies such as Vancouver. In Vancouver today, a heritage evaluation model that upholds western elite notions of heritage would be at odds with the city's multicultural and socioeconomic diversity, as well as heritage theory that posits best practices that privilege intangible heritage, and enshrine the subjective and ever-changing nature of heritage. Concurrently, heritage planners must implement established policies and regulations in a fair and neutral manner, which is at odds with evaluating subjective concepts. Existing literature on heritage evaluation models highlights this issue.

## **2.1. Tangible and intangible heritage and the connection between them**

Past scholarly and practical conceptions of heritage focused primarily on tangible places and their conservation, while more recent definitions bring emphasis to intangible heritage (Taha, 2014, p. 18). *Tangible heritage* includes buildings, cultural landscapes, and artifacts - things that can be touched. Intangible heritage refers to "the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage" (United Nations Educational, 2021). While these more recent conceptions of heritage consider the entirety of heritage, that is, both tangible places and the cultural associations they invoke (Taha, 2014, p. 17), they are weak with respect to recognizing the role of tangible heritage places in supporting intangible heritage activities. I argue that tangible and intangible heritage should not be considered separate concepts, but rather as interconnected. Tangible heritage in

isolation lacks recognition of the meanings people confer onto places. My research seeks to explain that intangible characteristics on their own are too amorphous to fit into streamlined heritage evaluation processes. Understanding the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible heritage offers a way of delineating the relevance of the tangible. As I will argue, intangible heritage needs tangible places where it can occur.

Literature on place attachment frames the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible heritage, and helps to answer the first part of my research question, “What is the tangible and intangible heritage value of Wong’s Market?” Place attachment is defined as “a positive, affective bond people form with particular places where they feel comfortable and safe and desire to maintain their connection” (Cross, 2015, p. 494). Further, according to Jones and Evans (2012), it is “an embodied experience built on affective connections between people and spaces” (p. 2316). Recent heritage policies applicable to the Vancouver context emphasize the recognition and safeguarding of intangible heritage, which comprises facets of a culture such as “oral traditions [and] social manners” (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 4). This definition of intangible heritage aligns strongly to the ways in which place attachment is formed, that is, through connections and social practices carried out in spaces. We can benefit from applying theories of place attachment to heritage evaluation processes as it can reveal the similarities between place attachment and recent conceptions of heritage, but these theories also discuss the role of place in supporting intangible heritage. Research-based literature suggests that the importance of tangible heritage is enduring, even in the context of emphasizing intangible heritage.

As an example, Jones and Evans (2012) use place attachment theory to examine why residents often regard new buildings or new neighbourhoods as “sterile” in comparison to older ones (p. 2316). One of their findings is that “attachment to place [is] more about an individual’s interaction with members of the community, rather than the physical surroundings” (Jones & Evans, 2012, p. 2318). That said, they point out that physical places and social connections are interdependent, and “buildings in the urban landscape are not inert actors, but are woven into spatiotemporal webs of associations” (Jones & Evans, 2012, p. 2321). Thus, when a neighbourhood undergoes wholesale redevelopment, it takes time for the social connections, or the ways in which people interact with spaces, to return to a point where residents hold place attachment to the neighbourhood (Jones & Evans, 2012, p. 2321).

These examples illustrate the applicability of place attachment theories to heritage evaluations, because they demonstrate how old buildings sustain social connections and cultural practices. Jones and Evans' findings could also be applicable to historic neighbourhood grocery stores. As longstanding small businesses housed within old buildings, they offer familiar and established spaces for interaction. The activities and social value that they have supported is their intangible heritage value. For this reason, tangible heritage remains significant because intangible heritage takes place in physical locations.

## **2.2. The subjective and contested nature of heritage**

If we return to my case study example, we can see that, despite Wong's Market's rich history, it is not officially recognized as having heritage status by the City of Vancouver. Its lack of official heritage status can in part be explained by scholarship that contends that heritage is subjective and contested in nature, and in particular, how the field of heritage conservation has in many contexts historically privileged places that embody the aesthetics of Western elites. Wong's Market, like many historic neighbourhood grocery stores in North American cities, does not embody these elite aesthetics. Thus, to date, it has been excluded from official heritage recognition.

### **2.2.1. Authorized Heritage Discourse**

Smith (2006) argues that heritage is subjective and contested and claims that notions of heritage are not neutral. Rather, an Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) shapes the heritage field and ultimately determines what is recognized and preserved (Smith, 2006, p. 11). According to Smith, the AHD in her home of Britain has proselytized the universality of elite western values, leaving other groups out of the heritage conversation entirely (Smith, 2006, p. 12). One component of Britain's AHD is that the tangible heritage of grand buildings, regarded as having high aesthetic value, that have the highest status as heritage assets (Smith, 2006, p. 12). That is, those places that are "significant" because they are considered examples of a recognized architectural style, designed by a famous architect, or monumental in physical scale, and evoking wealth, are those places most likely to be deemed to have the greatest heritage value. The lack of official recognition of Wong's Market may be an example of a similar

AHD operating within the Vancouver context. Historically, Vancouver's AHD has been biased toward elite British architectural aesthetics (Lu, 2000, p. 23). This AHD continues to inform which places are officially recognized as heritage. Wong's Market does not exemplify elite culture, either in its physical form, or in the stories it embodies, and is therefore left out of the AHD.

### **2.2.2. Multiculturalism in Vancouver and Redressing Historical Wrongs**

Steeped in its colonial beginnings, Vancouver's AHD has traditionally centred around those places associated with British-Canadian heritage, despite the longstanding presence of diverse ethnocultural groups in the city, particularly those from Asia. As Lu (2000) sagely notes, the colonial City of Vancouver incorporated in 1886, has always been a multicultural city. In the 1891 census, Vancouver contained residents from 42 different countries (Lu, 2000, p. 23). Chinese immigrants began arriving in British Columbia in the 1850s and Japanese immigrants began arriving in the 1890s. Furthermore, by 2006, half of Vancouver's population was of Asian ancestry (Yu, 2009, p. 1013). Despite this, the AHD in Vancouver has largely centred around the British aspects of the city's character (Lu, 2000, p. 23).

Despite the aforementioned AHD privileging of white, British heritage in the Vancouver context, Yu (2021) offers hope that this discourse is changing. Historically, the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada have all enacted policies that were explicitly anti-Asian and white supremacist in nature. Consequently, we have not heard the stories of the Asian communities that have inhabited Vancouver since the earliest colonizers arrived. These silenced voices from the margins were excluded from mainstream historical narratives that privileged white supremacy (Yu, 2021, p. 3).

For Yu, recent governmental apologies for historical wrongs against Asian Canadians represent a change in the dominant narrative to allow for Asian-Canadian stories to be told, creating a foundation for a more inclusive Canadian society in the present and future (Yu, 2021, p. 13). Part of this story could include the heritage recognition of places, such as Wong's Market, that embody parts of the story of Asian communities in Vancouver. If that is the case, then Vancouver's AHD, as expressed

through the Vancouver Heritage Register, would need to change from its current form to include places reflecting a greater diversity of community values than it does now.

## **2.3. Models of Heritage Evaluation**

Section 2.2.2 above revealed that research has established that the subjective nature of heritage. Undoubtedly, it is a highly subjective concept. Equally, we must acknowledge the legacy of understanding heritage through an AHD that upholds the universality of western elite values. However, if we accept that heritage is subjective and contestable, how can heritage be defined and evaluated? A review of recent literature on models for evaluating places for potential heritage recognition reveals that, despite the existence of models that attempt to capture heritage as subjective and contested, heritage practitioners lack guidance in this highly complex and contested arena of professional practice.

### **2.3.1. Values-Based Management**

Values-based management of heritage resources refers to identifying the values associated with a place, such as aesthetic, historic, scientific, or social. Different scholars and jurisdictions have articulated the classes of values in different ways, but generally these types of values are applied to places that embody them (Mason, 2002, p. 9). Heritage practitioners use these values to determine whether to grant a place official heritage status (values-based assessments), or use them to make decisions about what changes can be made to a heritage place while still retaining that which makes it “heritage,” that is, retaining its heritage values (Mason, 2002, p. 5). Values-based assessment is currently the predominant model for evaluating heritage (Walter, 2014, p. 634).

Proponents of the values-based system claim that it is an inclusive system. “Too often, experts determine significance on the basis of a limited number of established criteria. As an alternative to this approach, Mason argues for a “deliberate, systematic, and transparent process of analyzing and assessing all the values of heritage,” that is, a values-based assessment (Mason, 2002, p. 5). Mason presents values-based assessments as an alternative to the AHD, since it is able to encompass a diversity of values rather than employing finite, prescribed criteria. Walter (2014), however,

considers values-based assessments to be the AHD model (p. 634). This is because the application of heritage values to places is at the discretion of heritage professionals who “postpone commitment to specific values until it is clear which way [they] wish to argue, and then use them to adorn one’s conclusions” (p. 635). Therefore, the professionals use values as a tool to control the AHD. For this reason, the implementation of a values-based model would not in itself represent a jurisdiction’s departure from the privileging of western elite values.

### **2.3.2. Theory of Narratives**

Walter (2014) critiques values-based heritage assessments largely because of their inability to offer a departure from the AHD. As an alternative, Walter proposes that the heritage professions move toward a theory of narratives to inform the practice of determining whether a place is worthy of official heritage recognition by governments, and ultimately, whether a place is worthy of conservation. According to Walter, different people have different stories, or narratives, of a place that give it meaning for them (Walter, 2014, p. 645). For him, “a narrative approach to historic buildings acknowledges that in most cases that ‘story’ has not reached its conclusion” (Walter, 2014, p. 645).

Walter explains that the theory that heritage value can be ascribed to places emerged during the Enlightenment period (17th and 18th centuries) in Europe and suggests that many of the issues arising in heritage professions today are due to the fact that the theory used to guide practice is outdated and does not fit within today’s globalized, contested world. Today, scholars and practitioners recognize that heritage values are not neutral (Walter, 2014, p. 635). Rather, as outlined in the previous section, there is an AHD which “takes its cue from the grand narratives of Western national and elite class experiences, and reinforces ideas of innate cultural value tied to time depth, monumentality, expert knowledge and aesthetics” (Walter, 2014, p. 637). The narrative model purports to offer the heritage planning field a way to move past its status as operating in an AHD, and to instead become more inclusive of the diversity of values and voices in a society. Stories have the potential to include diverse and even divergent perspectives. They need not represent only the elite values of the AHD. For Walter, the power of narrative lies in stories’ inherent attractiveness to people. They can engage a broad public and bring people together to foster community. Finally, for this researcher,



narrative is “increasingly seen as relevant to our understanding of who we collectively are” (Walter, 2014, p. 646).

Cross’s work is also relevant here. Her work suggests that people can develop attachments to place through narrative (Cross, 2015, p. 501). Another recent study based on semi-structured interviews of heritage professionals concluded that tangible places can receive intangible heritage values through narrative and storytelling (Djabarouti, 2021, p. 402). Therefore, if a building is deemed to be a part of the ongoing story of a city and will continue to be part of the story in the future, its recognition and conservation may therefore be justified.

Because of the ways in which Wong’s Market’s story parallels that of the development of Vancouver, an understanding of Wong’s Market’s significance would fit appropriately within the theory of heritage as narrative. Yet, it remains unclear how to undertake transparent decision-making under the narrative model when heritage is contestable in nature. A place may not be at the “conclusion of its story” to one group, but may be considered “concluded” by another. Although Walter asserts that narratives are helpful in building consensus, particularly in contrast to the values-based model which “entails a tortuous trading between different categories of values” (p. 646), conflict over whose stories are included or excluded from the historical narrative of a place is still likely to occur. The issue as to who gets to decide persists (Walter, 2014, p. 646).

### **2.3.3. Evaluation Models for Vernacular Architecture**

In a 2021 scholarly review of evaluation models for vernacular architecture, Olukoya asserts that it is difficult to find an appropriate model for this type of building through a standardized process, including those grounded in values-based models (p. 1). Olukoya goes so far as to state “that the established ‘one-size-fits-all’ value typologies are simply incompatible with capturing the holistic dimensions of contextualized cultural heritage such as vernacular architecture... which is a product of contextual processes and practices of a people” (p. 2).

Unlike the more “monumental” architecture privileged in the AHD, Wong’s Market, along with other historic neighbourhood grocery stores, is an example of vernacular architecture. Based on Olukoya’s assessment, standardized models are

inherently unable to capture the value of these places. Vernacular architecture is understood in a regional context (Olukoya, 2021, p. 7), so any model used to assess it would need to be unique to that context and therefore not standardized. This ties into Walter's theory of heritage as narrative in that it allows room for stories from particular regions to explain heritage value, which contrasts with the approach of an objective definition of heritage value as universal and able to fit into different geographical contexts.

Indeed, a “nondescript” building like Wong's Market may not have evident heritage value to someone who is not familiar with it and does not understand its context as being associated with significant historical themes and events, and to particular groups in Vancouver. This insight aligns with findings in the literature on place attachment which has suggested that greater knowledge of a place is correlated with higher levels of place attachment (Brown & Raymond, 2007, p. 101). The problem with simply acknowledging that all examples of vernacular architecture require their own models for heritage evaluation, and that each model must match the building's specific context, is that government bodies with jurisdiction over granting buildings official heritage recognition are expected by the public to apply a fair and unbiased evaluation of heritage significance. Outcomes of heritage evaluations can have implications on the development potential of properties, and therefore, their economic value, so such context-specific models are at risk of invoking claims of bias and favouritism on the part of governments.

#### **2.3.4. Multicriteria Approaches**

Olukoya's review above in section 2.3.3 highlights a major issue. Standardized evaluation models are not well-suited for the recognition of vernacular architecture. Within this review, Olukoya showed how numerous heritage values are, and therefore how difficult they can be to capture within one model. Other recent literature supports this contention. How can practitioners identify the numerous criteria that may exist with respect to a place and then measure them through a consistent and equitable model?

Fortunately, other researchers have addressed this question. Research by Oppio et. al. (2015) employed multicriteria analysis to the castles in Valle D'Aosta Region, Italy. The authors of this study assert that “cultural heritage enhancement and conservation

can be considered as a field where problems are not well structured, because of the wide range of interests and values to be considered” (Oppio, et al., 2015, p. 780). To capture these various interests and values, the authors performed a multicriteria analysis of physical, environmental, logistical, financial, institutional and organizational, and social capital factors as they relate to the historic castles of the region (Oppio, et al., 2015, p. 782). A number of different professionals engaged in the evaluation and conservation of heritage resources participated in feeding the analytical model. The sheer complexity and effort invested into this analysis renders this multicriteria analysis an infeasible model for site-by-site decision-making in an urban environment.

Similarly, Wang and Liu (2021) explore an evaluation model based on complex adaptive system theory, which measures the suitability of buildings for adaptive reuse while taking into account their heritage significance. Like Oppio et. al, Wang and Liu point out the complexity of factors that must be considered in the evaluation of heritage buildings, and the shortcomings of standardized procedures currently in use in many jurisdictions. They assert “the current evaluation research mostly focuses on architectural values, physical environment and social-cultural aspects, and is confined to the decision-making of a single entity such as the government, a property holder or indigenous people, lacking attention to the participation of multi-agents” (Wang & Liu, 2021, p. 135). This quote speaks to the inadequacy of standardized models. As an alternative, they propose an analytical model with 34 factors, including structural integrity, architectural aesthetics, and regional context, as well as additional practical characteristics relating to a building’s potential adaptability and economic feasibility of its conservation (Wang & Liu, 2021, p. 137). They conclude that the complex adaptive system theory model “is not applicable for the historic buildings without adequate data for 34 indicators,” (Wang & Liu, 2021, p. 144) so it would not be feasible for most municipal applications where there would be inadequate resources to collect the data required for such an analysis.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

Existing literature on tangible and intangible heritage and their interconnectivity, the subjective and contested nature of heritage, and heritage evaluation models, frame my research on the tangible and intangible value of Wong’s Market and the reasons behind its lack of official recognition as a heritage site by the City of Vancouver. First,

defining tangible and intangible heritage and using theories of place attachment, I argue that tangible and intangible heritage are interconnected. Their interconnectivity lends new credibility to tangible heritage conservation, since tangible places support cultural practices that are part of a community's intangible heritage. Further, literature on the subjective and contested nature of heritage explains the processes that inform prevailing definition of heritage. Specifically, in the Vancouver context, popular discourse around heritage has until recently centred around white, elite heritage despite Vancouver's longstanding ethnocultural diversity. Finally, literature on heritage evaluation models describe different ways that places can be evaluated for their heritage significance. Despite the existence of a wide variety of models, existing models are not universally-applicable. These models are not tailored for Vancouver's heritage planning function and cannot be applied to address the shortcomings of the Vancouver Heritage Register and its lack of recognition of Wong's Market. Given these weaknesses, how might organizations responsible for official recognition of heritage sites account for the complexity of new understandings of heritage, and work toward better alignment between what they officially recognize as heritage and the myriad community values present in their jurisdictions?

## **Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

To address my research questions regarding the tangible and intangible heritage value of Wong's Market and the extent to which established processes for recognizing and protecting heritage sites in the City of Vancouver leave out neighbourhood retail stores, I employed a qualitative mixed-method approach of field observation, archival research, media analysis, document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews. Through these, Wong's Market serves as a case study to illustrate how ostensibly "nondescript" neighbourhood retail stores can be valued by a community despite lacking formal heritage recognition. I also completed a heritage evaluation of the building according to the City of Vancouver's current heritage evaluation methodology, as well as through the lens of recent policies applicable to the evaluation of heritage resources in Vancouver. These methods illuminated the reasons why Wong's Market is not a formally recognized heritage site according to the current heritage evaluation process. I collected the data over a three-month period from January to March 2022.

### **3.2. Field Observations**

I began data collection by visiting the site at 5993 Main Street on January 7, 2022 to observe the building's physical form. I recorded notes on its design and material characteristics and took photos of the building. I also walked around the site in a four-block radius to observe the surrounding neighbourhood. This activity helped me gain an understanding of the building's appearance and scale. This understanding informed my analysis, because knowing what the building looks like and how it fits into its surroundings is necessary to understanding its heritage value, particularly its aesthetic value.

### **3.3. Archival Research**

I then conducted archival research on Wong's Market, collecting some archival data about its surrounding neighbourhood as well. This archival research helps with answering the first part of my research question, "What is the tangible and intangible

heritage value of Wong's Market (5993 Main Street, Vancouver)?" When a place has been identified as having potential for heritage recognition by a governing body, a first step in establishing whether the place is worthy of recognition is to understand the place. Understanding a place involves learning about its "evolution over time, and past and current importance to its community" (Parks Canada, 2010, p. 3). Archival research is a key tool in advancing this understanding, since there is little detailed history of this building existing in any secondary sources. As such, I conducted archival research using online resources from Vancouver Public Library, City of Vancouver, University of British Columbia Library, Ancestry.ca, and Google search, as well as visited New Westminister Public Library to research in-person to gather historical information about Wong's Market to understand its heritage significance.

First, I created a chronology of all the residents and businesses that have existed in the building throughout its history (see Figure 3). I compiled the chronology using historical criss-cross directories of Vancouver. The criss-cross directories list residents by name in one half of the book and by street address in the other half. Therefore, it is possible to look up an address and see who lived there or what the name of the business that was occupying the building in that year. Vancouver Public Library has digitized the directories up to 1955, and these are accessible online. To collect the data from 1955 until 2000 when these directories ceased production, it was necessary to research in-person at the New Westminister Public Library where there are physical copies of the city directories available for researchers.

Another source that informed the understanding of Wong's Market's heritage value was the Goad's 1912 Fire Insurance Map, which is digitized and available on the City of Vancouver's GIS platform, VanMap. City fire insurance maps were made by insurance companies in the 19th and 20th Centuries to determine fire risk in a community. They illustrate building footprints and are colour-coded to denote the primary building materials of each building. They are also invaluable data sources on the progression of development in a neighbourhood because the building footprints illustrate how densely-developed a neighbourhood is in a given year.

Next, I searched historical newspapers that are digitized and available on the Vancouver Public Library website and the University of British Columbia Library website. These sites allow for the search of contents of historical newspapers. Having devised

the chronology of residents and businesses at Wong's Market, I searched the newspapers for the resident and business names identified in the chronology. I also used the building's address, 5993 Main Street, as a search term. The information in the newspapers provided a greater understanding of the kinds of products that the store sold throughout its history, and greater understanding of the people who lived and worked there. Similarly, I used archival resources available on Ancestry.com, specifically vital statistics and Canadian census records, to learn more about the store's various owners.

Finally, to fill in gaps in the findings from the aforementioned archival resources, I used Google to search for additional archival sources elsewhere online. This online research revealed two sources relevant to my research. The *Canada Gazette* is a newspaper of the Government of Canada, which had a 1911 issue that mentioned the Wong's Market building. As well, in United States Senate Documents I discovered information about neighbourhood grocery store franchises operating in the United States and Canada. The findings from the collective archival resources were used to create a list of themes which illustrate the ways in which the history of the Wong's Market building mirrors significant themes in the development of the city as a whole.

### **3.4. Media Analysis**

Next, I conducted a media analysis of 16 articles published between September 2019 and January 2022 about historic neighbourhood retail stores in North American cities to explore how communities feel about these places. Articles included in the analysis had to meet the following criteria: they had to be from North American cities with at least 100,000 inhabitants and they had to contain some discussion of historic neighbourhood retail stores and their relevance in the present-day urban context. I used Google News search to search for articles using the terms "historic corner grocer" and "historic grocery store." I accessed the articles in January 2022 from Vancouver, British Columbia.

My analysis was limited to articles about North American cities, because many cities in North America have similarities to one another with respect to development patterns. That is, many North American cities were established before the use of private automobiles was pervasive, but experienced significant growth during the mid-20th Century when auto-oriented development encouraged separation of land uses. In many

cases, this meant that neighbourhood retail stores within low-density residential neighbourhoods were no longer permissible under cities' zoning regulations. This context is not comparable with other continents, such as Europe, which experienced more urban growth in earlier historical time periods and different development patterns than in North America.

I chose only to include articles that discussed cities with a population of 100,000 or more, because this makes their context more comparable to Vancouver, where the Wong's Market case study is located. Vancouver is an urban centre with 662,248 inhabitants in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022), cities with a population under 100,000 would not be sufficiently urban to be comparable. Articles about Vancouver's neighbourhood grocery stores were also included, though I did not find any media articles about Wong's Market specifically.

### **3.5. Document Analysis**

Next, I conducted a document analysis of regulations, policies, and guidelines relevant to the evaluation of heritage buildings for official heritage recognition in the City of Vancouver. These included documents from all three levels of government - the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada (including Parks Canada, a federal government agency). All of the documents were available online on their respective websites. The purpose of the document analysis was to understand how the municipal, provincial, and federal governments conceptualize heritage today, and how buildings in the City of Vancouver are evaluated for official heritage recognition. Ultimately, this was to understand why Wong's Market does not have formal heritage recognition by the City of Vancouver.

I analyzed the Vancouver Charter, the Vancouver Heritage Register and its Evaluation Methodology, the Vancouver Heritage Program Summary and its associated Council report, and Parks Canada Framework for History and Commemoration. For additional context, I reviewed *The Evaluation of Historic Buildings* by Harold Kalman, published by Parks Canada in 1980. This book served as the basis for the Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology and elaborates further on the theory underpinning the Methodology. Other policy documents that focus primarily on the



management of heritage buildings and development of heritage property, rather than heritage evaluation, were excluded from the analysis.

### **3.6. Expert Interviews**

Finally, I conducted five interviews with experts familiar with historic neighbourhood retail stores in Vancouver, the heritage evaluation process in Vancouver, and the wider heritage policy context applicable to sites in Vancouver. These experts included one heritage planner, one heritage consultant, one historian, and two community volunteers. Because I work in the heritage field, I was able to recruit all five participants from among my pre-existing relationships. The interviews followed a semi-structured, qualitative format, and were about 45 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom video conferencing in February and March 2022. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only virtual interviews were permissible at that time. Responses were anonymized because of the political nature of the subject matter. I wanted participants to feel comfortable speaking freely about heritage policies without the fear of professional hardship should they have any critique of the policies. No participant worked for either the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, or the Government of Canada at the time of the interview.

I opted not to interview residents of the neighbourhood around Wong's Market or other community stakeholders because this building is meant to serve as a case study for a wider heritage phenomenon – that is, places like neighbourhood stores that are architecturally nondescript but nevertheless widely established to be cherished by communities. For this reason, the value derived from collecting data from the community would not have been worth the significant effort and resources that engaging community members would have required. Instead, I chose to direct efforts into other data sources with greater relevance to my research questions.

The interviews complemented both the media analysis and the document analysis, because I asked participants about their feelings about the heritage value of historic neighbourhood retail stores in the Vancouver context, as well as their knowledge of the City of Vancouver's heritage evaluation process. With respect to the document analysis, there is nuance behind the reason for these places being left out of established heritage processes beyond what can be understood from the documents alone, so the

interviews helped provide greater context as to how the policies analyzed in the document analysis play out in practice. They therefore contributed to answering both parts of the research question.

### **3.7. Heritage Evaluation**

Following my data collection, I completed heritage evaluations of the Wong's Market building according to both the City of Vancouver's current heritage evaluation methodology established in the 1980s, and more recently-adopted policies the Vancouver Heritage Program (2020) and the Framework for History and Commemoration (2019). The purpose of this exercise was to determine whether either lens would result in official recognition for Wong's Market, and which would be better suited to recognize the heritage value of Wong's Market that was established through my archival research and expert interviews. As I have professional experience with conducting heritage evaluations, I relied on my own expertise in making the choices I made as to what the building should score according to these methodologies. This was a theoretical exercise that differed from how buildings would typically be evaluated for official heritage recognition in real-world applications. Specifically, these evaluations would normally be reviewed by multiple City staff with oversight from community advisory groups so as to minimize the impact of individual bias on the outcome of the evaluation. Nevertheless, because of my depth of experience in this area, the choices I made reflect a realistic outcome for the evaluation of the Wong's Market building.

### **3.8. Summary**

Through this research design, I sought to situate the history of Wong's Market within the broader patterns of the history of the development of the City of Vancouver. I also sought to contextualize its longstanding role as an example of a neighbourhood-serving small business. These factors inform an understanding of Wong's Market's heritage value. Further, through the document analysis and the interviews, I was able to illustrate how the current heritage evaluation principles relating to heritage sites in the City of Vancouver has resulted in overlooking Wong's Market as an official heritage site.

## Chapter 4. Findings

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the media analysis, semi-structured interviews, archival research, and document analysis that I employed in establishing the heritage value of neighbourhood retail stores, such as Wong's Market at 5993 Main Street in Vancouver. These findings also explain how established processes of recognizing and protecting heritage sites in the City of Vancouver leave out some neighbourhood retail stores, like Wong's, despite residents' well-known attachments to these places. Findings from the media analysis and semi-structured interviews confirm that neighbourhood retail stores, and specifically grocery stores are regarded as making a positive contribution to communities, and that historic neighbourhood grocery stores are regarded by residents as part of a community's heritage. Concurrently, the findings from the archival research reveal how Wong's Market possesses qualities that make it a special place in the Vancouver context despite its lack of official heritage recognition by the City of Vancouver. The document analysis provides insight into possible reasons why stores like Wong's Market may not be not officially recognized as heritage sites, and reveals a disconnect between the purported goals of official heritage recognition and how this recognition is carried out in practice. The findings from the semi-structured interviews provide further elaboration on this disconnect, as Vancouver heritage experts discussed the implications of the heritage policy framework in practice.

The findings from the archival research demonstrate how my case study example of Wong's Market embodies many of the positive qualities of historic neighbourhood grocery stores that were identified in the media analysis and semi-structured interviews. First, the building's design is typical of small-scale retail stores constructed in North America before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when auto-oriented development became pervasive. This design is pedestrian-oriented, which the media analysis revealed to be regarded as appealing by residents of many North American cities. Further, Wong's Market has continually adapted to meet the needs of the neighbourhood by changing its brand and the goods it has supplied, reflecting the overall economic climate of the city across different historical periods. Its shopkeepers stayed at the store for varying periods of time, and the families who lived and worked there came from several different

ethnocultural groups, aligned with the evolving demographics of the surrounding neighbourhood and the city as a whole.

## **4.2. Establishing the value of neighbourhood retail stores**

### **4.2.1. Introduction**

First, the media analysis and interviews revealed that in cities throughout North America, including Vancouver, residents cherish historic grocery stores in their neighbourhoods and regard them as part of their heritage. Several features contributed to this attachment, including their human-scale form and design, their contribution to walkable neighbourhoods, and their fostering of social connections. These stores are also often small businesses that cater to the specific needs of their communities, and evolve over time to adapt to changing needs of the communities in which they are located. In addition, their often longstanding existence in neighbourhoods helps foster a sense of place among residents. Media articles and interviews suggested that people value the existence of small, enduring, independent businesses in the neighbourhoods in contrast to corporate chain alternatives. On these grounds, the media articles and interviews suggested that neighbourhood corner stores can be considered to be part of a community's heritage, both because of their histories and being part of community's stories as well as for their utility in the present.

### **4.2.2. Neighbourhood retail stores and their role in cities**

The media analysis revealed that historic neighbourhood grocery stores can be found in many North American cities, and that they are cherished by residents of many cities. A US-focused article discussing the benefits of neighbourhood stores, or "corner stores" to residential neighbourhoods described these stores as "a type of space [that] was more common in the past" and that "if you walk around some 1920s era neighborhoods, it's not unusual to see a tiny grocery store or even smaller commercial space sitting on an otherwise residential block" (Gibbs, 2020) Further, an article in the *Seattle Times* suggests that such places have endured for a century "because they are beloved local places" that connect locals "to Seattle's past; to each other; to the food, drink, art, culture and life of a specific neighbourhood" (Kraft, 2021).

The neighbourhood grocery store was a popular topic in Vancouver media as well. A local article discussing Vancouver neighbourhood grocery stores contends that the historic stores that remain in the city “are valued for their charm and character and how they contribute to the neighbourhood identity of communities” (Chan, 2020). Some stores are described as “anchors” of neighbourhoods (Ryan, 2020).

In semi-structured interviews I conducted with Vancouver heritage experts as part of this study, participants expressed a personal connection to neighbourhood retail stores as well as a professional view that they are often worthy of formal heritage recognition. A heritage planner noted:

I thought about neighborhood grocery stores and corner stores a lot in Vancouver but also in other places, and I really do think they have a huge amount of value and my main concern is I certainly think that we should find ways to preserve them...I think that they can certainly have heritage value or just community value (Heritage Planner).

Another informant added that these stores play a role in telling a city’s story:

I think they're hugely important. I think if you want to tell the story of our shared heritage in the city, then what can be more vital than the local grocery store or the bodega?... they do so much more than just provide groceries, right? Like that is not a Safeway or a Nester’s. They tell stories that I think the big chains don't (Community Volunteer 2).

A third research participant thought that neighbourhood retail stores make the city more interesting: “I think the City should pull out all stops to make sure these do not disappear, because as they disappear, the city is homogenizing. Every block is beginning to look like every other block” (Historian).

### **4.2.3. Building designs of neighbourhood retail stores**

Many neighbourhood retail stores across North American cities are housed within small, simple buildings. The media articles analyzed in this study emphasized that this human-scale form and design was a critical component of what residents cherish about these places. In media articles highlighting the positive attributes of neighbourhood stores, their small building size was repeatedly cited as an aspect of their appeal. As Robert Gibbs wrote about the ability of corner stores to “anchor” neighborhood, “the corner store is the smallest and most useful retail” space, and “holds a special place in neighbourhoods” (Gibbs, 2020).

Media articles about historic neighbourhood stores in Vancouver also specifically cited the appeal of the small-scale buildings in which they are located. A historic neighbourhood store at the corner of Nanaimo Street and East 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue, commonly known as BK. Grocery is undergoing a major renovation at the time of writing. Like Wong's Market, BK. Grocery is a two-storey mixed-use building with a store on the ground floor and residential use on the second floor. Local media covered the plan for its rehabilitation. In one article, the property developer who saw its potential and purchased it was quoted as saying "this little building kept calling out to me" (Thomson, 2021). This statement illustrates the contribution of the building's small size to its market appeal, which is reflective of what people like to have in their communities. Additionally, because this property developer recognized the store's value, its heritage potential was brought to the attention of City of Vancouver staff, and the BK. Grocery building was placed on the Vancouver Heritage Register prior to the commencement of its rehabilitation (City of Vancouver, 2016, p. 1).

Similarly, a store on Vernon Drive near East Georgia Street in Vancouver, commonly known as Vernon Drive Grocery has been lauded in the local media as attractive for its physical form and design. It is a narrow, one-storey building that shares a property with a small house. In a *Georgia Straight* article about "Vanishing Vancouver stores," Carlito Pablo describes Vernon Drive Grocery as "iconic" (Pablo, 2020). This article also claims that it is the "most photographed neighbourhood corner store in Vancouver." Furthermore, its design invokes the Vancouver of a past era where "if you happen to stop by the store around sunset, you could be transported back in time to [renowned Vancouver street photographer] Fred Herzog's Vancouver when corner stores and their colourful signage were everywhere" (Pablo, 2020). Such language implies a positive regard for grocery store designs that are symbolic of past periods in the city's history and that their aesthetic qualities make them worthy of photographing.

Beyond just the physical size of the buildings in which the stores are located, the articles mentioned some case-specific architectural features of these places that contributed to their character. This further illustrates how the design features of these stores are seen as special. For example, another historic neighbourhood grocery store in Vancouver that is currently being rehabilitated is Cardero Grocery in the West End. An article about its renovation describes it as being "valued for its Edwardian-era features" (William-Ross, Historic Vancouver convenience store on track for restoration, re-

opening, 2020), that is, architectural features common during the reign of King Edward VII of England from 1901 to 1910, when Cardero Grocery was constructed.

Similarly, local media featured a historic neighbourhood grocery store at the corner of Yew Street and West 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Vancouver in 2020 when its owners applied for permits to demolish the building. There was public outcry over its proposed demolition, and some who called for its preservation pointed out that it is “particularly interesting because it retains almost all of its original architectural details,” (Ryan, 2020). As well, in an *Edmonton Journal* article, Jeff Labine discusses an Edmonton family-run grocery store whose owner sought a heritage designation for the building. The article described it positively as a one-storey building with “an identifiable low-pitched gable roof, rectangular plan and boomtown front” (Labine, 2019). Clearly, physical form contributes to the positive value communities place on these places.

The media analysis’s highlighting of charm of the physical form of historic neighbourhood grocery stores was underscored in the semi-structured interviews I conducted. One participant described that they felt that the remaining historic grocery stores were valued by the community, and that this was both because of their being small businesses, that is, their intangible aspects, and because of the small buildings in which they are located, that is, the tangible aspects of these places. This participant stated “I think what does make it special is that they are usually located in a smaller building,” so the fact that they are small business is also “represented in the physical existence of the building” (Heritage Consultant). In particular, when contrasted with locating the same small business in a newer, larger development, this participant also indicated that a small business located in an older, smaller building had an advantage in terms of fostering community ties. They said, “if you go into a mass development, it might take away that special element of it that you feel in some kind of close community environment.” The heritage consultant elaborated that they were “not saying that new development can’t include [this special element], but [they] think the small scale of corner stores does add to community ties” (Heritage Consultant).

#### **4.2.4. Longstanding existence in communities**

Aside from commenting on the physical design of neighbourhood grocery stores, the media analysis revealed that their age confers some respect. Being “old,” they have

a longstanding existence in communities, a factor that contributes to their heritage value and a component of what people like about those places. Articles about the aforementioned BK Grocery discussed the role the store has played in the community since it was built in 1918, and how its story of being a neighbourhood hub led to its heritage designation and rehabilitation. Before property development firm Domus Homes purchased the property in 2015, Richard Wittstock, a principal at the firm, took a tour of the property with James Mah who had grown up on the property. Mah's parents were originally from China and operated the store from 1968 to 1986 (Thomson, 2021). This tour around the property, during which Mah told Wittstock stories of his childhood there, helped inspire Wittstock to go ahead with plans to rehabilitate the store and incorporate it into a new residential development.

Furthermore, many historic neighbourhood stores have adapted to meet the changing needs of the community across their long existence. The stores' various incarnations across time are reflective of the broader historical themes of the city's history, and their continued adaptation is a part of their heritage value. At the time of writing, the retail space at BK Grocery has not yet been tenanted, but "the former grocery has gotten lots of interest from coffee roasters and family-run cafes (Thomson, 2021), indicating it will likely change use to meet the current needs of the community. Additionally, "Wittstock explained the city had recently passed the Norquay Neighbourhood plan and he predicted the area would start burgeoning with young families that would be looking for a neighbourhood hub" (Thomson, 2021). The Norquay Village neighbourhood centre plan, approved by Vancouver City Council in 2010, permitted higher residential densities than were previously allowed in that neighbourhood (City of Vancouver, 2010). This signalled that new development would soon bring more residents to the area, and therefore a larger customer base for neighbourhood retail stores and cafes such as the former BK Grocery, triggering an opportunity to adapt the business to the new realities of the neighbourhood.

There are other similar examples of adaptation of historic neighbourhood retail sites in Vancouver and elsewhere. For example, a store at the corner of Carolina Street and East 12th Avenue in Vancouver, long known as Charles Grocery, re-opened in 2021 as Oh Carolina, a "grocer-café hybrid" (William-Ross, New grocer-cafe hybrid 'Oh Carolina' opening in Vancouver, 2021). As demographics of neighbourhoods change, owners have re-branded and change the goods and services offered in this units to



remain profitable by offering what locals need and want in their neighbourhoods. The Vernon Drive Grocery store re-opened as Rise Up Marketplace in 2021. In the case of Oh Carolina and Rise Up Marketplace, the stores were taken over by owners of successful bars and restaurants in the city, bringing with them a reputation for running popular and beloved establishments (William-Ross, New grocer-cafe hybrid 'Oh Carolina' opening in Vancouver, 2021) (Sproule, 2021). Other grocery stores in Vancouver that have been converted to cafes in recent years include the Federal Store at Quebec Street and East 10th Avenue and Wilder Snail at Keefer Street and Hawks Avenue. These converted stores are sometimes referenced as success stories to bolster the argument against demolition of existing neighbourhood retail sites (Ryan, 2020).

At the same time, some historic retail sites undergo more significant changes to adapt to new contexts. The media analysis revealed that in some other North American cities, historic neighbourhood grocery stores have changed to uses differing more dramatically from their original intended grocery store use. For example, in Lincoln, Nebraska, a historic-designated store that had long been vacant was turned into apartments (Johnson, 2021). The Delton Grocery Store in Edmonton, Alberta had also been used as a residence for a part of its history (Labine, 2019). In Salem, Oregon, a historic grocery store that was once slated for demolition was moved to a new location and converted to a museum through the efforts of local residents (Patton, 2021). These examples demonstrate that although neighbourhood retail stores change to meet community needs across different historical contexts, their longstanding existence is key to continued attachments that residents hold to these places.

Interview responses provided context for the reasons for why the longstanding presence in the community is an essential part of what makes historic neighbourhood grocery stores special, that is, social relationships and familiarity that patrons build and maintain over time. Participants spoke about how the success of neighbourhood retail stores in part comes from their status as an established place that the community is familiar with and is accustomed to visiting. One participant spoke about how a retail space's continuity supports the endurance of social ties in the community, stating:

When you have, especially one [neighbourhood retail store] that has a long history, or even a building that has a long history, then you already have that [social connection] partially established. If people are already used to coming to a certain location, then having that continued use is very valuable to the community. So as much as it's great to be able to

put new [neighbourhood retail stores], it's great to just be able to continue ones that already exist, or if there's a building or something that's already a meeting point for another reason or on a prominent corner that has a lot of foot traffic, then readapting that for corner store us as well, could have significant community value (Heritage Planner).

Another participant echoed this sentiment by providing a Vancouver example of how the continuity of neighbourhood retail stores adds to their appeal. This example, the Vernon Drive Grocery, was also brought up in the media analysis and mentioned earlier in this section.

“You get these wins like the Vernon Drive Grocery... the little grocery store itself has reopened as a coffee shop... it's fabulous, it's absolutely fabulous. You go in there and you're part of something that goes back a century to this little store out on the streetcar line - on the Georgia streetcar line, and that's a certain thing that, to me, makes a city worth living in because... if you don't have this sort of continuity, then why bother? Why not live in suburban Chilliwack or something like that?” (Historian).

Like Wong's Market, Vernon Drive Grocery was located along the BC Electric Railway Streetcar line when it was constructed, influencing the choice to open a business in those locations at that time.

#### **4.2.5. Supporting walkable neighbourhoods and social connections**

Building on the sentiment that historic neighbourhood retail stores are a part of what “makes a city worth living in” (Historian), both the media analysis and interviews highlighted how the continued existence of these stores supports some of the common goals of urban planning today, such as contributing to walkable neighbourhoods and fostering social connections. The concept “walkable neighbourhoods” refers to the ability for residents to meet their daily needs by walking, with the goal of reducing private auto use (City of Vancouver, 2022b, p. 52). This has the associated benefits of being more environmentally-friendly and supporting healthier, more active lifestyles. Some neighbourhood retail stores also contain a mix of uses within one building, such as apartments above a store, meaning store owners can live above their business and not need to commute to work.

Some of the media articles claimed that neighbourhood retail stores contribute to walkable neighbourhoods because of their location within primarily residential areas,

saving residents from having to travel to larger retail centres for their daily necessities. For example, in an article about Seattle corner stores (Kraft, 2021), architect Sam Kraft tells a story about running out of toilet paper and being grateful to purchase more from a nearby neighbourhood grocer. Further, another article asserted that “surveys and polls suggest that residents want local amenities and walkable amenities,” and that neighbourhood retail stores “could help be part of what some planners call the 15-minute city, the idea that all residents should be able to walk or bike to take care of their daily needs within 15 minutes” (Gibbs, 2020).

Interviewees also raised some critical additional issues. One participant simply stated “a lot of people just value that they have something close by they can walk to” (Heritage Consultant). Another participant agreed, remarking “I think they’re really important because they support our neighborhoods as walkable places” (Community Volunteer 1). Another participant viewed this walkability as a part of these stores’ cultural value because that was part of what has made them unique throughout their existence in Vancouver. This participant explained that “they were all around schools, and just about every school in the city had a little grocery store that was right nearby, and the kids would go and they would spend the money they were supposed to be spending on milk, they would spend it on bubble gum or something” and this ritual is part of Vancouver culture (Historian). Another participant pointed out how neighbourhood stores’ walkability aligns with sustainability goals because “you can get the things you need without having to get in your car and drive somewhere.” “So having those neighborhood corner stores is...really key” to sustainable cities, by creating “small communities within larger cities” (Heritage Planner).

Further, in the media analysis, articles repeatedly mentioned the social function offered by neighbourhood retail stores. Residents regard them as a place to talk to people, not solely places to shop. A store in Salem, Oregon that escaped demolition was remembered in an article as a “social hub and gathering place where folks could learn news of the neighbourhood... and of the neighbors” (Salem Reporter). Similarly, the owner of the Delton Grocery store in Edmonton, Harjinder Sokhal, described his relationship with the surrounding community as a “friendship” and claimed that locals liked to go there and talk to him and his family (Labine, 2019). A Vancouver example, McGill Grocery store at the corner of McGill Street and Slocan Street, was featured in an article about neighbourhood grocery stores. The owner of that store was quoted as

saying that his regulars gather every morning at McGill Grocery in East Vancouver “to drink strong coffee and solve the world's great debates, such as which is healthier – coffee or tea?” while one of McGill Grocery’s customers added “It’s a nice place to stop for five or 10 minutes and catch up with whatever is going on with sports or world news” (Johnston, 2019). Several articles referred to these stores as neighbourhood “hubs,” affirming their roles as points of activity.

The interviews elaborated on the social value of neighbourhood retail stores found in the media analysis. As with the media articles, the interview participants raised the fact that customers can go to these stores to chat with the owners and to one another. One participant said of the neighbourhood grocery near their home “I love to have a little chat with the people there... and I know them, right? So as soon as I walk in, there's a smile” (Community Volunteer 1). Another participant added “I’ve seen with my own experience at some of the corner stores that I frequented during my time living in Vancouver just how they really brought the community together” (Community Volunteer 2).

Another interview participant emphasized the social value that neighbourhood retail stores provide, particularly in the Vancouver context since it is a large city comprised of many distinct neighbourhoods. This participant saw historic neighbourhood retail stores being an integral part of these neighbourhoods:

Although Vancouver is a metropolis in some ways - it's still a very large town, I would say, where there are different neighborhoods that are very neighborhood-centric and where community ties really matter. And these grocery stores are able to connect these people with each other as a local hub almost (Heritage Consultant).

This participant contrasted the experience of shopping at a local neighbourhood retail store with the experience of shopping at larger, corporate stores: in smaller stores, customers are more likely to encounter the same shopkeepers each day, and even the same fellow customers than would be the case in a large corporate chain (Heritage Consultant). Another participant explained how the evolution of the retail landscape toward corporate chains changed the shopping experience in Vancouver:

As the kind of corporate change developed in the 70s, but particularly the 80s and the 90s, handy marts at gas stations 7-11's, this sort of thing. Nothing against the people who worked there, but they tended to be shift workers for a corporation, as opposed to people, primarily

Chinese people, who lived in the community and generally lived behind the store or up above the store and so they had this connection [to the neighbourhood] (Historian).

#### **4.2.6. Cultural Diversity**

The historian speaking above also noted that many of the neighbourhood retail stores in Vancouver currently are, and historically were, run by Chinese families, including in neighbourhoods that were predominantly white. Indeed, another theme that arose in the media analysis and semi-structured interviews was the connection between neighbourhood grocery stores and a city's ethnic diversity. This historian also explained how neighbourhood retail stores in Vancouver provide opportunity for cultural exchange:

If you were a kid [in the 1960s and 1970s] ... from a middle class, white environment, you're looking around as you grow up, you're looking around for people who live a little bit differently from you, or you see this and develop a kind of understanding of what the challenges are that people are going through just by going into their store and seeing them and nodding and saying hello and... getting that kind of little smile back and forth (Historian).

A theme in both the media analysis and the semi-structured interviews was that many of these historic neighbourhood grocery stores were family-owned, and particularly immigrant-family owned. Many respondents felt that this feature makes them special and valued to communities, and part of cities' heritage in that it exemplified the ethnocultural settlement patterns of the city.

In Vancouver specifically, interview participants considered neighbourhood grocery stores to be a marker of the city's cultural diversity. One interview participant argued that the stores "connect to what Vancouver is about and how lucky we are to live in Vancouver because of our cultural diversity" (Community Volunteer 1). Coincidentally, a significant point raised during the interviews was that racial exclusion had played a role in leading non-white residents of Vancouver into the grocery business:

When you look at Canadian racial exclusions a century ago, and even more than a century ago, and particularly the Asian racial exclusions, you realize that the challenges a lot of these people had in coming here and then trying to establish a life, and particularly in trying to establish a better life for their children. And the corner grocery store - this was absolutely central to large numbers of people who could not become accountants, [and] that could not become lawyers (Historian).

One participant suggested that not only do small-scale grocers serve their local neighbourhoods, but also may provide culturally-specific products (Heritage Consultant). Further, another participant highlighted how immigrant-run grocers can be an ethnocultural community's connection to their country of origin:

What's being sold in those stores is for a lot of communities, [is]... their connection... back to their old country, or that's intergenerational knowledge of food preparation coming from somewhere else. That will be lost if they don't have those [culturally-specific products] available... So it's a way of making connections for new communities and also a way of passing down that intergenerational knowledge of food production for first- and second-generation Canadians as well, so yeah I think it has massive importance. And it can't be replaced with a big chain... [which is] usually what comes into the big developments when those shops are demolished (Community Volunteer 2).

The media analysis also revealed that in Vancouver and other North American cities, historic neighbourhood grocery stores were run by families from a diversity of backgrounds. In Vancouver, according to Chan, “there is a long history of independent corner grocery stores (including green grocers) that were minority-owned and played a key role in supporting culturally appropriate food access for Vancouver’s diverse ethnic and cultural communities, and continue to do so today” (Chan, 2020). Furthermore, “A century ago, those who owned and operated these stores were the city’s new immigrants, including Italian, Chinese, Irish, Japanese, Portuguese, Eastern European, and Scandinavian families. In many instances, these families lived on-site in an upstairs apartment or attached bungalow” (Chan, 2020). Specifically, as mentioned earlier, BK Grocery at the corner of Nanaimo Street and East 34th Avenue was for many years run by the Mah family. Similarly, Mike’s Grocery and McGill Grocery had long-term owners of Chinese origin.

#### **4.2.7. Conclusion**

In summary, the media analysis and semi-structured interviews revealed that in many North American cities, including Vancouver, historic neighbourhood grocery stores are valued by residents and are widely considered worthy of conservation. A number of factors were identified for their importance, including their physical form, and their role in supporting walkable and socially-connected neighbourhoods. Additionally, their longstanding existence and adaptation in communities as retail spaces makes them part of the story of a city’s development over time and offers a familiar place for local

residents to visit. In many cases, these stores also were a marker of a city's cultural diversity and ethnocultural settlement patterns. This study revealed that residents cherish historic neighbourhood stores due to both tangible aspects, such as the buildings themselves, as well as intangible aspects such as the fact that they are often small, family-run businesses.

### **4.3. Case Study: Wong's Market, 5993 Main Street, Vancouver**

#### **4.3.1. Introduction**

This section describes the store at 5993 Main Street, known as Wong's Market, in Vancouver and how its history reflects many important themes of the city's history. This helps to establish its heritage value, as it demonstrates its significance to the neighbouring community over time. Wong's Market's possesses several characteristics which render it an ideal case study to illustrate the heritage value of neighbourhood retail stores. As I explored in section 4.2, historic neighbourhood retail stores are cherished in Vancouver and other North American cities for their human-scaled form and ability to adapt and serve the local neighbourhood over many decades, all qualities that Wong's Market embodies.

#### **4.3.2. Physical Form**

The building that stands at 5993 Main Street, the northwest corner of Main Street and East 44th Avenue, in Vancouver was constructed in 1911. It is two storeys in height and has a retail unit at street level with apartments on the second floor. A relatively small building located on a narrow lot, it is approximately seven metres wide and twenty meters deep. There is a small garage at the rear of the lot abutting a lane running parallel to Main Street. The garage doors face toward the main building rather than opening out towards the lane, which is an unusual orientation. On the front elevation, the entrance to the retail unit on the first floor is recessed from the sidewalk and positioned off-centre with windows on each side. This storefront design is typical of retail stores constructed in the early 20th Century. There is a door on the south end of the front elevation leading to stairs up to the second-floor apartments.

The building has undergone renovations throughout its history which have altered the exterior from its original appearance. Currently, the exterior is characterized by bottle-dash stucco cladding and Coca-Cola branded sign reading “Wong’s Market.” Historic photos reveal that the building was once clad in wood lap siding, and that the locations of the window openings on the second storey have been changed (Kluckner, Wong’s Market, 2022). This was likely done to accommodate a change in the interior layouts of the apartments. Overall, the building’s simple design and small scale, combined with its being built up to the front property line, makes it welcoming to pedestrians.

Originally opened as the Winnott Store and Post Office, the building was a part of the Municipality of South Vancouver upon its completion in 1911. At that time, the surrounding neighbourhood was sparsely developed. A map produced for fire insurance purposes in 1912, the Goad’s Fire Insurance Map, shows that on the block of Main Street where the store is located, only one other lot was developed, which was the one directly to the north of the store (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

In 1911, South Vancouver, which bordered the City of Vancouver in the north at 16th Avenue and the Fraser River in the south, was a small but growing municipality. At that time, the federal, provincial, and municipal governments were planning “a great fresh water harbour” on the Fraser River (Stevens, 1911). Main Street was significant in particular, because it provided a thoroughfare from what was then the centre of the City of Vancouver around its intersection with Hastings Street near Burrard Inlet in the north, all the way to the Fraser River in the south. According to *The Western Call* newspaper in 1911, Main Street was “the logical avenue of trade and commerce” (Stevens, 1911).

Further, the British Columbia Electric Railway expanded its streetcar service along Main Street south to 50th Avenue in 1910 (Kluckner, *Vanishing British Columbia*, 2005, p. 38). This spurred the development of “streetcar suburbs,” or the expansion of the urban area outward from Vancouver’s downtown following the introduction of streetcar service to new areas. For this reason, locating the Winnott Store and Post Office on Main Street in South Vancouver in 1911 provides evidence of the economic development of the area at that time.





**Figure 2. Wong's Market, January 7, 2022. Photo by the author.**

### **4.3.3. History of 5993 Main Street**

The history of the store at 5993 Main Street reflects the changing economy and demographics of Vancouver since 1911. Its history comprises four phases. First is its settler merchant period, from its opening until about 1923, when it was a general store and post office run by a succession of short-term, transient shopkeepers. Next, after the surrounding neighbourhood became more fully established, was its period as an independent grocery. Mostly long-term owners ran the store from 1923 until 1942, when it entered a period of instability and high turnover of owners until 1950. A long-term owner purchased it in 1950, and in 1955 made it part of a cooperative chain of grocers under a recognizable brand. This was the store's period as a grocery chain.

Then, after 1971, it became fully-independent once again, and transitioned from a grocery to a convenience store. In the mid-20th Century, large corporate grocery

stores became the main place for families to shop for food, since the ubiquity of personal automobiles meant that most people could drive to a grocery shopping destination to get large quantities of food in a single shopping trip. Existing small-scale grocers such as Wong's were no longer a primary place for grocery shopping, and therefore began selling fewer grocery items and focused more on "convenience" items such as pre-packaged ice creams, soda, and cigarettes. The Wong's Market convenience store closed sometime between 2015 and 2020 and remains vacant at the time of writing. These four phases of the store's history each reflect broader economic and demographic themes in the development of the city. This subject is discussed further in the following sections.

**Table 4.1. Chronology of Inhabitants and Businesses at Wong's Market (Henderson's, BC Directories Publishers, and Polk City Directory Criss-Cross Directories 1911-2001)**

Store Phase	Year	Store Name	Storekeeper Name
Settler Merchants	1911	Wagenhauser Wm grocer Winnott Post Office	Wagenhauser W. A.
	1912	Winnott Stores Winnott Post Office	John W. Robson
	1913-1914	Reeve & Harding General Store Winnott Post Office	Walter C. Reeve Charles P. Harding
	1915-1916	Munro & Arnett General Store Winnott Post Office	John Munro George P. Arnett
	1917-1921	John H. Webster grocer Winnott Post Office	John H. Webster
	1922	David Gelford Grocer	David Gelford
Independent Grocery	1923-1936	Blyth's Grocery	Alfred G. Blyth
	1937-1941	Blyth's Cash Grocery	K. Fukuhara
	1942-1945	Blyth's Cash Grocery	D. F. Brynildsen
	1946-1947	Matt's Grocery	Matt Stefiuk
	1948-1949	C & M Market Grocery and Meats	P. J. Murchison C. C. Crawford
	1950-1954	A. Hunter Grocer	A. Hunter
Chain Grocery	1955-1970	Hunter's Purity Grocery and Meats	A. Hunter
Not Applicable	1971	No return	
Convenience Store	1972-2000s	Wong's Market	Kwok K. Wong B. K. Wong Yee Cheuk Wong

## ***Transient Settler Merchants***

The store at 5993 Main Street changed shopkeepers frequently during its first several years in business. The Winnott Store and Post Office's original postmaster and shopkeeper was William Albert Wagenhauser (The Canada Gazette, 1911, p. 4335). Wagenhauser was born in England in 1879 (Ancestry.com, 2006). He remained at 5993 Main Street for less than one year. By 1912, he had moved to Cumberland on Vancouver Island, where he co-founded The Cumberland Departmental Stores. Wagenhauser was an experienced merchant who moved around North America, establishing new businesses in growing cities and towns.

He had also previously been a merchant in San Francisco. (New Firm Started, 1912, p. 1). Wagenhauser's pattern of migration from England, to the United States, and then to Canada illustrates the settlement pattern in South Vancouver at the time. It was common for settlers in South Vancouver to have come from England, or other west coast cities like San Francisco (MacLeod, 2012, p. 21).

During its early years, the store sold items that reflected the needs of the surrounding community at that time. There were farms in the area, but many residents of South Vancouver worked in the City of Vancouver. John W. Robson, also originally from England, succeeded Wagenhauser as shopkeeper and postmaster, running the store and post office from about 1911 until 1913. A newspaper article in The Western Call in 1911 revealed the kinds of items that Robson sold at the store:

The Winnott Store, conducted by Mr. J. W. Robson at 46th and Main, deals in groceries, hardware, soft goods, boots, shoes, feed, etc., and also handles stumping powder. Mr. Robson conducts the Winnott Post office and has operated here since June. He has had over thirty years' experience in business and served on the council in the old land, his native commonwealth (Stevens, 1911, p. 4).

Similarly, while operating as the Reeve & Harding General Store from 1913 to 1914 (The Greater Vancouver Chinook, 1913, p. 5) and as the Munro & Arnett General Store from 1915 to 1916, the store specialized in dynamite and stumping powder (The Greater Vancouver Chinook, 1914, p. 4; see Figure 3). The dominant industry in Vancouver at that time was forestry (McDonald, 1996, p. 233), extracting value from the lumber from trees that once covered the city. In the 1910s, much land in South Vancouver was undeveloped. Stumps from the recently-logged lands remained. Before

building could occur on the land, the stumps had to be removed using explosives. For this reason, there was local market demand for explosives, or “stumping powder” to prepare the land for development. The store’s provision of products such as feed for animals, as well as boots and stumping powder illustrates how South Vancouver was experiencing the transition to urbanization, a process that required stumping powder and food for still existent livestock. In 1921, the Winnott Post Office and John Webster’s grocery relocated from 5993 Main Street to 6404 Main Street, just a few blocks away (Henderson’s Vancouver Directory, 1921, p. 248) though 5993 Main Street also remained a grocery store at that time.

In summary, from the store’s opening in 1911 until about 1923, it was run by a series of transient merchants who did not stay in South Vancouver permanently. It was a general store located along a streetcar line, which served the surrounding largely rural community with daily necessities such as agricultural and building supplies, as well as food and other grocery items. The fleeting presence of the merchants, combined with rudimentary products the store sold in this era, indicates South Vancouver’s status at the time as a place on the urban frontier.



Figure 3. Winnot Store Advertisement, Greater Vancouver Chinook, December 19, 1914 p. 9. (Note 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue is now 44<sup>th</sup> Avenue)

## ***Independent Grocery***

In 1923, Alfred G. Blyth and his family took over the store at 5993 Main Street. Blyth would become a long-term owner. In 1929, during Blyth's time at the store, South Vancouver amalgamated with the City of Vancouver, and public transit expansion helped to accelerate growth of the area as a streetcar suburb of Vancouver. The urbanization of the area surrounding the store supported its stability under Blyth's management. Whereas prior to Blyth, no owner had stayed with the store for more than four years, the surrounding neighbourhood's development into streetcar suburb built up with single-detached homes, and a variety of businesses and small apartments on main roads, offered the store a stable customer base attractive to a long-term owner like Blyth. Mr. Blyth lived and worked at 5993 Main Street for 13 years until his death in 1936 (Ancestry.com, 2001).

The store was subsequently purchased by George Kisaburo Fukuhara. Born in Vancouver in 1908, Fukuhara was a Canadian of Japanese ancestry. In 1942 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, the Canadian government seized property from people of Japanese ancestry, including those who were Canadian and born in Canada. The Canadian government deemed them to be enemy aliens and forcibly removed them from their homes. People of Japanese ancestry in Vancouver, including the Fukuharas, were sent to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia. The Fukuharas never returned to their home and store at 5993 Main Street (Kluckner, *Vanishing British Columbia*, 2005, p. 39).

Although residents of Asian ancestry have lived in Vancouver since the beginning of its colonial settlement, the values of the dominant Vancouver society in the first half of the 20th Century upheld white supremacy, and Asian residents were unwelcome outside certain parts of the city (McDonald, 1996, p. 206). For example, residents of Japanese ancestry were concentrated around the Powell Street area known by the Japanese Canadian community as Pauerugai beginning in the 1890s because of exclusion from other areas (Yakashiro, 2021, pp. 35-36). Fukuhara was the first person of Asian ancestry to work and live at 5993 Main Street. Unlike previous owners of the store, the Fukuharas did not change the business name during their time there; the store retained the name Blyth's Cash Grocery after its previous owner, Alfred Blyth. This may have been a deliberate decision by the Fukuharas brought about by fears of the risk of

anti-Asian sentiment harming their business. In the first half of the 20th Century, it was common for Vancouver residents of Japanese ancestry to be entrepreneurs. Their employment options were limited due to legislation that excluded them from many professions (Denise Cook Design, Birmingham & Wood Architects and Planners, 2017, p. 16). At least one other neighbourhood grocery store, located at 2598 Eton Street in Vancouver, also had owners of Japanese ancestry in the early 1940s and was also subject to seizure by the government during this time (Park Grocery and Woodside Apartments Statement of Significance, 2016).

After the government seized the store from the Fukuharas and interned them in British Columbia's interior, the store once again experienced a period of high ownership turnover. Still under the Blyth's Cash Grocery name, D.F. Brynildsen ran the store from 1942 to 1945. Like some of the earlier shopkeepers at 5993 Main Street, Brynildsen came from a family of settler merchants. D. F. Brynildsen's father was a merchant in Bella Coola (Deaths and Funerals, 1941, p. 8). In 1946, 5993 Main Street became Matt's Grocery, owned by Matt Stefiuk. From 1948 to 1949, it was known as C & M Market, which was run by P. J. Murchison and C. C. Crawford. The 1940s was therefore another period in the store's history when it experienced repeated ownership turnover, indicative of the economic instability incited by World War II, lasting for several years after the War's end in 1945.

### ***Chain Grocery Store***

In 1950, the store entered a new period of stability as Vancouver entered a period of growth following World War II (Vogel & Wyse, 1993, p. 97). As part of this growth, by the 1950s, the neighbourhood surrounding 5993 Main Street had become more fully-developed, once again providing a solid customer base for the store. It was owned and operated by Alex Hunter for twenty years, from 1950 until 1970.

During this period, widespread use of personal automobiles contributed to changes in grocery shopping habits. Consequently, the store at 5993 Main Street evolved to suit the shopping preferences of the day. Originally simply named Hunter's Grocery, the store became a part of the United Purity Stores brand in 1955 and was renamed Hunter's Purity Grocery & Meats. Chain stores, that is, stores owned by a single entity owning many locations, either all in the same region or in different regions, began to proliferate in North America in the early 20th Century (Chain Stores, 1932, p.

xvi). This posed a challenge to small independent retailers, such as grocers, because chain stores had access to bulk buying and advertising advantages. Because they were larger, they could buy from suppliers in greater quantities and outprice single-owner, single-location retailers. The proliferation of personal automobiles also made chain stores grow in popularity since cars made transportation possible over longer distances and residents often chose chain store destinations over smaller retailers (Holt, 2010).

United Purity Stores was an American grocery store co-operative that allowed independent grocery store owners to take advantage of the bulk buying and advertising benefits of being part of a chain with a recognized brand while retaining ownership of their businesses (Chain Stores, 1932, p. xv). Being part of a cooperative like United Purity Stores was a way for independent shopkeepers to remain competitive against chain stores, even being regarded as “the salvation of the independent retailer” (Chain Stores, 1932, p. xv).

In Vancouver and surrounding municipalities, dozens of formerly independent grocers joined United Purity Stores, including many grocers based in primarily residential neighbourhoods, such as 5993 Main Street. This is illustrated by an ad for the store in The *Vancouver Sun* newspaper of, November 30, 1952 with a slogan that reads “Prove to yourself! ...You don’t have to leave your neighborhood to get the BEST QUALITY and LOWEST PRICES in town. There’s a Purity Store near you!” (Vancouver Sun, 1952, p. 29; see Figure 4) The Purity Stores sold food and cleaning products, and had locations in Vancouver, North Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, New Westminster, and the Fraser Valley.



Figure 4. United Purity Stores Advertisement, *Vancouver Sun*, November 30, 1952, p. 29

### **Convenience Store**

Briefly in 1971, the store at 5993 Main Street was called Paul's Market grocery before eventually becoming Wong's Market either that year or in 1972. It remained Wong's Market until it closed sometime between 2015 and 2020. Due to its long tenure as Wong's, it is still largely known by the community as Wong's Market.<sup>1</sup> The Wong's sign still remains on the building at the time of writing. The switch from being a co-operative grocery store to a convenience store exemplifies the continued evolution of consumer preference toward grocery shopping at larger stores. Because of this shift, during the latter half of the 20th Century, many of Vancouver's small-scale groceries located in primarily residential areas adapted to become convenience stores. These convenience stores sold items such as milk, cigarettes, and packaged food items, rather than fresh groceries.

The Wong's Market building is small, located on a thirty-three-foot lot in a primarily residential area. Because of this, the store itself is small and is therefore limited in the amount of inventory and variety it could stock. Packaged food items with a longer shelf life are easier to keep in stock in this context. Furthermore, the building is located on a primarily residential block and does not have designated automobile parking. Although there is a limited amount of parking on adjacent Main Street and East 44th

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<sup>1</sup> I was not able to find any publicly-available information about the Wong Family.



Avenue, its lack of a designated parking lot contributes to its being a predominantly local-serving store than a store that residents further afield would drive to for their grocery needs. Large, destination stores, by contrast, offer consumers a wider variety of both fresh and packaged foods in one location.

#### **4.3.4. Summary**

From 5993 Main Street's beginnings as a post office and general store run by a series of short-term merchants, to its time as an established independent grocery store, to its time as part of a grocery chain, and finally to its time as a convenience store, its history reflects the changing retail landscape and demographics of the city. The products offered at the store changed over time to remain viable and to meet the changing needs of the surrounding neighbourhood. Each of these four phases in the building's history have in common that the building remained mixed-use with a store on the main floor and apartments above. In each phase, storekeepers lived above their stores, making them a part of the community as both residents and small business owners. Many raised families there and had family members working in the store. These were working families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. As the building still stands today, it is possible a new shopkeeper could reincarnate it into a new store format that meets the community's needs today and into the future.

This examination of the physical form and history of Wong's Market reveals its heritage value as a place with a longstanding presence as a community-serving business that is representative of significant episodes in the city's development and social history. This history is largely associated with ordinary, working-class residents of Vancouver from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In light of these attributes, section 4.4 will examine the extent to which current heritage policies and evaluation systems recognize the values associated with historic neighbourhood retail stores like Wong's Market.

## 4.4. Heritage as defined by Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver

### 4.4.1. Introduction

Findings from the document analysis and interviews suggest a disconnect between policy and practice regarding how the City of Vancouver officially recognizes heritage. Such inconsistency affects the evaluation of the heritage value of sites like Wong's Market. Recently adopted policies and guidelines, such as Parks Canada's *Framework for History and Commemoration* (2019) and the City of Vancouver's *Vancouver Heritage Program* (2020) broadly define heritage to include both tangible and intangible aspects, and problematize longstanding definitions of heritage. They prioritize reframing the historically-Eurocentric focus of heritage discourse in Vancouver and in Canada to embrace "cultural diversity, equitable and inclusionary practices for all peoples... including those communities that have suffered from discriminatory policies and actions" (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 4). These policy documents enshrine the idea that "heritage" is a socially constructed concept. They also affirm that "interpretations of the past are constantly evolving" (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 33), and thus that heritage values can change across different historical periods.

Concurrently, the mechanisms through which heritage is actually identified and protected through legislation, do not align with the subjective and contingent definition of heritage outlined in recent policies. Specifically, the City of Vancouver's *Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology*, unchanged since its creation in 1986, purportedly evaluates sites in an unbiased and scientific manner, an approach which is at odds with current policies that regard heritage as subjective rather than objective. Partly responsible for this unchanging approach, the *Vancouver Charter*, the provincial legislation which grants the City of Vancouver the powers to recognize and protect heritage assets, essentially excludes the recognition and protection of exclusively intangible aspects of heritage, such as cultural practices. According to the *Charter*, the Heritage Register is a tool to identify real property, that is, land and structures deemed to have heritage value and nothing else. These findings provide insight into the lack of official heritage recognition of Wong's Market, because its value to the community is not well-captured by current processes for recognizing and protecting heritage, even if the City's current heritage values might recognize it as such.

Interview participants underscored this disconnect between policy and practice and expressed a desire for governments to address the misalignment between current heritage legislation and evaluation processes, and recently articulated heritage policies and programs. Participants hoped that updating the Heritage Register evaluation process could result in recognition and protection of more places, such as neighbourhood stores, that are important to residents. They also expressed a strong view that “tangible” and “intangible” heritage should not be considered separate concepts, since the design of particular physical spaces supports the activities and cultural practices that occur within them, and that it is not possible to separate the relative contributions of physical space and activities to cultural significance. Participants also acknowledged that there are immense challenges in incorporating the principles of current heritage policies into established processes for official recognition of heritage resources, particularly with respect to recognizing intangible heritage and the subjective nature of heritage.

#### **4.4.2. History of Heritage Planning in Vancouver**

Residents of Vancouver began calling for recognition and protection of heritage resources in the city in the 1960s (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 6). Partly, this initiative occurred in response to plans for urban renewal of the Gastown and Chinatown neighbourhoods that would have demolished many of the city’s oldest extant buildings (Punter, 2003, p 52). After Gastown and Chinatown evaded plans for their wholesale demolition and renewal, the Provincial Government designated both neighbourhoods as historic areas in the early 1970s (Punter, 2003, p. 52), heralding the beginning of formal heritage planning in Vancouver. As the City of Vancouver approached its centennial in 1986, the municipal government responded to community calls to establish a Heritage Conservation Program within the City’s planning framework.

In September 1986, Vancouver City Council adopted its first Heritage Inventory. In 1994, the Vancouver Heritage Inventory (VHI) became known as the Vancouver Heritage Register (VHR) because of new provincial legislation that introduced heritage registers as a municipal planning tool (City of Vancouver, 2022c, p. 1). The VHI was the culmination of several years’ work by heritage consultants and city staff; the list comprised nearly 3000 buildings, plus dozens of landscape resources (trees, parks, and monuments), and archaeological sites. The list of sites was based largely upon a

“windshield survey” conducted by heritage consultants who drove around the city to identify potential heritage buildings (City of Vancouver, 1985, p. 72). In conducting this windshield survey, the heritage consultants were looking for the “best buildings” in the city based upon visual assessment (City of Vancouver, 1985, p. 11). Because the preliminary list of properties was based on aesthetics, it was biased toward capturing architectural heritage values.

At that time, the City also adopted an evaluation methodology to determine whether buildings could qualify for addition to the VHI, and if so, at which level. Heritage consultants used this methodology to assess many of the buildings that they identified in the windshield survey. The VHI/VHR Evaluation Methodology is a numerical scoring system, so the tallying of each section of the Methodology leads to a final number which determines its evaluation category, an A (*Primary Significance*), B (*Significant*), or C (*Contextual or Character*).

The Evaluation Methodology measures significance across several heritage values; these include Architectural History, Cultural History, Context, and Integrity. The Architectural History, Context, and Integrity sections deal primarily with aesthetic values. This is apparent in the title of Architectural History, and indeed this section assesses architectural style and features. Context is also mainly aesthetic in that it measures factors such as the landscape surrounding a building, and the extent to which the surrounding buildings are of a similar style and age. The Integrity section is “a measure of the impact of changes to the building on the appreciation of its style, design, and construction” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5) which are also aesthetic factors.

Although the Cultural History section does measure intangible values, including “association with a person, group, institution, event or activity that is of historical significance” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3) or “association with broad patterns of... history including ecological, social, political, economic, or geographic change” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4), these criteria represent a relatively small contribution to the overall score a building can receive. Cultural History accounts for 35% of the points available in the evaluation methodology, with the remainder of the points primarily counting toward architectural values as outlined above. Further, to receive full points under Cultural History, a building must be considered of “considerable importance to the city, province, or nation” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3) according to the professional

who completes the evaluation. Because this criterion does not examine who considers the building of “considerable importance,” and is silent on the idea that there could be differing perspectives on what is important, it leaves little room to incorporate subjectivity or diverse perspectives about what constitutes heritage.

Although the City of Vancouver asserts it has continued to update its heritage planning programs following best practices in the field (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 6), it continues to use its original Evaluation Methodology from the 1980s to evaluate buildings for the VHR today in spite of its misalignment with the Vancouver Heritage Program. Although the City updates the VHR when resources are added at the owner’s request or when a resource on the VHR is demolished or destroyed by fire, it has not undergone significant change since its inception. The City has expressed intention to comprehensively “upgrade” the VHR, including its Evaluation Methodology (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 6). That said, to date, because a small group of professionals did most of the work in creating the VHI in the 1980s (City of Vancouver, 1985), and because it has not had a comprehensive update since that time, the current VHR leaves out many places cherished by residents. The Evaluation Methodology’s emphasis on architectural heritage values, combined with its purported objectivity, means that some places that particular communities hold strong connections to including some neighbourhood retail stores such as Wong’s Market, are not officially recognized as heritage by the City of Vancouver.

#### **4.4.3. Heritage Evaluation Processes: the roles of the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments**

This section outlines the roles of the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments in the heritage evaluation process. It provides essential background information for understanding Vancouver’s process, and how it currently leaves out many neighbourhood retail stores, such as Wong’s Market. In Canada, the responsibility for regulating development of private lands, including holding the power to recognize places of heritage significance and to enact special regulations for these places, lies primarily with municipal governments. When a municipality lists a place on its heritage register, provincial governments subsequently place it on its concomitant provincial register. After that, the federal agency Parks Canada places it on the Canadian Register

of Historic Places, which comprises all municipal heritage registers in the country (Province of British Columbia, n.d.).

Parks Canada also provides leadership on best practices in heritage recognition which are often followed by municipalities across Canada. Parks Canada is responsible for national historic sites and has “a mandate to ensure that Canada’s designated heritage places are protected and presented for this and future generations” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 9). Under the Parks Canada Agency Act, Parks Canada must have “long-term plans in place for establishing systems of national historic sites” (Parks Canada 2019, p. 9). To fulfil this requirement, Parks Canada prepares its National Historic Sites System Plan. The Federal Government adopted the most recent version of the System Plan, the *Framework for History and Commemoration*, in 2019. This plan purports to be at the “forefront of public history” at the time of its publishing. Municipalities across the country may refer to this document in guiding their own heritage programs.

#### **4.4.4. Current Policies and Programs**

Two policy documents that outline current best practices for heritage recognition, as it applies to Vancouver, are the City of Vancouver’s *Vancouver Heritage Program* (VHP) adopted in 2020 and Parks Canada’s *Framework for History and Commemoration* (FHC) adopted in 2019. The following sections will explain that these policies represent a shift in heritage planning in Vancouver and Canada. They address the limitations of previous approaches to heritage recognition, especially in enabling the recognition of heritage that reflects Canada’s diversity. Because the heritage value of neighbourhood grocery stores such as Wong’s Market is centred around the experiences of ordinary people, and often immigrant families, the following analysis of these heritage policy documents aims to demonstrate how existing processes for heritage recognition do not represent current heritage “best practices” by excluding places like Wong’s, despite their well-established value to communities.

#### ***Heritage as a Social Construct***

A fundamental way that new heritage policies aim to make heritage more inclusive is through enshrining the principle that heritage is subjective in nature. In the FHC, Parks Canada takes the position that heritage is a social construct. This means

that different people conceptualize heritage differently, and that the idea of what constitutes heritage may be contested. Parks Canada acknowledges that heritage planning in Canada has historically been based upon the perspectives of white, upper-class Canadian society to the exclusion of the stories of other groups (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 31). The 10 key practices for public history at heritage places outlined in the FHC describes Parks Canada's approach to heritage commemoration and interpretation. One of these key practices is to "realize that history is written from a worldview," meaning that "everyone has embedded assumptions and learned values about the world," which influence their point of view of history, and in turn, how the federal government should commemorate it" (Parks Canada, 2019, pp. 30-31).

Further, Parks Canada acknowledges that history can be controversial and could generate disagreement (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 30). This is especially true in Canada because "Canadians, as a very diverse population, each have their own understanding of history" (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 7). People's identities and socioeconomic status can affect their interpretations of heritage places (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 32). While the VHP is less explicit about heritage being a social construct than is the FHC, the City of Vancouver implicitly shares Parks Canada's position by calling for cultural redress through the VHP, meaning that the City is aiming to balance how they recognize heritage to make it reflective of the diversity of the city's population rather than "preferencing... the settler's history over Indigenous history" and "the Eurocentric focus over cultural and systemically excluded racialized communities" (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 9). Parks Canada appears bolder in their reconceptualization of heritage than the City of Vancouver by virtue of their jurisdiction. That is, their work centres mainly on government-owned places, whereas the City of Vancouver regulates private development and therefore considers the needs of private owners in implementation of City policies. Nevertheless, these recent admissions that heritage is subjective mean that Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver are communicating that current and established processes for heritage recognition fail to capture all places that reflect the diversity of the city and the country.

Additionally, Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver acknowledge that heritage values change over time. Another of the 10 key practices for public history at heritage places within the FHC is to "appreciate that interpretations of the past are constantly evolving" (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 33). Historical interpretations can change because of

discovery of new information about a place or changes in society or the natural environment (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 7). According to Parks Canada, “history can always be interrogated and no one ever has the last word” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 7). In the VHP, the City of Vancouver professes to embrace “a broader concept of heritage” than the City has held in the past (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 4), implying that the City’s conceptualization of heritage has changed, and thus that heritage values change.

Parks Canada points out that at the federal level, heritage recognition initially focused strongly on more monumental events of Canadian history, particularly political and military history, and milestone events, whereas they later placed greater emphasis on the stories of ordinary people rather than prominent figures and events (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 30). Failure to recognize many historic neighbourhood grocery stores is thus a relic of the time when monumental history was more likely to be commemorated than everyday history, since neighbourhood grocery stores are typically associated with everyday lives of ordinary people.

### ***Whose heritage is included?***

Establishing that heritage is a social construct that changes over time also allows Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver to recognize negative aspects of history, and the exclusionary ways in which past governments have commemorated historic places. Parks Canada’s following admission makes this clear: “in Canadian history, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism are examples of ideologies and structures that have profound legacies” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 31). Underscoring this point, Parks Canada specifically mentions “violence, oppression, and inequality” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 30) as being part of Canadian history and society. Similarly, In the VHP, the City of Vancouver acknowledges there are cultural communities in Vancouver that “have suffered from discriminatory policies and actions” (City of Vancouver, 2020, Appendix C, p. 2) by the City of Vancouver and other levels of government.

Both the FHC and the VHP state their intention to include the histories and perspectives of all cultural groups and to have heritage commemoration reflect the diversity of Canada and of Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2020, Appendix C, p. 2; Parks Canada, 2019 p. 9). The City of Vancouver professes it will “work with all communities... in the identification and recognition of heritage values and historic places” (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 13). Likewise, Parks Canada will engage in a dialogue with all



groups affected by decisions involving heritage places (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 32). Recognizing that any organization communicating history does so from a particular worldview, Parks Canada aims to understand heritage places from all perspectives, and to communicate all heritage values associated with a place. To this end, Parks Canada asserts that “to better grasp perspectives from other eras, it is important to explore people’s circumstances as fully as possible, including how they lived, what they believed and how those ways of life are viewed today” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 31).

Parks Canada also does not shy away from darker aspects of Canadian history, asserting that “to connect with history, it is important to think about complexities, controversies, achievements, failures and tragedies of the past - and to convey how they are relevant today” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 7). Further, it acknowledges that history can be divisive, but that this is not a reason to recoil from the work of public history (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 20). Because many neighbourhood grocery stores have been run by families from ethnocultural groups that have been subjected to discrimination by all levels of government, such as families of Chinese and Japanese ancestry, their stories are connected to these tragedies of the past. For example, the federal government seized Wong’s Market from a Canadian family of Japanese ancestry. The City’s failure to place Wong’s Market on the Vancouver Heritage Register despite community calls to do so suggests that established processes for recognizing heritage in Vancouver have not caught up to new policies, particularly with respect to the promise to engage communities in identifying heritage resources.

### ***Tangible and Intangible Heritage***

Another avenue through which Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver proclaim to incorporate stories reflective of their jurisdictions’ diversity is through affirming that heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible aspects. “Particularly important is to acknowledge that intangible values are... essential in understanding heritage values of Vancouver’s many ethnocultural communities. The VHP recognizes that intangible cultural heritage can only be considered heritage if the people who create, maintain, and transmit it recognize it as being heritage” (City of Vancouver, 2020 Appendix C, p. 3). According to Parks Canada, heritage places “whether they are natural or cultural, are conduits for the country’s history and identity, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects of Canada’s heritage” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 10).

Further, “this encompasses the physical resources of a site, as well as those intangible aspects such as traditional knowledge and skills, social practices and oral traditions” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 29). Similarly, the Vancouver Heritage Program states that intangible heritage includes “oral traditions, celebrations, social manners, performing arts” (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 4).

The focus on both the tangible and the intangible implies the goal of capturing what citizens regard as special about historic places through their commemoration and conservation in a more meaningful manner than they have in the past. Conservation of a physical structure does not mean that the qualities of the places that people cherish are also preserved, hence Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver’s consideration of intangible aspects of places. As the City of Vancouver notes, “heritage buildings are particularly valued for their contribution to a ‘sense of place’ as an expression of culture they represent” (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 21). According to the City’s own understanding, then, places like neighbourhood grocery stores can express a culture and thus possess intangible heritage value. That said, both the FHC and the VHP extol the importance of intangible heritage while remaining ambiguous about how greater recognition of intangible heritage will fit into processes for official heritage recognition.

### ***Intangible Heritage and Vancouver Charter Limitations***

In Canada, provincial governments give municipalities their legislative powers. For the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Charter is the legislation that outlines the regulatory powers of the City, including its powers with respect to heritage conservation. Within Part XXVIII - Heritage Conservation of the Vancouver Charter, section 582 describes the City’s authority to establish a heritage register. Specifically, “Council may, by resolution, establish a heritage register that identifies real property that is considered by the Council to be heritage property” (Province of British Columbia, 2021). This section explains that the City can list only *real property* on its heritage register. The Vancouver Charter defines real property as “land and every improvement thereon” (Province of British Columbia, 2021).

While the goal of recognizing intangible heritage is highlighted in the FHC and VHP, these documents nevertheless do not explicitly state how the City would meaningfully recognize intangible heritage on its register in its existing legislative powers. The legislation’s limiting of heritage registers to the identification of real property

poses a challenge to the official recognition of intangible heritage as outlined in the FHC and the VHP. This limitation is a fundamental reason why the VHR and its associated processes are yet to be comprehensively updated to reflect the VHP. It is proving difficult to reconcile a desire to recognize intangible heritage with a legislative framework that does not allow it.

### ***The Vancouver Heritage Register and its Evaluation Methodology***

The City of Vancouver has clearly articulated a commitment to highlight a diversity of heritage values, the experiences of ordinary people, and both tangible and intangible heritage in the context of heritage as a social construct. However, the City of Vancouver's Heritage Register and its Evaluation Methodology are not currently reflective of these principles. Because the original VHI from the 1980s formed the basis for the VHR, and buildings were selected for addition first based on visual criteria as selected by professionals who set out to find the city's "best buildings" (City of Vancouver, 1985, p. 75), the VHR remains biased toward architectural values. The VHR contains seven pages of explanatory text to help the reader understand the document, followed by the list of buildings, landscape resources, and archaeology sites the City of Vancouver deems to have heritage value. The document does not mention heritage being a social construct, being contestable, or being mutable. Rather, it presents heritage as a neutral concept (City of Vancouver, 2022a, pp. 1-7).

The City of Vancouver evaluates buildings for addition to the VHR using the Evaluation Methodology created in the 1980s for the City's first heritage inventory. This methodology is based on *The Evaluation of Historic Buildings* by Harold Kalman, published by Parks Canada in 1980. The Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office (FHBRO), which evaluates federal government-owned buildings and buildings at national historic sites, including those in Vancouver, also still uses a methodology based on Kalman's system from 1980 (Government of Canada, 2022). Therefore, like the City of Vancouver, it appears that FHBRO has not yet found a way to reconcile recent policies, such as the FHC, with their methods for evaluating heritage buildings.

As with the VHR document itself, its Evaluation Methodology makes no mention of heritage being socially constructed. Furthermore, it aims to make the evaluation process objective and technical. The City describes it as "an evaluation process that could systematically assess information and assign a numerical score to each building"

(City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 1). This approach is ostensibly at odds with current policies such as the FHC and the VHP which take the stance that heritage is always subjective, and even contested and controversial. Instead of considering heritage as a social construct, the VHR Evaluation Methodology uses words such as “significant,” “well-known,” “major influence,” and “importance” without even suggesting that the meaning of these is subjective. For example, the City describes the criterion intended to measure historical association of a building as follows:

a building's association with a person, group, institution, event or activity that is of historical significance to the local area, city, province or nation... Examples of a person, group, or event that could be considered significant to the history of a local area, the city or province, include a well-known pioneer, an organization important to the community's identity, a distinct ethnic group, or an event that had an influence on the community (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3).

In so doing, it does not specify to whom a person, group, or event could be considered significant or a “pioneer.” This criterion’s description conveys that significance or importance to the community can be objective truth. Furthermore, the use of the term “pioneer” invokes a reverence of settler colonialism that seems outdated in the present context.

It is a matter of concern that the pattern of using “significance” and “importance” as objectively measurable concepts occurs throughout the methodology. The Style and/or Type criterion measures “a building's style representative of a local area's significant development periods; or a building type associated with a significant industrial, commercial or transport activity” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2). Similarly, another criterion measures the significance of the designer or builder of the building and their degree of “importance” to the development of the city (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). Particularly given that there were once racial exclusions from professions such as architecture in British Columbia, this criterion may implicitly highlight the history of white, upper middle-class residents.

Recognizing that the *Evaluation of Historic Buildings* by Harold Kalman was the basis for the Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology, an analysis of Kalman’s system provides further insight into the 1980s approaches to heritage evaluations in Canada, and how they contrast with today’s heritage policies which define heritage as a social construct. Kalman’s system “is intended to take some of the

mystique out of architectural value judgements, and to show how these may be made rationally, objectively and confidently” (Kalman, 1980, p. 6). The aim is to be rational and objective in evaluating places for inclusion. Kalman defines “evaluation” as “an *objective* exercise that determines quality.” Although he recognizes that “there is no perfectly reliable or perfectly ‘objective’ measure of capabilities... techniques allow an assessor to come much closer to the ideal of objectivity” (Kalman, 1980, p. 8). These assertions conflict with the recent policies that clearly articulate that heritage is always contestable. The FHC and the VHP do not identify objectivity as a goal of official heritage recognition.

It is a matter of further concern in the current context that Kalman’s system and those that adapted it rely heavily on the influence of alleged “authorities” such as “architects, historians, and architectural historians” (Kalman, 1980, p. 11). These kinds of professionals are to identify potential buildings based on activities such as conducting windshield surveys of an area, as was done in Vancouver in the 1980s. Based on the results of those surveys, these people are then also the ones to complete the evaluations based on methodologies which are also established by these same kinds of professionals who are likely to have similar worldviews. Therefore, a small group has a profound influence on what becomes officially recognized as heritage. This approach differs from the FHC and VHP’s clearly articulated commitment to partnership with all affected groups in the identification of heritage resources.

Despite the FHC and the VHP’s progressive approaches to heritage, Parks Canada and City of Vancouver continue to use evaluation methodologies to determine official recognition of heritage resources that do not align with their high-level policy documents. As demonstrated in this section, the approaches are often even contradictory and exclusionary.

#### **4.4.5. Expert Perspectives**

##### ***Introduction***

The semi-structured interviews with heritage experts in Vancouver provide a deeper understanding of the policy and regulatory framework governing heritage in Vancouver and the disconnect between recent policies and the existing evaluation process, and in particular, how the official evaluation process misses many neighbourhood retail stores such as Wong’s Market. First, one participant suggested that

the Vancouver Heritage Program adopted in March 2020 represented a significant change in policy direction from the City's previous Heritage Conservation Program, because it shifted focus from architectural, historical values, to a greater recognition of living culture in communities in Vancouver (Community Volunteer 2). The same participant was of the opinion that the VHR is not aligned with the VHP: "The [VHP] updated the way [the City] conceptualizes and applies heritage, but the Register... hasn't quite got up to that new conceptualization of what heritage is in the city" (Community Volunteer 2). Another participant echoed this sentiment by asserting that the VHR is "stuck in the past" and "behind current heritage thinking" (Heritage Consultant).

### ***Privileging of Architectural Values***

Participants identified several ways in which they considered the VHR to be antiquated and misaligned with the VHP, including that it biases tangible values over intangible values. One explained that "it doesn't fully recognize important intangible and evolving heritage" (Heritage Planner). This suggests why the City has not listed many neighbourhood grocery stores on the VHR. Another participant elaborated by saying the VHR "still seems to be oriented around the built form rather than what happens within those built forms, so something like a grocery store, which is more of a cultural asset" than an architectural asset, is not captured in the VHR (Community Volunteer 2).

Other participants expressed knowledge about the way the City created the VHR in the 1980s and provided insight into how it has been architecturally-biased since its inception. They described how the professionals who put together the first inventory were trained in architectural history and the worldview flowing from their training is reflected in the buildings they selected. At the time, the practice was to rely on this kind of expertise in identifying heritage buildings (Historian, Community Volunteer 1, Heritage Consultant). One participant explained that "because the [neighbourhood grocery stores] were vernacular architecture, that wasn't well-captured [in the 1980s]. The people who were doing the original inventory were architectural-historian trained" and this background influenced which buildings they chose (Historian).

### ***The Vancouver Heritage Register does not represent the city's diversity***

Furthermore, in part because a small group of experts had control over the formation of the VHR, one research participant pointed out that the VHR is not representative of the city's diverse population. One participant explained this by saying that some cultural communities are overrepresented on the VHR, while others are underrepresented, and that the VHR is "not reflective of the various kinds of heritage that Vancouver has" (Heritage Consultant). In speaking about some cultural groups in Vancouver that are not represented in the VHR, this participant explained "The first thing that comes to mind is the Indigenous perspectives... [such as] Urban Indigenous communities ... or members of the three local First Nations... I think there's also just simply groups that have been marginalized in the past that don't feel themselves represented through this register" (Heritage Consultant). Historic neighbourhood grocery stores, whose cultural values and associated stories have often centred around ethnocultural groups such as Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians, whom all levels of government have subjected to discriminatory policies. The VHR has not evolved as heritage values have evolved.

Another pointed out that those who have influence over official heritage recognition in Vancouver comprise a small circle of people who "might be missing" places that are of importance to particular communities in the city (Community Volunteer 1). As well, the focus on historical information means that the City might overlook important aspects of intangible, living culture through official processes (Community Volunteer 1). Indeed, as one participant summarized, "the current city of Vancouver heritage register does not represent a lot of communities." This participant believed that many places that are of value to citizens of Vancouver are not included on the VHR, while many listings currently on the VHR are not valuable to many citizens of Vancouver (Heritage Consultant). An example of a place that interview participants identified as missing from the VHR is the "food hub for the Philippine community on Joyce [Street]," a collection of small businesses offering Filipino food items that is slated for redevelopment. The City of Vancouver staff had not been aware of its significance to the community until residents opposed the rezoning application that proposed to displace these businesses (Community Volunteer 1).

### ***Opportunities for Improvement***

Despite the VHR's failure to reflect the city's diversity and many of the places that residents care about, interview participants expressed that the VHR nevertheless does recognize many cherished places, and also expressed hope that it could improve some of its aforementioned issues. As one participant remarked "I think it does a good job, but I would also like to see it expanded in how it's applied" in order to better capture intangible heritage values (Community Volunteer 2). Another added that "I think it can evolve to appreciate community values and intangible values more" (Heritage Planner).

The interviews revealed that inclusion of more neighbourhood grocery stores was an example of where there is room for the VHR to improve: "food heritage through grocery stores would really be an amazing way of diversifying the VHR and giving those establishments an avenue to official recognition that could help protect them from forces working against them" such as redevelopment pressures (Community Volunteer 2). Specifically, the City could achieve this by including in the evaluation methodology the current utility that a place has to its community to demonstrate that it is not just part of history, but also "in the story of the city here and now" (Community Volunteer 2). In addition, the official recognition of neighbourhood grocery stores represents the recognition of intangible heritage because "they capture intangible heritage values better than almost anything else" (Historian), because they are part of the social fabric of neighbourhoods.

### ***Challenges in addressing changing heritage values and intangible heritage values***

While interview participants recognized the limitations of current processes for official heritage recognition in Vancouver and its shortcomings in recognizing intangible and ever-changing heritage values as they relate to historic neighbourhood grocery stores, they also expressed reservations about the ability of heritage planning alone to address these issues. First, as one participant stated, "the city has become more complex," and as a result "ideas of what constitutes heritage have...become more complex than they were" (Historian). Another echoed this point by saying, "[there are] all these tensions and all [city staff] can do is just move forward with the evaluation and methodology and evaluation process and follow the national guidelines, but it is it really



is a minefield” (Community Volunteer 1), making heritage recognition more difficult to fit into an established, streamlined, routine process.

As another participant noted, people value neighbourhood grocery stores because they are public meeting places, but “corner stores and any sort of public meeting place are constantly evolving” (Heritage Planner). This participant also explained that “we certainly want to encourage businesses to be living and evolving and not stagnant, because the needs of the community are going to evolve as well.” This comment seems to suggest that community needs change along with broader societal changes such as demographics and economic trends (Heritage Planner). Further, municipalities must provide reasons for a place being listed on a heritage register, which makes official recognition of intangible values associated with neighbourhood stores difficult. With values constantly evolving, it is challenging to protect them without “legislating stores out of existence” (Heritage Planner). This is because “change is key to survival” of the small businesses and their financial viability (Heritage Planner). While residents may wish to see small neighbourhood retail stores protected, the necessity for such stores to be economically viable to support their continued existence, means official heritage recognition and protection is not the appropriate way to support these stores. In order for something to be protected, those qualities that are unique and special about it would need to be identified and controlled, which could result in the opposite of the desired effect – i.e., it could threaten the business’s success.

Further, some participants expressed scepticism about how the City could achieve recognition of purely intangible values, particularly in isolation from tangible values embodied by the buildings themselves. A participant asserted that they “try not to distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage” values in their own conception of heritage, explaining that with neighbourhood grocery stores, their heritage value lies in their relationship to the community, but they need to have a tangible physical presence to do that. The buildings that house these stores are their tangible embodiment (Heritage Consultant).

Another participant added that it could be possible to have policies “such that if you tear down a building with a corner store, you have to put up a corner store” to keep the community-serving use in a new building (Heritage Planner). This participant also expressed the belief, however, that “some value is lost in losing the structure itself” when

a historic neighbourhood retail store is demolished. They also acknowledged that this “is a challenging area of heritage policy - if you do not also have architectural values tied in with intangible values, it is very hard to protect the intangible which might change and evolve and we should not be discouraging those changes” (Heritage Planner). As well, if a building that houses a historic neighbourhood grocery store undergoes redevelopment, and the property developer is obliged to allow the business to reopen in the new building, it takes years to build a new building. During this time, the neighbourhood loses the continuity offered by a longstanding business (Community Volunteer 2, Heritage Consultant).

In addition, participants identified a key reason that small businesses embodying cultural value, such as some neighbourhood grocery stores, face the threat of closing. This is due to high land values in Vancouver and pressures to redevelop properties to their highest and best use. One pointed out that Wong’s Market could be replaced with “generic duplexes” (Historian). This participant proposed the following remedy:

It would be... super interesting if, for example with Wong’s Market, if the City could stop the process that would replace it with generic duplexes, and somehow get somebody in there... who would run a coffee shop... and then put up a plaque or a little interpretive board with a few photographs... then people [could] really connect with that and they learn about racial history.... So, it's not just keeping the building, but trying to put a little interpretation too (Historian).

Another participant echoed the suggestion that neighbourhood grocery stores are threatened with redevelopment, explaining how their survival is challenging because they are often non-conforming commercial uses within residential zones wherein redeveloping to residential use is profitable (Heritage Planner). Participants expressed that stopping redevelopment of neighbourhood stores is not an issue solely for the City’s heritage policies to solve. Rather, one suggested that the City should focus on creating an environment where small businesses can succeed:

If we, as a community, value neighbourhood grocery stores, why don't we start with providing them the opportunity to thrive without having heritage status? This could be done by offering tax incentives, subsidies, or caps on rent for places that are known as being local and not the bigger chains that are everywhere in North America (Heritage Consultant)

Non-profit groups also have a role to play in supporting small neighbourhood businesses by capacity-building and advocating for the needs of small business owners. Another participant also emphasized that heritage planning alone cannot be relied upon to protect neighbourhood grocery stores, but rather heritage needs to be integrated with other areas of planning, stating “what you really want to do is encourage that business to continue and that's usually more of a community planning and policy item, so I think it's something that heritage planning and community planning probably need to work together on.” (Heritage Planner). This is because of the limitations of legislation, which is tailored to the protection of physical features (Heritage Planner).

#### **4.4.6. Discussion**

The summary of findings from the document analysis and expert interviews conducted in this study, this section has illustrated why established processes for recognizing and protecting heritage sites in the City of Vancouver leave out many neighbourhood retail stores, such as Wong's Market. Although cherished by Vancouver residents, these places are not officially-recognized heritage sites because they are located within buildings that are unremarkable architecturally, and because, despite significant changes in heritage planning, they are still marginalized due to their association with the stories of working class and historically-marginalized ethnocultural groups. Despite recent heritage policies and programs such as Parks Canada's 2019 National Historic Sites System Plan, the *Framework for History and Commemoration* and the City of Vancouver's 2020 *Vancouver Heritage Program's* emphasis on intangible heritage values and reflecting the cultural diversity of Canada and of Vancouver, heritage legislation and evaluation methodologies have failed to catch up to current best practices in identification of heritage resources. As a result, the places that are officially recognized as having heritage value are not reflective of communities' values today, and places such as Wong's Market remain unrecognized. While interview participants believe that there is room for heritage planning in the City of Vancouver to better capture what Vancouver residents care about, they also cautioned that this would be insufficient in helping to protect and support historic neighbourhood grocery stores' continued existence in the city.

The emphasis on architectural values still prevalent in the Vancouver Heritage Register today is relic of 1980s approaches to heritage recognition and is no longer

adequate in recognizing what residents care about in their communities. In the current context, governments have acknowledged that communities desire recognition and protection not simply of buildings, but intangible heritage, which is embodied in the unique ways of life of communities, demands safeguarding as well. In Vancouver, historic neighbourhood grocery stores, often small businesses run by immigrant families, are an example of intangible heritage deemed worthy of recognition and preservation. Although recent policies such as the FHC and VHP aim to address this requirement, my study highlights the huge implementation difficulties posed by such an approach. It remains unclear how the relationships between tangible and intangible heritage and so many diverse community and specialist perspectives can be incorporated into the current legislative framework, or a revised, predictable, standardized heritage evaluation process.

Apparently, like other forms of urban planning, heritage planning must contend with significant global economic forces that threaten the viability of small businesses in favour of big corporate alternatives. Residents are concerned about how the loss of small businesses has a detrimental impact on the cultural and social fabric of neighbourhoods. At the same time, because conferring official heritage recognition of place requires description of the qualities that embody its heritage value, it is unclear how this could be applied to the range of intangible qualities that make a place special. In the small business example, being proscriptive about how the business is run could render it non-viable, therefore making it more likely to close down rather than less likely. Given the severity and complexity of these constraints, it is not surprising that heritage evaluation methodologies have not caught up to the goals outlined in overarching policies such as the FHC and VHP which underscore the importance of diverse perspectives and intangible heritage.

## Chapter 5. Analysis

The findings from the media analysis, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis suggest that Wong's Market possesses both tangible and intangible heritage values. Its tangible value is embodied in its built form, while its intangible value includes its association with the development of the South Vancouver neighbourhood and Vancouver as a whole, its association with significant historic events, and its longstanding existence as a community-serving small business. In this section, I will consider these heritage values in informing the completion of evaluations for this building following the City of Vancouver's current Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology (1986) and the recent policy documents, the Framework for History and Commemoration (2019) and the Vancouver Heritage Program (2020). As I will outline in greater detail in this chapter, both of these systems would result in official heritage recognition of Wong's Market.

Although the existing methodology attempts to make the evaluation of buildings clear and consistent, scoring is affected by the interpretation of the person completing the evaluation. In conducting this component of my research, I exercised my professional judgement in this regard, informed by careful examination of the explanatory text of the methodology. For the criteria under which the evaluation of Wong's Market is ambiguous, I will discuss other possible interpretations, ultimately arriving at my own proposed score according to my interpretation of the criteria.

I will then complete evaluation through the lens of newer heritage policy documents, the FHC and the VHP. Completing evaluations through both the existing methodology and the more recent documents will provide greater insight as to whether there is a disconnect between current heritage policy and the existing methodology. What this will achieve is to discover whether either of the systems would result in official recognition for Wong's Market, and which is better suited to recognize the heritage value of Wong's Market that was established through this research.

## **5.1. Evaluating Wong's Market According to the Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology**

The City of Vancouver's Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology, which heritage consultants devised in the mid-1980s and is still in use today, measures the relative heritage significance of buildings according to ten criteria. Evaluators must consider the methodology as a whole rather than as each criterion in isolation so as not to double count the same aspect of a building in more than one criterion, thus resulting in an artificially high score. Each criterion can be scored as either fair/poor, good, very good, or excellent with a set number of points going toward each, out of a total score of 100 points.

### **5.1.1. Architectural History: Style and/or Type**

The first section of the methodology addresses Architectural History. Considering the physical form of the Wong's Market building, how would it score on the Architectural History criteria? Part of the heritage value of Wong's Market is embodied by the building itself. As a two-storey mixed-use building with a retail store on the ground floor and apartments on the second floor, it is a typical example of a small-scale mixed-use building constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The form of the building supports the activities that occur there. It is not designed of a particular architectural style. The building is therefore an example of vernacular architecture, because it was not designed by a trained architect and its design is representative of local traditions (Kalman, 1980, p. 22).

The first criterion in this section is Style and/or Type and measures "a building's style representative of a local area's significant development periods; or a building type associated with a significant industrial, commercial or transport activity" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2). Examining how the Wong's Market building fits into this, it is associated with the development period of the early urbanization of South Vancouver. It is also associated with the commercial activity of essential goods retailing, as is evident in its beginnings as an outlet for stumping powder and work boots, to its time as a grocery store, and later as a convenience store. These two associations may suggest that the building could receive some score on this criterion, but there is more information

to consider before making this determination. The description of the Style and/or Type criterion continues as follows:

The description of a building's style is a means of describing visual elements such as form, materials and ornamentation that are characteristic of a particular age or development period. A building which displays typical features of a particular style can be said to be of that style. Whether the building is a good, very good, or excellent example of a style depends on the following:

an understanding of the style's origins and characteristics,

an understanding of the historical role of building styles in the development history of the local area and city,

an appreciation and judgement of the relative merit of a building's stylistic elements in comparison to buildings of similar style in the local area or city" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2).

As a vernacular building, Wong's Market must be judged as such, and not evaluated in comparison to buildings that are designed by architects in a particular architectural style, since scoring under Style and/or Type "depends on... an appreciation and judgement of the relative merit or rarity of a building type" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2). Because of this, the ability for the Wong's Market building to receive points for Style and/or Type is improbable.

There are other extant examples of vernacular mixed-use residential and retail buildings in the City of Vancouver, so they are not especially rare. And some of these other examples are of a higher "relative merit" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2) architecturally than Wong's Market. Indeed, some of these examples are listed on the VHR. The Park Grocery & Woodside Apartments at 2598 Eton Street, for example, is on the VHR and is an architecturally stronger example of a vernacular mixed-use retail and commercial building. It was constructed in 1911, the same year as Wong's Market (Park Grocery and Woodside Apartments Statement of Significance, 2016).

To summarize Wong's Market's evaluation of Style and/or Type within the existing Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology, it is unlikely to score any points under this criterion. The methodology describes a building scoring a zero under Style and/or Type as being "an average example of a style or type that remains common in Vancouver" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2). In order to receive a score of "good" and receive twelve points, a building must be "a good example of a style or type that is

common in Vancouver or in a local area” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2). Because the methodology measures “relative significance” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 1), and other examples of vernacular mixed-use retail and apartment buildings constructed prior to World War One are more impressive architecturally than Wong’s Market, it would not receive points in the existing Evaluation Methodology for Style and/or Type.

### **5.1.2. Architectural History: Design**

The next criterion in the Architectural History section of the Evaluation Methodology is the Design criterion, which measures “a building’s notable or special attributes of an aesthetic and/or functional nature including massing, proportion, scale, layout, materials, detailing, colour, texture, fenestration, ornamentation or artwork” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2). Unlike the Style and/or Type criterion that has long descriptive text explaining what aspects an evaluator should take into consideration in terms of Style and/or Type, the Design criterion is brief and does not elaborate beyond the aforementioned quote. While any building could be argued to have some “attributes of an aesthetic and/or functional nature” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 2), the methodology specifies that to score on this criterion, these attributes must be *notable* or *special*. Although these are subjective terms, it is reasonable to assume that the aesthetic or functional attributes of the design must be over and above the defining attributes of the building’s style, as these are already measured and captured under the Style and/or Type criterion.

Considering the Wong’s Market building along this criterion, its physical form is related to the commercial activity for which it was constructed. Because the Wong’s Market building was constructed to have a retail store at street level with an apartment above, it possesses style characteristics indicative of this. For example, the retail store’s front door is recessed from the front property line, creating a covered threshold with display windows on either side of the door. This is a functional form for a small-scale retail store in that the covered entry allows some protection from the elements while the large windows on either side of the door allow for potential customers to see the goods inside the store enticing them to come in and make a purchase.

Using the example of the aforementioned Park Grocery & Woodside Apartments at 2598 Eton Street contrasted with Wong’s Market, while both are examples of



vernacular architecture in Vancouver from 1911, the Park Grocery & Woodside Apartments possesses “several notable or special attributes” that Wong’s Market does not. Similar to Wong’s Market, Park Grocery has a recessed entry door with storefront windows on either side, but Park Grocery’s store front windows have “original wood-framed storefront glazing including transom lites” (Park Grocery and Woodside Apartments Statement of Significance, 2016), that is, a higher level of architectural detail than Wong’s Market. Woodside Apartments, the second and third storeys of the building, feature prominent bay windows, another special aesthetic attribute. Wong’s Market, by contrast, does not have these sorts of attributes. As outlined in the previous section on Style and/or Type, Wong’s Market’s design is related to its function as a grocery store and apartment, but beyond that, it does not possess *special* attributes that make it notably strong aesthetically or notably functional. Therefore, I determined that it will not score points for Design.

### **5.1.3. Architectural History: Construction**

The next criterion under Architectural History in the Evaluation Methodology is the Construction criterion. Like Design, the Construction criterion is concise. It measures “a building’s unique or uncommon building materials, or its historically early or innovative method of construction” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). Wong’s Market building’s presence on the 1912 Goad’s Fire Insurance Map illustrates that the building is of wood-frame construction (City of Vancouver, n.d.), which was, and still is, a common construction material and method in Vancouver. For this reason, the building receives no points for construction.

### **5.1.4. Architectural History: Designer / Builder**

The final criterion under Architectural History in the Evaluation Methodology is Designer / Builder. It evaluates whether the building is associated with an “architect, designer, engineer and/or builder who has made a significant architectural contribution to the city, province, or nation” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). There is no surviving building permit for Wong’s Market’s initial construction, so the designer or builder of the building is unknown. This means that the building cannot receive a score for Designer / Builder. To score any points under this criterion, the building would need to have been designed or built by an architect, designer, engineer and/or builder of some importance

to building and development in the city, province or nation” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3).

The inclusion of this criterion in the methodology suggests that those buildings that were designed by a prominent architect or builder are more significant, and deserving of more points in the evaluation system, than those that were designed and built by non-professionals. This also suggests a bias within the methodology toward buildings associated with elite members of society, as they would be more likely than working class people to commission buildings by well-known designers or builders. Vancouver’s methodology includes this criterion despite that Kalman’s *The Evaluation of Historic Buildings*, on which the methodology is based, states that “with vernacular architecture, the identity of the builder is immaterial” (Kalman, 1980, p. 22), further signaling a preference toward high architecture. In summary, Wong’s Market would receive a score of zero in the Architectural History portion of the Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology.

### **5.1.5. Cultural History: Historical Association**

The next section in the Evaluation Methodology is Cultural History. This includes the criteria for Historical Association and Historical Pattern. Historical Association is the first criterion within the methodology that can easily give points to Wong’s Market. It measures “a building’s association with a person, group, institution, event or activity that is of historical significance to the local area, city, province or nation” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). The methodology explains that “examples of a person, group, or event that could be considered significant to the history of a local area, the city or province, include a well-known pioneer, an organization important to the community’s identity, a distinct ethnic group, or an event that had an influence on the community” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). As discussed above, Wong’s Market is associated with the shameful dispossession and internment of Canadians of Japanese ancestry. This is significant at a national level because it was the federal government who was responsible for this action (Yakashiro, 2021, p. 33). Dispossession and internment had a profound impact on the city, the province, and the nation because the forced movement altered the ethnocultural landscape (Yakashiro, 2021, p. 33). Wong’s Market can receive a score of excellent, 35 points, for this criterion because the building is “closely connected with a person, group, institution, event or activity that is of considerable importance to the...

nation” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). For a building to receive a lower score for Historical Association, its association with a person, group, institution, event or activity would have to be of a lesser importance or only important on a local scale, rather than a city-wide, provincial, or national level (p. 3). For this reason, a score of excellent is appropriate for Wong’s Market on this criterion.

### **5.1.6. Cultural History: Historical Pattern**

The next criterion is Historical Pattern, which measures

a building's association with broad patterns of local area or civic history including ecological, social, political, economic or geographic change... Examples of broad patterns of local area or civic history include the clearing of forest land for farm land, the formation of distinct ethnic communities, the establishment of exclusive suburbs, or the movement of the city's commercial center westward (p. 4).

Wong’s Market could receive a score of very good on this criterion since it is “a building that can be directly linked to the establishment of an historical pattern of local area importance, or one of earliest surviving examples in a local area” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4) because of its direct link to the very establishment of South Vancouver by selling the stump powder necessary to create an urban settlement. That said, the Cultural History section of the methodology is capped at 35 points, so since Wong’s Market would receive 35 points for having a score of excellent for Historical Association, its score for Cultural History is already maximized. It cannot receive additional points for Historical Pattern.

### **5.1.7. Context: Landscape / Site**

Next in the methodology is a section that evaluates a building’s Context. The first criterion in this section, Landscape / Site is “an intact historical landscape or landscape features associated with an existing building, or a particularly notable historical relationship between a building's site and its immediate urban environment” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4). Because the property where Wong’s Market is located does not contain landscape features, such as trees or other plantings, or other landscape architectural elements such as retaining walls, it does not receive any points for Landscape / Site. This criterion is also reflects a bias toward more “monumental”

architecture and buildings associated with elites, because sites that have a landscape architectural component would typically be more upscale. To receive at least a score of good, a building needs “a landscape which includes one or two important features which are directly related to the building's style, design and history or an altered but recognizable historical relationship between a building's site and its immediate urban environment or related geographic features” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 3). The site where the Wong’s Market building is located does not contain these elements.

### **5.1.8. Context: Neighbourhood**

The Neighbourhood criterion evaluates “a building's continuity and compatibility with adjacent buildings and visual contribution to a group of similar buildings” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4). Again, the emphasis of this criterion is on aesthetic aspects of a building within its context, that is, other buildings and landscape features that surround it. Wong’s Market receives a score of Good under this criterion, because it is “a building which is not part of a contiguous group of similar style, type or age, but is in an area of compatible use” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4). The buildings surrounding Wong’s Market are single-detached houses. This low-density residential use is “compatible” with the apartment residential and corner store commercial uses of Wong’s Market. To receive the next higher score of Very Good, Wong’s Market would need to be “part of a contiguous group of similar style, type or age” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4), which it is not, because the only building of a similar age is a house built in 1910 located to the west of the Wong’s Market property. These two properties alone do not constitute a group. The surrounding buildings are also not of a similar style or type. Therefore, the score of good for Wong’s Market for the Neighbourhood criterion is clear-cut and open to little interpretation. An evaluator could make the argument that it should receive no score for Neighbourhood if they believed that commercial and residential are incompatible uses (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 4), but it is reasonable to believe that a store of the small size of Wong’s Market is compatible with low-density residential uses.

### **5.1.9. Context: Visual / Symbolic Importance**

The final criterion under Context, Visual / Symbolic Importance measures “a building’s importance as a civic or local area landmark; a building’s symbolic value to a neighbourhood, local area or the city” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5). While the concept

of “symbolic value to a neighbourhood” is highly subjective, the use of the words “importance” and “landmark” in the description suggest that this criterion is referring to the extent to which a building is easily noticeable and familiar to residents of the local neighbourhood or the city. Wong’ Market could receive a score of good, as “a neighbourhood landmark or building of symbolic importance to a neighbourhood” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5) for being of symbolic importance for the events and historical periods it is associated with. That said, there is little evidence that the general public living in the neighbourhood around Wong’s Market is aware of its history. I therefore evaluate Wong’s Market to be Fair / Poor, receiving no points for this criterion, as “a building of no landmark or symbolic significance” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5).

### **5.1.10. Integrity**

The final section in the Evaluation Methodology measures a single criterion, Integrity, which the methodology defines as “a measure of the impact of changes to the building on appreciation of its style, design and construction” (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5). Unlike ranking according to other criteria in the methodology, buildings lose points for being deemed to lack integrity, rather than adding points for possessing integrity. The Integrity section contains further explanatory text that an evaluator must consider before deciding on a score for this criterion.

Generally, an evaluation of this effect is made by comparing the altered with the original. However, because buildings evolve over time, many buildings may have alterations that are of architectural or historical significance. Some of these later alterations may be of equal or greater importance than features of the original building. In this case the evaluation must be made with full recognition of the building's periods of development. An understanding and appreciation of the architectural and cultural history of the building will determine the single dominant period, or the several most significant periods for evaluation purposes (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5).

In essence this paragraph establishes that in typical cases, a building’s most significant period is the time when it was first built. Thus, a building of the highest integrity would be one with no alterations throughout its history. The explanatory text explains, however, that some buildings have alterations that are of significance and therefore would not detract from the building’s integrity. Understanding the history of the building, including

both tangible, style and design aspects, as well as intangible, historical associations is important in considering how to rate a building's integrity using this methodology.

Because of these considerations related to different time periods in a building's history, the Integrity criterion is one of the most subjective in the methodology. Evaluating the Integrity of Wong's Market under the methodology's definition of Integrity is especially unclear, because the building does not have a "single dominant period" or "several most significant periods for evaluation purposes" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5). Indeed, much of the intangible or historical value of Wong's Market lies in how it has constantly evolved to meet the needs of the surrounding community in a manner that parallels the city's development patterns.

Additionally, the archival research I conducted did not reveal detailed information on what physical changes were made to the building and when they were made. Because photos of the building survive from the 1930s, we know that owners made obvious changes to the exterior since that time, such as changing locations of windows, removal of a cornice, and changing the cladding. However, we do not know if the 1930s appearance was the original appearance from 1911, and we cannot determine when changes were made after the 1930s.

In my interpretation of the intent of the Integrity criterion, despite its mention of different periods of historical significance, the emphasis is on the aesthetic value of buildings and how alterations have impacted their style, design, and construction. Further, the way the actual levels in the integrity criterion are written also suggest emphasis on aesthetic factors. While there could be examples of buildings that have alterations that more directly relate to their heritage value, the connection between alterations and the heritage value of Wong's Market is weak, because there is no particular period that is most significant. For this reason, I evaluate Wong's Market as a good for Integrity because it has "a combination of several minor alterations, the effect of which detracts from the style, design or construction" (City of Vancouver, 1986, p. 5) of it as a vernacular corner store and apartment from 1911. A score of good results in a reduction of 8 points.

### **5.1.11. Evaluation Summary: Wong's Market According to the Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology**

**Style and / or Type:** 0

**Design:** 0

**Construction:** 0

**Designer / Builder:** 0

**Historical Association:** 35

**Historical Pattern:** 0

**Landscape / Site:** 0

**Neighbourhood:** 6

**Visual / Symbolic Importance:** 0

**Integrity:** -8

**Total:** 33 points

With a final score of 33 points, Wong's Market could qualify to be added to the VHR in the "C" evaluation category, the lowest category. As outlined in Chapter 4, the City of Vancouver's initial heritage inventory was comprised of buildings selected by visual inspection, so Wong's Market was likely overlooked because of its "weak" architectural features. I completed an evaluation for Wong's Market for the purposes of my research, which was informed by awareness of the building's compelling history, something that may not have been known to professionals who established the inventory in the 1980s. The existing Vancouver Heritage Register Evaluation Methodology does not do justice in recognizing the tangible and intangible heritage value of Wong's Market due to its allocation of more points toward narrowly-defined architectural, tangible features rather than to historical, intangible features.

A maximum of 40 points is available for Architectural History, whereas there is a maximum of 35 points available for Cultural History. Although this may seem like a

relatively small difference, given that the Context section deals with aesthetic aspects as well, a significantly larger proportion of points go to tangible heritage values vs. intangible heritage values. In particular, the inability for a building to score highly on both Historical Association and Historical Pattern, due to the Cultural History section's being capped at 35 points, means that buildings that have stronger historical values in comparison to aesthetic values receive a lower score than buildings with primarily stronger aesthetic values. Notably, the word "intangible" does not appear in this methodology.

## **5.2. Evaluating Wong's Market according to the Framework for History and Commemoration and the Vancouver Heritage Program**

While Parks Canada's Framework for History and Commemoration (FHC) and the City of Vancouver's Vancouver Heritage Program (VHP) do not include a pre-set methodology for evaluating buildings, I will analyze the information in these policy documents relevant to evaluation of buildings for official heritage status. This analysis provides insights into how Wong's Market might be recognized according to these recent policies. As the following section demonstrates, the FHC and the VHP would result in official heritage recognition of Wong's Market.

### **5.2.1. Elevating intangible heritage**

As the previous section on the evaluation of Wong's Market according to the existing methodology established, the existing methodology is better tailored to capture tangible, aesthetic heritage values of places in comparison to intangible values such as the stories associated with a place. The FHC and the VHP, by contrast, specifically name the recognition of intangible heritage as a priority. The FHC "provides strategic priorities for continuing to establish places, persons and events of national historic significance to encompass the breadth of Canadian history... These places, whether they are natural or cultural, are conduits for the country's history and identity, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects of Canada's heritage" (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 10). Similarly, one of the "Drivers of Change" in the VHP states that "the VHP promotes and supports a broader concept of Cultural Heritage which includes both tangible (buildings, monuments, natural landscapes) and intangible or living



heritage (oral traditions, celebrations, social manners, performing arts)” (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 4). Considering these commitments, the FHC and the VHP would allow for recognition of Wong’s Market’s intangible values, such as its longstanding existence as a small business that allows the neighbouring community to purchase essential goods, and its ongoing adaptability to meet the needs of the community.

### **5.2.2. Emphasizing ethnocultural diversity**

Another theme in both the FHC and the VHP is that new commemorations of places should reflect the diversity of Canada and of Vancouver. One of the FHC’s “Strategic Priorities” is “diverse peoples made Canada what it is today, and their contributions to the country’s history need greater recognition” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 27). Similarly, the VHP’s top priority is to “recognize a diversity of heritage values... [to] Identify, celebrate, and protect a broad range of historic places, including those with social and cultural heritage significance, illustrating the rich diversity and histories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, and citizens of Vancouver” (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 6). These quotes illustrate that Parks Canada and the City of Vancouver prioritize the recognition of places and histories that reflect the ethnocultural diversity of their jurisdictions. As the Wong’s Market building has had owners, tenants, and shopkeepers from a diversity of backgrounds including Chinese Canadian, Japanese Canadian, and British across its history, it is a good example of a place that reflects the longstanding ethnocultural diversity of the city. This suggests that through the lens of the FHC and the VHP, Wong’s Market possesses characteristics that would make it a candidate for official heritage recognition.

### **5.2.3. Recognition of historical wrongs**

Building on the FHC and VHP’s emphasis on diversity, these documents also acknowledge the historical wrongdoings of governments in Canada, and support the illumination and redress of these historical wrongs. According to Parks Canada, “to connect with history, it is important to think about complexities, controversies, achievements, failures and tragedies of the past - and to convey how they are relevant today” (Parks Canada, 2019, p. 7). The VHP also acknowledges that some ethnocultural communities have been subject to systemic exclusions, and as such, a goal of the VHP is to support “cultural redress” of such communities, meaning it “embraces cultural

diversity, equitable and inclusionary practices for all peoples of Vancouver, including those communities that have suffered from discriminatory policies and actions” (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 4).

Official heritage recognition of Wong’s Market presents an opportunity for cultural redress, and the chance to acknowledge historical wrongs. Without question, it is a site where profound historical wrongs occurred, that is, the dispossession and internment of Canadians of Japanese ancestry. The Province of British Columbia conducted the Japanese Canadian Historic Places Recognition Project in 2016 in which they sought public nominations of places of significance to Japanese Canadians and Canadians of Japanese Ancestry (Province of British Columbia, 2017). Wong’s Market was nominated through this process because the “building is significant as an example of a successful Japanese Canadian-owned business prior to World War II” (Heritage BC, n.d.). Wong’s Market’s nomination demonstrates that the community has recognized the building’s association with historical wrongs. This nomination also suggests that official heritage recognition of Wong’s Market could support cultural redress, and therefore is in alignment with the FHC and the VHP. This is particularly true if it were coupled with a historical interpretation program to communicate its social and ethnocultural history.

#### **5.2.4. Absence of specifics regarding physical form**

While in the existing evaluation methodology, a significant proportion of the points is allocated to specific physical aspects of heritage sites, such as a building’s architectural style and design elements, or physical elements of the landscape surrounding a building, the FHC and VHP only address physical form at a very high level. However, the words “style,” and “architecture” are not used in either the FHC or the VHP summary document. Both documents mention that “tangible” aspects contribute to Canada’s and to Vancouver’s heritage, but they do not elaborate on how they would determine what constitutes tangible heritage. The VHP adopts the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Historic Urban Landscape Approach, which acknowledges “that a city is made up of many layers, both tangible and intangible, all of which contribute to the city’s uniqueness” (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 4). While this statement suggests that tangible aspects are part of these layers, it is unclear whether physical specifics at the level of detail presented in the existing methodology are relevant to these layers that contribute to uniqueness.

Although the FHC and the VHP are silent on specific aspects of the physical form of tangible heritage, this omission could contribute positively toward official recognition of Wong's Market. The Wong's Market building's physical form in itself represents layers of history through its alterations over time. In its current appearance, experiencing the building's physical form is to experience the phases of its history and the history of the city as a whole. The building's scale and massing are representative of the time it was built in 1911, while its bottle dash stucco cladding invokes mid-20th Century cost-saving design trends. And, its Coca-Cola "Wong's Market" sign makes it familiar as a mid-to-late 20th Century convenience store. Unlike in the existing methodology, using the lens of "layers of history" does not proscribe the evaluation to decide which period in a building's history is its most significant and it does not suggest that building must fit into an architectural style, be it vernacular or any other specific architectural tradition. For this reason, despite the FHC and VHP's lack of precise guidance on evaluating the physical form, these documents are suited to appreciate the physical form of Wong's Market in its current condition.

### **5.2.5. Subjectivity and mutability**

At the same time, significant challenges exist in some of the key aspects of how the FHC and the VHP conceptualize heritage. This is particularly the case when we apply them to a case study, such as Wong's Market. The two ideas that (1) heritage is a social construct, and (2) that heritage values change over time both relate to how governments can evaluate heritage for official recognition. Both say something about how their jurisdiction views heritage. That is, heritage means different things to different groups. What constitutes heritage changes throughout history. An individual at a moment in time cannot account for the vagaries of subjectivity and mutability and confidently arrive at one "correct" evaluation outcome. These concepts do not neatly translate into criteria to be used as an evaluation tool. To better account for subjectivity and mutability, an evaluator would need to consider factors beyond the scope of the evaluation alone, such as the political and economic context, the needs of those who manage and care for the site, and any commemorative or development plans for the site.

### **5.2.6. Framework for History and Commemoration and Vancouver Heritage Program Evaluation Summary**

To summarize Wong's Market's evaluation according to the FHC and the VHP, these documents do allow for recognition of the tangible and intangible value of Wong's Market. The building and the stories associated with it are aligned with several of the priorities outlined in these documents, such as an emphasis on intangible heritage, highlighting ethnocultural diversity, and acknowledging historical wrongs. Although these documents lack specificity as to how they would evaluate tangible heritage, that is, heritage buildings, this lack of specificity allows for the flexibility to recognize the current physical form of Wong's Market and how this form relates to its story over time. The documents leave room for subjectivity around what constitutes heritage. Importantly, according to my assessment, an evaluation system based on these documents is well-positioned to confer official heritage recognition to Wong's Market.

### **5.3. Discussion and Conclusion**

This analysis reveals that both the existing VHR Evaluation Methodology from the 1980s and the more recent FHC and VHP would allow for official heritage recognition of Wong's Market. Although the existing methodology places greater emphasis on aesthetic, tangible heritage values than intangible, cultural values, Wong's Market's cultural values give it enough significance to be given heritage status according to both of these systems. The FHC and the VHP do not provide set criteria as the existing methodology does. Using Wong's Market as a case study to compare the two, however, has revealed the differences between the existing methodology and the newer policies. The existing methodology, although its criteria are open to interpretation, attempts to fit evaluation into a systematic process that results in some degree of consistency and predictability as to how the City evaluates buildings for inclusion on its heritage register. The FHC and the VHP, by contrast, are more forthcoming about the subjective nature of heritage and do not prioritize consistency and predictability.

The FHC includes "strategic priorities" and the VHP includes "goals," signaling that they have a position. Although the existing methodology privileges architectural, aesthetic elements of a place, it is not explicit about the fact that it is doing this. It does not transparently state that aesthetics is a "goal," but this is implied in the way the criteria

are written. The existing methodology's silence on its goals and priorities implies the perspective of privileging aesthetics as self-evident. This is the fundamental departure between the two: the existing methodology does not call out the subjective nature of heritage whereas the newer policies do. Since I conducted this analysis myself, my worldview affected my interpretation of the methodology and policies. Nevertheless, it is clear that both systems result in recognizing Wong's Market's heritage value.

## Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1. Discussion

The building that stands at 5993 Main Street in Vancouver is of a modest design, lacking architectural distinction. Although it has stood at the corner of Main Street and East 44th Avenue since 1911, alterations over its history have removed much of the evidence of its status as an Edwardian-era building. Nevertheless, the building's function as a retail store and apartment is apparent in its design. 5993 Main Street, commonly known as Wong's Market, has continually evolved to meet the needs of the surrounding neighbourhood. From its beginning as a post office and general store that sold dynamite for blowing up tree stumps from the recently-cleared land in South Vancouver, it later served as a grocery store and finally as a convenience store. Notably, Wong's Market was a site of racial marginalization, having been seized by the Government of Canada from its Japanese-ancestry owners in 1942 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour. In its current appearance, it invokes the layers of history it represents with its mix of features exemplifying different periods in time.

Despite its noteworthy history paralleling the development of the city, it is not officially recognized as a heritage site by the City of Vancouver. As Vancouver continues to grow, the neighbourhood surrounding Wong's Market will likely redevelop to accommodate higher population densities. Wong's Market's thus has the potential to provide continuity and foster a sense of place among long-term residents. The store remains closed at the time of writing (February 2023). Although there are currently no publicly announced plans for its reopening, numerous possibilities can be imagined for its reincarnation as a new business. Reflecting its resilience throughout its history, Wong's Market can remain an integral part of the neighbourhood as it develops in the future.

As my research demonstrated, historic neighbourhood retail stores such as Wong's Market are common in many North American cities and are typically well-liked by residents. Due to the histories they are associated with, as well as their human-scaled design and fostering of longstanding social connections, they are regarded as part of many communities' heritage. Nevertheless, as the case study of Wong's Market demonstrates, they are not necessarily officially recognized as heritage sites. In the case

of Wong's Market, its lack of heritage recognition is likely due to its modest architecture. The City of Vancouver's Heritage Inventory (1986) was initially compiled via a "windshield survey" in which consultants selected buildings for heritage recognition based primarily upon their aesthetic quality. At the same time that the City of Vancouver created its first Heritage Inventory, it also created a methodology for evaluating heritage buildings. This methodology is still in use today, and gives more points to aesthetic heritage values than to intangible cultural values. Several criteria in the methodology also are tailored to recognize heritage associated with more elite groups rather than ordinary people. For example, a building scores more points if it is designed by a famous architect. These are criteria not best tailored to capturing the cultural values associated with a place like Wong's Market.

In recent years, the way that Canadian jurisdictions define heritage has shifted away from a primary focus on tangible heritage associated with white elites, to foster greater inclusivity and focus on intangible heritage. Recent policies, the Parks Canada's Framework for History and Commemoration (2019) and the City of Vancouver's Vancouver Heritage Program (2020), emphasize intangible heritage values and the cultural diversity of Canada and of Vancouver, and define heritage as subjective and ever-changing. Considering this new policy, the City recognizes the limitations of how it identified heritage properties in the past. Both the FHC and the VHP contain commitments to address gaps in heritage commemoration through community engagement. The FHC and the VHP (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 13) argue for working with communities whose composition reflects their jurisdictions' diversity in identifying and safeguarding heritage resources. Despite these assertions, both the Government of Canada (Government of Canada, 2022) and the City of Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 1986) have not updated their methodologies for evaluating buildings since the 1980s.

As my analysis reveals, however, Wong's Market could qualify for addition to the Vancouver Heritage Register according to the current, 1986 methodology, but only barely. It could also be granted official heritage recognition according to recent heritage policies, the FHC and the VHP. Because Wong's Market is a simple, vernacular building that has been owned and occupied by working class people, it qualifies for addition to the Vancouver Heritage Register at the lowest level, a 'C' listing, despite its significant history and cherished role as a neighbourhood-serving business. This finding demonstrates that the methodology communicates a conception of heritage as being

aesthetically- and elite-oriented. Wong's Market's heritage value does not align with those criteria.

If it is the case that both the 1980s and present-day systems can recognize the heritage value of Wong's Market, then why has it been overlooked by established processes for recognizing heritage sites in the City of Vancouver? As discussed earlier, the original Heritage Inventory was compiled by consultants based on visual inspection. Since that time, the City has not comprehensively updated its heritage register to reflect its present heritage values. It has not updated the VHR despite committing to do so as part of the Vancouver Heritage Program:

“The VHR Upgrade and associated Council report will be completed in 2020/21 after further community consultation, including self-directed input from xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, Urban Indigenous People and systemically excluded ethnocultural communities of Vancouver is received. This additional planning work requires community engagement to address Reconciliation and Equity initiatives, outlined in Culture|Shift & Making Space for Arts and Culture (ACCS) delivered through Vancouver Plan public consultation” (City of Vancouver, 2020a, p. 2).

At the time of writing (February 2023), there is no progress update on this work posted on the City's website. This delay suggests that there are challenges to realizing the commitments outlined in the VHP.

Further, even if governments gather and respond to community contributions, the FHC and the VHP are silent on how these contributions could meaningfully translate into a new heritage evaluation process that takes into account all voices while at the same time fitting into a streamlined and transparent process that is comprehensible for property owners, the development industry, and residents of Vancouver. Land use policies, including heritage registers, are in place for municipalities to communicate how lands may be developed. Defining heritage as being subjective and constantly changing is at odds with the function of a Council-adopted land use policy.

At the same time, the FHC and the VHP play an important role in redressing past harms by governments against equity-deserving groups. They acknowledge that in the context of ethnocultural and socioeconomic diversity, not everyone will agree on what constitutes “heritage,” and that societal attitudes change over time. By doing so, and by acknowledging historical wrongs, the governments address their legacies of privileging



white, elite heritage. Policies such as these are significant in communicating that the Government of Canada and the City of Vancouver value ethnocultural and socioeconomic diversity.

Nevertheless, the City of Vancouver continues to use a heritage evaluation methodology that is nearly 40 years old and is misaligned with recent policies designed to inform heritage evaluations. Wong's Market may narrowly be eligible for recognition under this current methodology, but significant inconsistencies still exist between the methodology and more recent policies. As my research suggests, fitting the principles of the VHP and the FHC into a prescribed methodology for evaluating any heritage building is not possible because of the complexities it would need to capture and accommodate. Nevertheless, the data suggest the possibility of bringing the VHR into closer alignment with the VHR (Heritage Planner), perhaps via providing criteria to measure how a place is valued by a community presently (Community Volunteer 2), but not to the extent that all complexities can be satisfactorily resolved.

Further, the findings of this research suggest that heritage registers, as a planning tool, are not well tailored to protect intangible heritage according to current legislation. The Vancouver Charter is the provincial legislation that gives the City of Vancouver its powers to identify and protect heritage properties. At present, only real property, the land and improvements thereon, can be listed on a heritage register. As my research also suggests, the applicability of heritage registers as a land use planning tool to real property alone makes sense because intangible heritage is dynamic. Placing something on a heritage register requires providing reasons to do so, and those reasons represent a snapshot in time. The case study of Wong's Market demonstrates that intangible heritage value has to be adaptable, exemplified by the changing types of businesses housed within the Wong's Market building throughout its history. If the City of Vancouver forced it to remain as one type of business with certain prescribed characteristics and selling certain products, it would probably not continue to operate as a business or be successful in meeting community needs. This approach contrasts with that accorded tangible heritage values, such as architectural features, that can be protected while still supporting new uses for a building that allow it to continue to exist in perpetuity, assuming it is properly maintained.

The Wong's Market building, as real property and as a tangible feature in the urban landscape, is the representation of its longstanding existence in the neighbourhood, and therefore its heritage value. Because its form is a manifestation of the layers of history and activities that have taken place there, its tangible and intangible heritage cannot be separated. Indeed, as one interview participant pointed out, they do not consider tangible and intangible heritage as separate concepts (Heritage Consultant). Although the data suggest that much of the heritage value of small neighbourhood retail stores, like Wong's Market, are attributable to intangible aspects such as their historical associations and utility to communities, the data also suggest that the buildings that house them are important too. The same small businesses could be relocated to a new development, but "it might take away that special element of it that you feel in... [a] close community environment" (Heritage Consultant).

The tangible thus allows the intangible to be protected. Because of the mutually-supporting nature of tangible and intangible heritage, it is possible that relatively minor changes to the City of Vancouver's heritage evaluation methodology can go a long way toward bringing the VHR into greater alignment with community values. The City Council can develop a more meaningful VHR without changing legislation or implementing onerous processes to capture the subjective and contested nature of heritage.

## **6.2. Conclusion**

Through the FHC and the VHP, the Government of Canada and the City of Vancouver communicate their intention to bring greater emphasis to intangible heritage and enshrine that heritage is subjective and mutable. As UNESCO proclaims, "the strategies for safeguarding tangible heritage cannot be transferred mechanically to the effort to safeguard intangible cultural heritage" (Tangible and Intangible Heritage, 2022). Indeed, heritage legislation such as the Vancouver Charter, which includes tools like heritage registers that only allow for the recognition and protection of physical places, are not suited for recognizing and safeguarding intangible heritage. These tools involve enshrining heritage values as they are in a snapshot in time, and therefore do not accommodate the ever-changing nature of intangible heritage.

Nevertheless, my case study of Wong's Market, a historic neighbourhood retail store, has illustrated the role of recognition of tangible heritage in supporting intangible

heritage, and demonstrated the interconnection between the tangible and the intangible. To illustrate this connection, my research has broken new ground by applying place attachment theories to the heritage field. According to Jones and Evans (2012), “buildings in the urban landscape are not inert actors, but are woven into spatiotemporal waves of associations” (p. 2321). Further, people form a sense of place through the social interactions they have in places (Jones & Evans, 2012, p. 2318). As my findings revealed, people cherish historic neighbourhood retail stores because of the social connections that can be formed through shopping at a small business where people can meet the same staff and fellow patrons on a regular basis, particularly when contrasted with corporate chain alternatives (Historian).

Additionally, when these small businesses are housed within older buildings in neighbourhoods, this co-location fosters a sense of continuity contributes to the favourable experience of shopping at such businesses (Heritage Consultant). This finding is consistent with Jones and Evans’ work on place attachment in that they found that following physical redevelopment of neighbourhoods, it takes time for residents’ sense of place to rebound in that space (Jones & Evans, 2012, p. 2321). My research has made the connection between sense of place and the interconnectivity between tangible and intangible heritage, and how buildings support the practices that constitute intangible heritage.

The case study of Wong’s Market and its being left out of established processes for recognizing places of heritage significance in Vancouver shows how despite the new conceptions of heritage articulated in the FHC and the VHP, the City of Vancouver’s heritage register is still not fully reflective of places that the community cares about. As my findings suggest, “the current City of Vancouver heritage register does not represent a lot of communities” (Heritage Consultant), evidenced by the City staff’s lack of awareness of places of significance to particular ethnocultural communities such as the “food hub for the Philippine community on Joyce Street” (Community Volunteer 1). Previous literature has identified that heritage is not neutral (Smith, 2006). In the Vancouver context, this has meant that elite British architectural aesthetics have dominated the landscape of what is considered “heritage” (Lu, 2000, p. 23) despite the longstanding multicultural nature of the city, particularly its high populations of Asian residents since colonization (Yu, *Global Migrants and a New Pacific Canada*, 2009, p.

1013). Although the FHC and the VHP represent advancement away from the emphasis on elite aesthetics, my findings demonstrate that this has not yet been achieved.

Acknowledging the increasing attention paid to intangible heritage within the heritage conservation field, previous studies have proposed new models for heritage evaluation. They attempt to capture the significance of places in a meaningful and comprehensive manner and try to account for the subjective and ever-changing nature of heritage. They also aim to mitigate the challenges posed by more inclusive models to rigorous decision making. For example, the values-based assessment proposed by Mason claims to offer a “deliberate, systematic, and transparent process of analyzing and assessing all the values of heritage” (Mason, 2002, p. 5). Further, the narrative model proposed by Walter purports not to suffer from the matter of competing values, because diverse perspectives can be articulated within one story (Walter, 2014, p. 646). The problem with these models is that despite their attempts to incorporate subjectivity into a model that can be applied to heritage evaluations in real-life situations, there still exists the question as to who gets to decide what the values are and what the community’s story is. As my findings suggest, “ideas of what constitutes heritage have... become more complex than they were (Historian). Additionally, heritage evaluations are fraught with “tensions” (Community Volunteer 1).

### **6.2.1. Policy Recommendations**

Considering these conclusions, I offer the following recommendations:

#### **1. Guidance on evaluating privately owned properties**

It is recommended that:

*Parks Canada provide specific guidance to municipalities on how they should undertake heritage evaluations of privately-owned properties*

In recognition that municipalities are responsible for regulating land use of private property, and that municipalities look to federal heritage policies to inform their own heritage policies, Parks Canada should make recommendations on how to evaluate privately owned heritage resources.

The *2019 Framework for History and Commemoration* (FHC) emphasizes the diversity of worldviews that exist among the Canadian populace and that these inform people's perspectives on what governments officially recognize as heritage but does not offer tools to help municipalities organize these diverse values and use them to make decisions about how to recognize and commemorate heritage in their communities.

## **2. Put Parks Canada policy into action**

It is recommended that:

*The next edition of the Parks Canada System Plan must include specific actions required to advance the goals contained within it*

The 2019 FHC does not include tools municipalities can use to inform heritage evaluations. If Parks Canada deems it a priority for heritage commemorations to reflect the diversity of the country, then the Government of Canada should fund municipalities to engage the broader public in identification of heritage resources in their communities, and specifically to attract people from historically marginalized groups to participate in conversations about community heritage resources.

## **3. Federal government funding for cherished places**

It is recommended that:

*The Government of Canada fund conservation of historic places that are not attractive candidates for private sector investment, such as places with minimal architectural value that are nevertheless cherished by communities*

Funding to commemorate places with greater intangible values than aesthetic values, and representative of the diversity of the country would assist in realizing the goals outlined in the 2019 FHC.

## **4. New evaluation methodologies**

It is recommended that:

*The City of Vancouver and Parks Canada update their heritage evaluation methodologies to be better aligned with their current policies*

The new methodologies should contain a set of criteria better able to recognize nondescript places. For example, the points allocated to architecture and architects should be reduced. Criteria should be introduced to measure the place's contribution to place attachment among residents.

## **5. Continued recognition for tangible heritage**

It is recommended that:

*The City of Vancouver and Parks Canada continue to support the recognition of tangible heritage resources by continuing to commemorate buildings as heritage resources*

Greater recognition of intangible heritage should not come at the cost of reduced recognition of tangible heritage. Intangible heritage needs places where it can happen, and protecting tangible places provides an arena for people to carry out their ways of life. Governments should continue to maintain and fund programs for conservation of tangible heritage.

## **6. Intergovernmental cooperation and communication**

It is recommended that:

*All levels of government cooperate to work toward a complementary approach to heritage evaluations*

When updating heritage policies and heritage evaluation methodologies, each level of government should work together in consultation with their partners in other levels of government. Documents produced by each level of government should use consistent language that is also accessible for lay people.

## **7. Monitoring of heritage values represented in the Vancouver Heritage Register**

It is recommended that:

*City of Vancouver staff monitor the heritage values that are recognized in the Vancouver Heritage Register and how these change over time*

Staff should record and analyze the values associated with places that are demolished and deleted from the VHR and the values associated with places that are newly added to VHR. This way, staff can learn and communicate to the public the extent to which the VHR is succeeding at recognizing the diverse heritage values of the city.

## **8. Continued updating of Heritage Registers**

It is recommended that:

*Municipalities such as the City of Vancouver update their heritage registers regularly*

Heritage Registers should be updated to remain reflective of what a community values in the present. These updates should be based on feedback from community members and the findings from the monitoring suggested in recommendation #7 above.

### **6.2.2. Suggestions for further research**

One limitation of my research includes that it did not involve participation of community stakeholders to explore what they value about neighbourhood grocery stores such as Wong's Market. Interviewing stakeholders in this area would enhance the understanding of the intangible heritage value of Wong's Market. Future research on related topics could study completed heritage conservation projects and compare outcomes where tangible heritage conservation supports safeguarding of intangible heritage and with outcomes where it does not.

### **6.2.3. Summary**

In summary, I have used the case study of Wong's Market to illustrate the disconnect between the City of Vancouver's current definitions of heritage and the ways in which it actually evaluates potential heritage sites in practice. Wong's Market is a place that provides a tangible reminder of historical wrongs against Canadians of Japanese ancestry, and that has a rich history paralleling the development of the city.

Despite the disconnect between the FHC and the VHP, and the current heritage evaluation process in Vancouver, both systems could result in official recognition of Wong's Market as a heritage site. Therefore, my findings suggest that recognition of tangible heritage values is still relevant even though the literature establishes the shortcomings of a focus on tangible heritage. UNESCO has recognized that “there is the possibility of adopting integrated approaches to safeguarding the tangible and intangible heritage of communities and groups in ways that are consistent and mutually beneficial and reinforcing” (Tangible and Intangible Heritage, 2022). The case study of Wong's Market demonstrates that the physical fabric of a place supports the activities within it that constitute the intangible heritage of a community. Because, on balance, it is easier and more predictable to evaluate tangible heritage than intangible heritage, tangible evaluations still offer a worthwhile avenue to accommodate heritage into a streamlined process, as well as to safeguard places that are meaningful to communities.



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