Wells, British Columbia Economic Development Initiative

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Objectives and Methods

The town of Wells illustrates a significant period in the industrial, urban planning and architectural history of British Columbia. A remarkable resource of historic buildings remains, but the town is in need of important upgrading and cohesive development.

Because the town is situated in an active historic and recreational tourist region, economic trends indicate that tourism will continue to grow as the focus for immediate and future development in Wells. Therefore the existing historic and cultural features of Wells should be promoted and enhanced to develop a coherent and marketable town image.

The objective of this report is to create a database or "heritage inventory" that can be used to help guide development and promote the cultural and historical aspects of the community, making it more attractive to investment while at the same time encouraging increased tourism.

To develop this report the following tasks were undertaken:

- Research on the historical and cultural aspects of the community, including a review of the relevant literature and previous planning documents.

- A survey of the heritage resources of Wells in order to provide a blueprint for suggested signage, public space and structural upgrades.

- A survey of key business, social and political figures in Wells in order to come up with said blueprint for suggested signage, public space and structural upgrades.

- Analysis of the above information to develop a document that provides suggestions for suggested signage, public space and structural upgrades.

The product, this document, is to be used to:

- Help lead to the enhancement and restoration of the 1930's mining town theme in Wells; and thereby lead to increased investment, tourism, and commercial development in the area.

The long-term impacts of the Wells, British Columbia Economic Development Initiative are:

- Increased commercial development and tourism in the area of Wells, Barkerville and Bowron Lakes, contributing to a stronger local economy and community vitality and sustainability.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed in the preparation of the Wells, British Columbia Economic Development Initiative. Particular thanks goes to the Wells Historical Society, the Wells Museum and the District of Wells. Without their deep and specific knowledge and guidance this project would have been impossible.

Thanks also goes out to all of the various business, social and political figures in Wells who helped to come up with list of suggested signage, public space and structural upgrades.

Town of Wells – An overview

Wells is situated in a narrow valley 74 kilometers east of Quesnel British Columbia, on Highway 26, which ends eight kilometers further west at Barkerville Historic Town. The town is nestled in the scenic Cariboo Mountains at an elevation of 1,371 meters, at the confluence of the Willow River and historic Williams Creek.

The town was planned by the Wells Townsite Company, a subsidiary of the Cariboo Gold Quartz Mine Company. It was constructed between 1934 and 1936 as a settlement to house the miners and their families. Peak population in the community was 4500, dropping to 300 when the last shaft of the Gold Quartz Mine closed in 1967. After that time the community came under the legal jurisdiction of the Cariboo Regional District until Wells incorporated in 1998.

The present economy is based on a limited amount of hard rock and placer mining, logging and most importantly, tourism.

Today, Wells is a quiet but well preserved mining town situated in an area of rich historic, recreational, cultural and ecological value. The significance of its architectural resources derives from the type of the buildings and from the original town plan: a close grouping of streets and buildings, which foster a strong sense of community. The importance of its heritage resources lies particularly in their complementary relationship to Barkerville Historic Town, the largest heritage site in western North America.

The economic climate in Wells has been growing slowly over the past decade, and in the past five years commercial activity has shifted from the historic center of the townsite, to the highway leading to Barkerville. This new center caters to the summer tourist traffic, and has left the heart of the town looking for ways to improve its tourist draw.

Historic Significance of Wells

The settlement of British Columbia was precipitated by the discovery of gold in the Cariboo in 1862, and mining in the province has continued as a major industry and colonizing force until the present. Many B.C. towns originated as mine settlements; some as ad hoc temporary boom towns, and later, a new form, the planned community. Barkerville Historic Town exemplifies the earliest boomtown, and Wells, the later company town.

The Cariboo Gold Rush initiated unorganized, ad hoc and transient, temporary settlements supported by low technology and small, single man operations; the Wells gold rush of 1930 introduced planned and permanent settlement supported by high technology and corporate organization.

Company towns were not new to British Columbia in the 1930's. With industrial capital investing in long term resource extraction, located in an isolated region; companies planned and constructed housing and community amenities to attract a labour supply. G.W. Taylor, in *Builder's of B.C. – An Industrial History*, summarizes this history.

> The boom years 1905-1913 witnessed not only expansion in the small towns around the province, but a comparatively new development – the company town. James Dunsmuir had experimented with this idea without much public acceptance in 1900 when he built Ladysmith. But the idea of building a factory and a town to house its workers on a site had never been tried in B.C. In this period, there were a number of such towns built – Powell River, Ocean Falls, Swanson Bay, Britannia Beach and Anyox. All depended upon some basic industry – pulp, paper, or mining. (p. 146/7 Taylor, as cited by Iredale, 1984)

Wells was originally constructed by the Cariboo Gold Quartz Company as the community to house and service its mine employees. Dr. Burnett, one of the Directors of the Company, explains to shareholders in 1934:

> "Now there is another interesting development there which I find has a reassuring effect to a good many people, that we are building a number of houses. We have from the early days of operations there favoured married men as employees. Well there are a number of reasons for that. One real good reason is that in these hard times a man who has a family to support needs a little bit of preference over the fellow who just has to rustle for himself. That is one reason, and that is a good reason. Then the other reason, which is a little more selfish on our part, when a man takes on the handicap of having to provide for a woman, we find that he gets himself pretty well tied up, and he makes quite suitable employee…
> Now there has been a great deal of complaint among the men and I think very justly, that we have not provided facilities for men who have their wives and families here in Vancouver and are not able to get them up there because there is no decent place to house them." (p. 5 Annual Report, 1934, as cited by Iredale, 1984)

The Wells Townsite Company was incorporated under the Companies Act on December 14, 1933 as a subsidiary of the Cariboo Gold Quartz Company. Its objective was to acquire land to build a townsite:

> To survey and subdivide the same and create and operate there on a town or village (the intention being to name it Wells) and to provide it with streets, sidewalks, light, water, telephones and adjunct necessary or proper or desirable…(Townsite Charter, as cited by Iredale, 1984)

In the fall of 1933, Fred Wells, discoverer of the Quartz gold vein and a new Director of the Company, called upon Eddie Richardson and Ted Baynes, University of British Columbia (U.B.C.) Engineering graduates and Gold Quartz Mine employees, to lay out the new town.

Richardson laid out Wells according to the best town planning practices he had learned at U.B.C. After Wells, he planned West Vancouver, Park Royal, and the British Properties. The layout of the town was dictated according to the topography of the site. The driest, solid land in the area was the knoll, and therefore the commercial street was laid out on it. This main commercial street was called Pooley Street. The residential area, known as Bowman Crescent, was sited above the main commercial street.

It was on this street that the "better class" of house was constructed, in which Fred Wells, the Townsite Engineer, Mine Superintendent and other "white collar" and management level employees lived.

The bulk of the residential property was laid out on the flats below the commercial street. Larger lots for "better" but privately-owned houses were to be on the western perimeter of town. A major block in the middle of the flatland residential section was left whole for the development of a school, schoolyard and community sports facilities.

The density of the town and the size of the lots were determined by a variety of factors. The Townsite Company had a limited budget and sought to install and maintain utilities as easily and inexpensively as possible. Dense lots allowed a great number of households to tie into a smaller system. Also, most miners did not own a car in the 1930's. Proximity of houses to the commercial district facilitated ease of movement and daily activities.

Yet another reason for the high density was the climate. The climate in Wells was generally too cool for the gardens often encouraged in company towns, so there was no need for the large lots used to accommodate this. And finally, a densely laid out town encouraged good neighbours and created a sense of community.

Construction began on community buildings in 1934, with the first buildings being the Townsite Office on Pooley Street, and Ed and Mae Richardson's house. During the next two years a modern hospital, large school, a community centre and 40 houses were constructed by the company.

The Townsite Company continued operating under the auspices of the Quartz Mine until both closed in 1967. Townsite houses were sold to private people, the Community Hall was sold to the Wells Chamber of Commerce and the Hospital ceased operations and was sold privately. The provincial government now operates the school.

When looking at the construction of the townsite, certain distinctive features are evident. The town was constructed quickly, and has a marked uniformity of design. Buildings are remarkably standardized, the same plan being used in the construction of a number of buildings.

Commercial buildings are clustered in a defined centre, although this centre is larger than most company towns due to its independent nature. No one store dominates the street; instead the Wells Community Hall is the focal point, with various buildings branching out from its epicentre.

Although there has been an increase in investment, and a number of buildings and public spaces have been constructed or renovated over the past five years, the built environment of Wells remains frozen in the 1930's. False fronts, the wooden boardwalk, and the density of the buildings create a picturesque townscape of merit, aesthetically, culturally and historically.

A major concern is that a number of the buildings and public need upgrading. Without maintenance and attention, these buildings and public spaces will continue to deteriorate and take away from the 1930's feel of Wells. This document will provide a plan to enhance and upgrade the heritage buildings and public spaces in the area.

Heritage Inventory

In order to decide which heritage buildings and public spaces need to be upgraded and enhanced, an inventory was undertaken. This work builds upon a previous heritage inventory conducted during the summer of 1983 and reported in Iredale (1984) and a heritage report compiled in 1990 by Judy Campbell. In the almost 20 years since the original inventory, there have been many changes to the community. Some heritage buildings have been lost; others have been completely restored. It was necessary to revisit this inventory and establish new priorities for heritage conservation based on current conditions. The current inventory also builds upon the *Wells Beautification Plan (Lazzarin, 2001)*. This document presents concept plans for the development of four public spaces in Wells. Further work was needed to prioritize these projects.

Included in the inventory is a brief overview of the primary types of architecture in Wells, followed by an evaluation of key heritage buildings and public spaces, and finally a list of priorities and recommendations to upgrade and enhance the buildings and public spaces in Wells.

Included in the recommendations section are suggestions for improving the attractiveness of existing buildings in Wells, a number of suggested generic signage guidelines and suggested development alternatives for various public spaces and parks.

Architectural Styles

Wells was constructed almost entirely within a period of three years. Consequently, the most marked aspect of the architecture is its uniformity. The following is a summary of architectural styles as discussed by Iredale in her 1984 master's degree thesis on Wells.

Frontier Buildings

Some of the first buildings in Wells were log structures, and because much of the community were of Scandinavian origin, and consequently excellent log builders, many of the later, privately constructed dwellings were log also. These buildings are characterized by dovetail notches and fitted logs, often the façade surfaces of the log was planed to create a flat surface, which could then be painted.

Boom Commercial

Wood frame, false fronted commercial structures are a form that first developed in the goldrush towns of California and appeared thereafter in gold towns from California to the Klondike. False fronts developed as a way to make basic frame and gable-roofed structures appear larger, more substantial and consequently wealthier than they actually were. Early B.C. towns from the 1860's to the 1930's were constructed using false fronts for their commercial buildings. This style characterizes the Wells commercial building stock.

Gothic Revival

The three churches in Wells make stylistic references to gothic revival architecture. The direct prototypes for the churches were other rural B.C. Churches.

Late Victorian Commercial

Although renovated in recent years, the Tudor design of the Wells hotel remains intact. The Tudor effect has historically been a popular mode in western Canada, and the Tudor design of the Wells Hotel may have been chosen for its associations with English mining town inns and pubs.

Proto Modern Domestic

The majority of Wells' residential buildings can be characterized as modern domestic cottages. These are extremely modest buildings, their detailing limited to simple brackets, exposed rafters and casing boards. The first of the company house contracts was let to Northey Construction of Vancouver. They build 24 houses. The next contract was let to Gardner Construction of Wells and Quesnel. They build larger, gable-roofed structures.

Inventory Criteria

A survey of the heritage resources of Wells was conducted as an initial step for this document. The area of the survey was defined by the boundaries of the original Wells Townsite as laid out by Ed Richardson, Wells Townsite Company Engineer in 1933. The Island Mountain Mine Site was also inventoried for its industrial heritage resources.

The survey and inventory provide the background to develop a plan for enhancement and upgrades of the heritage buildings and public spaces in the area and assist in ensuring that scarce financial and human resources are channelled into the most important projects.

The heritage buildings and public spaces were examined using the following criteria:

- Description of building or public space.
- Historical or cultural significance, as determined by Iredale, 1984.
- Current use and condition of building or public space.

The heritage buildings and public spaces were prioritized according to this system. Based on the results of the evaluation, the following ratings signify the following importance.

High Priority – Buildings and public spaces in need of immediate enhancements or upgrades.

Moderate Priority – Buildings and public spaces that are in good shape, or will need enhancements or upgrades within the next two years.

Lower Priority – Buildings and public spaces that do not need any significant upgrades or enhancements.

Survey and Evaluation

High Priority Heritage Buildings and Public Spaces

Deluxe Boarding House (Lot 11, Block 2) (Picture #1)

Operating as the Deluxe General Store for the majority of its existence, the Deluxe Boarding House is a large, false front building in a highly visible location on Pooley Street.

The Deluxe Café and Boarding House was constructed in 1935 across the street from its main competition, The Commodore Café and Hotel. The Deluxe was owned and operated by Wing, a descendant of a Chinese Cariboo Miner. It was bought by Louis Hong in the 1940's and was operated as the Deluxe General Store.

In recent years the expansion of the Wells Hotel saw a portion of the Deluxe Boarding House moved directly across the street from its original location, into the space once occupied by the Commodore Café and Hotel. Major additions and a small attached building that were between the Delux and the Wells Hotel were demolished at this time. The building sat vacant for a number of years and is currently used for temporary storage by the Wells Hotel.

The building is an anchor point of the streetscape on the Pooley Street and requires extensive and immediate upgrades. New paint, new plumbing, new wiring, and an improved foundation are all required. In addition signage relaying its historical and cultural significance needs to be added.

The Pacific 66 Building (Lot6 1, 2 & 3, Block 4) (Picture #2)

Originally constructed by Harry Joyce in 1935, the Pacific 66 Building operated as Johnson motors until 1938. In 1938 a garage was added to the building, and it took its current form.

The Pacific 66 Building operated continuously as a garage until the 1980's, at which time it was sold and shut down. The building was purchased by a local contractor and is currently used as a workshop.

Although structural upgrades have been undertaken, the building requires extensive and immediate upgrades. New paint, new plumbing, new windows, new wiring, and signage relaying its historical and cultural significance all need to be added. Its key location at the corner of Pooley Street and Sanders Avenue make it another key anchor in the streetscape.

Island Mountain Kitchen (Bakery) Building (D.L. 5712) (Picture #3)

This building was built in 1933 and was used by the Island Mountain Mines as their kitchen and dining hall. There was a clear span area across the front of the building that was used as the dining area, with kitchen behind and living quarters upstairs. This building is highly visible from the Barkerville Highway and is an important heritage structure in Wells.

The building has sat vacant or been used exclusively for storage for the past 20 years, although the new owners have plans to restore the building to accommodate a music studio and living quarters.

Although minor structural and aesthetic upgrades have been undertaken, the building requires extensive and immediate upgrades. A new foundation, new plumbing, new windows, new wiring, and signage relaying its historical and cultural significance all need to be added.

The Miner's Union Hall (Lot 6, Block 4) (Picture #3)

The former home of the Wells Museum, and now the home of the Wells Wooden Products, this building was originally constructed to house a Chinese laundry. This venture didn't last very long, and the building soon became the home of the Wells Miners Union Hall (c. 1940).

With the closure of the mines the building sat vacant for a number of years before eventually becoming the Wells Museum in 1974. The museum moved into their new home in the early 1990's, and the building is now leased to Wells Wooden Products.

The building requires extensive and immediate upgrades. New paint, new plumbing, new wiring, and a complete foundation are all required. In addition signage relaying its historical and cultural significance needs to be added.

Wells Hotel (Lots 1, 2 & 3, Block 5) (Pictures #5 and #6)

The Wells Hotel is the largest and most imposing building on the main street of Wells, and is the centrepiece of the commercial streetwall. Its masonry finish and style establish a sense of permanence missing from the other frame buildings. Its importance as a landmark can't be over emphasized.

The Wells Hotel was the first hotel constructed on the townsite. Construction of the hotel commenced in the summer of 1934, and the 17- room Wells Hotel opened on November 13, 1934. In 1939 an addition was built containing eight rooms with private bath and an enlarged beverage room.

The Wells Hotel was refurbished and expanded in 1996. The renovations included reopening the Wells Hotel Pub, and refurbishing all the rooms and kitchen. However, the plan was to expand the hotel even further, and to do this the Deluxe Boarding House, which was situated next to the hotel, was moved across the street, and a foundation for an addition was started. Unfortunately the project never came to fruition, and currently there is an empty foundation located next to the hotel.

As well as needing the addition to be completed, the Wells Hotel needs other upgrades. Significant foundation work needs to be completed, the hotel needs to be repainted, and additional signage relaying its historical and cultural significance needs to be added.

Island Mountain Mine Site Industrial Buildings (portion of D. L. 5899 and Lot 1, Plan 32374) (Pictures #7 and #8)

The Island Mountain Mine site is composed of the remnants of hard rock mining activity, tailings, the ruins of some operation buildings and the new Wells Museum and Tourist Information Centre. This site is highly visible from the Barkerville Highway, the main highway entering Wells.

The mine was developed in 1933 and continued until August 15, 1954. During this period 812,000 tons of .43 oz. gold ore were milled. Dividends to shareholders totalled $1,518,283.

At one time there were seven buildings standing at the Island Mountain Mine Site, currently only three remain. Of the three that remain two are in dire need of extensive and immediate upgrades. These include the former Assay office, and bunkhouse.

The remaining buildings require significant structural upgrades, including: new foundations, new insulation, new flooring, new wiring, new plumbing, new windows, new roofs, new doors, new paint and additional signage relaying their historical and cultural importance.

Former Gold Quartz Hospital Building (Block 16, D.L. 289) (Picture #9)

The former home of the Gold Quartz Hospital is sited high above the town, and is highly visible both because of its size and location. This, and its importance to the life of the community warrant it landmark status.

Part of the Gold Quartz program to attract a stable population and labour supply to Wells included the construction of a good hospital. The medical program included a large maternity facility and regular check-ups for the miners. The building was constructed in late 1935 by Northey Construction of Vancouver, and officially opened on January 15th, 1936.

Of modern construction throughout, the building could accommodate nine patients on the main floor, in addition to a large well-lighted operating room, X-ray room, nursery and kitchen. When the mines closed down the building sat vacant, and was eventually turned into apartments.

The building currently needs enhancements and upgrades to convey its important cultural and historical role in the community. These include new paint, and signage relaying its historical and cultural importance.

The Fred Wells House (Lot 21 & 22, Block 2) (Picture #10)

This bungalow is rather unassuming given it was the home of the town founder. However, Fred Wells was often preferred a rough camp in the field and his housekeeper and chauffeur, the Schnoxells occupied the house. It is unique that it was not built in the style of the company houses and has strong references to the 'Craftsman' period of design.

The house is in poor condition and currently vacant. It needs a new foundation and interior repairs, new paint and signage relaying its historical and cultural importance.

The "Old Ball Diamond" Public Space (Lot 10351) (Picture #11)

Used by the town of Wells as a ball diamond for a number of years, this 7.1-acre parcel sits at the entrance to Wells. This site is reclaimed lake bed. This end of Jack O' Clubs lake was in-filled with mill tailings from the gold mines. In the late 1980s, these tailings were found to contain high levels of arsenic, and were subsequently covered with 28 inches of clean gravel fill, as part of a Ministry of Environment reclamation program. The sites location at the entrance to the community, make it a high priority. Currently undeveloped crown land, this public space needs immediate development in order to provide an attractive entrance to the town of Wells.

Jack o'Clubs Lake Pullout Public Space (unsurveyed) (Picture #12)

Located at the end of Jack o'Clubs Lake, just before the entrance to Wells, this 1.9-acre parcel of crown land is used for housing community information, and needs upgrading and development. Like the 'Ball Diamond" the whole pullout area was constructed with tailings from the mines in Wells. As well, its location on the approaches to the community make it a high priority for beautification.

Moderate Priority Heritage Buildings and Public Spaces

Good Eats Café (Lot 21, Block 3) (Picture #13)

The Good Eats Café is the only wooden-framed flatiron building still standing in British Columbia and one of the province's most photographed and painted buildings.

The building was constructed in 1935 by Ira Mooney, a carpenter, and two businesses originally occupied the premises, Buck's Barber shop at the front, and Betty's Beauty Parlour in the rear. In 1959 the building was converted to the Good Eats Café, and remained as such for many years.

The building was restored in the early 1990's, however due to its significance it is still in need of enhancement and upgrades. Some of the work that needs to be done is an immediate paint job and signage relaying its historical and cultural significance.

The Gardner Building (Pcl 1, Plan 38433) (Picture #14)

This large two-story building located directly behind the Wells Hotel on Sanders Avenue is a landmark building that sets the commercial tone of the street.

Constructed in late 1938 by Garvin Dezell Contractors for the Quartz Mine Company, this was the major office building for the town. It opened in 1939 with the second story occupied by the Townsite Company office and Lawyer Hub King. The first floor contained the Royal Bank and, in the rear, the R.C.M P.

In recent years the building has been used as a Bed and Breakfast, and stucco now covers the wooden exterior. Some of the work that needs to be done includes the removal of the stucco, a paint job, and signage to relay its historical and cultural significance.

Wells Community Hall (Lots 24, 25 & 26, Block 4) (Pictures #15 and #16)

The Wells Community Hall is the largest building in town. It is situated on Sanders Street, and establishes the character of the street as commercial. It has a lower visibility for a visitor than Pooley Street buildings do, but this is compensated for by monumentality, marking it as an important town building.

As a social, cultural and visual landmark for the townspeople, it is a building of major importance in the concept and plan of the town. The Hall was designed by Ed Richardson, and construction was started in 1937. The opening on January 4th, 1938 was a major community event, with imported entertainment and inaugural dance. Since that day all major social functions in the community have occurred in the Community Hall.

In recent years, thanks to the hard work of numerous dedicated volunteers, the Wells Community Hall has undergone major structural renovations. The only work that still

remains unfinished is cosmetic in nature. This includes a new paint job, new windows and signage to relay the historical and cultural significance.

District of Wells Building (Lot 28, Block 4) (Picture #17)

The current home of the District of Wells, this building was originally constructed in 1935, and was home to Buckley's Pharmacy.

The pharmacy was run by the brother of the inventor of Buckley's Mixture Cough Syrup. After the pharmacy the building housed a number of different businesses, including The Thrifty Hardware Store, Sui Mings Oriental Gift Shop, and Buckley's Pub.

When the District of Wells incorporated in 1998 they leased the building to serve as the home for the district offices. The building was renovated at that time, but still needs minor upgrading. Work that needs to be done includes a new foundation, paint job, interior finishing, and signage to relay the historical and cultural significance of the building.

Island Mountain Arts (Lot 4, Block 4) (Picture #18)

The current home of Island Mountain Arts, this building was originally the Hill Meat Market. Build by Harry Joyce in 1935, and managed by Lionel North as a butcher shop, the building was completely restored by Island Mountain Arts in 1987 for use as a gallery.

The renovation was very successful and the building is now perhaps the best example of an upgraded and enhanced heritage building in Wells.

Fred Wells Park Public Space (Lots 5, 6 & 7, Block 2) (Picture #19)

This .25-acre municipal park is located at the intersection of Pooley St. and Sanders Avenue. The cairn housed the ashes of Fred, of Fred Wells, founder of Wells and a memorial for injured workers. A kiosk for housing outdoor entertainment would enhance the park.

Willow River Parkette Public Space (Block 5 and 5A) (Picture #20)

This 2.4 acre parcel of crown owned land sits in the south east corner of the original Wells townsite, separating it from 'South Wells'. South Wells was developed by a separate townsite corporation during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The site is one to the trailheads for the walking trails which give access to the large meadow/wetland complex adjacent to Wells. The 'Meadows' was the site of many community activities. A golf

course and horseracing track were both constructed nearby, and today the marsh provides scenic views from the town knoll to the mountains. This space is an important connector between the two areas of the community and within walking distance of all major attractions in Wells. It could be enhanced and upgraded.
[note: this is not the helipad. We didn't include the helipad in the beautification plan because Crown Lands has consistently refused to give it to us under a Crown Grant.]

Lower Priority Heritage Buildings and Public Spaces

Amazing Space Studio & Gallery (Holy Rosary Catholic Church) (Lots 19 & 20, Block 1) (Picture #21)

The Amazing Space Studio & Gallery is situated in the deconsecrated former Holy Rosary Catholic Church. The gallery sits on the highest hill in Wells, a prominent landmark visible from the highway.

Holy Rosary was constructed in the early 1940's and had a later addition constructed in the mid-1940's. This building is the second Catholic Church in Wells. The first was situated on the tailings and later moved uptown into a converted house.

As the town's population diminished, the demand for the church was less and less. Holy Rosary Church sat empty for a number of years before it was purchased by Bill Horne and Claire Kujundzic in the early 1990s and has been fully converted into a working art studio and living space.

Pete & Diggers General Store (Old Wells Post Office)(Lots8& 9, Parcel B, Block2) (Picture #22)

This building was one of the first buildings built on the west side of Pooley Street. It was originally built to house the Pioneer General Store. By 1940 it was the home of the post office.

In 1989 the post office was closed, and the commercial space was eventually bought and transformed into a general store.

The post office moved back into the building in 1996. When the building was transformed into a general store extensive renovations were undertaken, however foundation repairs are still needed. This building is in good condition, and has been well maintained.

Marie Nagel Art Gallery (St. George's Anglican Church) (Lot 1&2, Block 2) (Picture #23)

Like the Catholic Church, St. George's Anglican Church has been deconsecrated, and is now an art gallery and studio.

The Anglican Church was built during the summer of 1935, funded in part by the Gold Quartz Company. It has very simple design, reminiscent of many small rural B.C. churches, and is strategically located overlooking Pooley Street, the main commercial street in Wells.

As Wells' population diminished, the need for the church was less and less. St. George's Anglican Church sat empty for a number of years until Marie Nagel purchased it in 1992. The church has been converted into a full time gallery and studio, housing art and crafts from right across British Columbia.

Company House Heritage Cluster (Lots 14, 25 & 16, Block 1) (Picture #24)

This group of four houses located on Bowman Crescent present a façade of town to visitors passing on the Barkerville Highway.

There density creates a sense of a destination point, and there identical form suggest that Wells is a company town. This sense is confirmed by glancing at the ruin of the Quartz Mine site across the lake.

These are all houses constructed in 1934 by the Northey Construction Company for the Wells Townsite Company. Each was leased by Gold Quartz employees for $18.00 a month. The siting of these houses meant that they were occupied by "higher priced help", such as tinsmith, electrician, mechanic, accountant, etc…These houses have all been purchased and renovated over the years, and are in good condition.

Bowman Crescent Heritage Cluster (Lot 16, 17, 18 & 19, Block 2) (Picture #25)

These houses create the core of the Bowman Crescent residential district, presenting a unified façade of large, attractive houses.

They are visible from the Barkerville Highway as the backdrop to the smaller foreground houses. As with the smaller houses, these were constructed in 1934 by the Northey Construction Company for the Wells Townsite Company. They were leased to administration level employees of the Gold Quartz Mine.

These houses have all been purchased and renovated over the years, and are in good condition.

Heritage Dovetail Log House (Lot 22, Block 1) (Picture #26)

This house is located next to the company housing heritage cluster on Bowman Crescent, and is visible, is obscurely, from the Barkerville Highway.

It is larger and of more affluent design than its company house neighbours, indicating a building of private design and construction. The owner and builder of the house were Ole Fardahl and Emil Hammer, both of Scandinavian origin. This house is in good condition.

The Flats Heritage Cluster (Block 6, Lots 13 – 24; Block 7, Lots 18 – 26; Block 8, Lots 1 – 12) (Picture #27)

These houses are located at the far end of Sanders Avenue, just north of the commercial district. Although there are some newer houses interspersed with the heritage houses, the majority of the houses in this part of town are townsite-constructed buildings.

These houses were constructed in 1934, once again by Northey Construction, and they were rented to Gold Quartz employees for $18.0 a month, including electricity. These houses have all been purchased and renovated over the years, and are in good condition.

Wells-Barkerville-Bowron Lakes Community School (Block 11) (Picture #28)

The first school in Wells was a one-room building; an early structure erected on the Wells Townsite.

A second school was constructed in the early 1940's. This was a four-room building, to which additions have been added creating the existing school building.

Thanks to the artistic and community involvement of the Island Mountain School of Arts a huge historical mural is painted on the side of the school's gym, providing a monument to Wells and the people who formed it. The building is in good condition.

Analysis of Heritage Inventory

The Heritage Inventory has revealed the need for enhancement and upgrading of commercial and public heritage buildings and public spaces in Wells.

Since the original heritage inventory in 1983, four commercial heritage buildings have been lost.

- Portions of the Deluxe Boarding House (Lot 4, Block 5) and the building beside it
- The Wells Wood Working Shop (original Overwaitea Store, Lot 19 & 20, Block 5)
- Wells Billiards (Lot 24, Block 3)
- Jack of Clubs Hotel (Lot 16/17, Block 3)

Given the consistent inclement weather, lack of resources, or simple neglect it is likely that more heritage buildings would have been lost over the last 20 years. That more have not, is due in part to the Development Permit Bylaw enacted when the original community plan was put in place in the mid 1980s. This bylaw establishes the "1930s Mining Town Theme" along Pooley and Sanders Avenue and along Highway 26. The bylaw ensures that no major changes can be made to a commercial building without obtaining a permit. Changes must conform to the design guidelines established in the bylaw. The bylaw further dictates that new buildings must conform to the design guidelines to ensure that they fit with the existing architecture. After incorporation, when the Community Plan was revisited in 1999/2000, the Development Permit Bylaw was retained as a heritage conservation tool.

However, numerous heritage buildings are underutilized in terms of their true historical and cultural significance. Of the 24 buildings, heritage clusters and public spaces studied 16 were in need of some type of enhancement.

These enhancements range from uniform changes that are needed across the board, such as new exterior paint, all the way to upgrades that are only needed on specific sites, such as new foundations.

The Inventory also shows an unfulfilled use of public space. This is important, because underutilized public space is detrimental to a town that is trying to market itself as a thriving, unique, and interesting place for tourists to visit.

The heritage inventory clearly establishes the Pooley Street commercial district as the most important commercial heritage district in town. This is in terms of remaining, quality heritage buildings, and as the historic heart of business and the future home of "history based tourism" in Wells.

The retention of the character of the Sanders Avenue commercial district is also very important. The groupings of buildings on Sanders Avenue provide a comfortable, attractive atmosphere that compliment the Pooley Street commercial district.

The heritage inventory also shows that although there have been a number of upgrades to heritage buildings over the past decade, most of these upgrades have been structural in nature, and there needs to be a consistent theme established and maintained.

Enhancement of the remarkable inventory of historic buildings present in Wells would create an active and living history experience for visitors. It is from this rich heritage that the town image could be more effectively developed and marketed.

An enhanced and marketable heritage theme is not only applicable to existing heritage buildings, but is transferable to newer commercial and public buildings in town.

Blueprint for Enhancement

Based on the findings of the heritage inventory, a select group of business, social and political figures in Wells was brought together to come up a blueprint for signage, public space and structural upgrades. Out of those meeting the following recommendations were agreed upon.

Improving the Attractiveness of Existing Buildings

Improving the attractiveness of existing buildings was seen by all as a very cost effective method of improving the visual and psychological impact of the community. The long-term impact of implementing these changes is an increase in commercial development and tourism in the area.

Improvements could range from exterior painting to façade upgrading, as well as lighting, new signage, murals and modest landscaping, such as installing seasonal hanging baskets.

One of the most recently painted heritage building in Wells, the former Hills Meat Market, now home to Island Mountain Arts, was seen as a good example of an existing building that has "street appeal" and beckons tourists to stop and browse.

The following guidelines were seen as being relatively inexpensive; yet extremely important in reinforcing the "1930's Mining Town Theme" in Wells.

- Renovating existing non-heritage buildings with false fronts, and ensuring that the existing heritage structures on Pooley Street and Sanders Avenue kept their false fronts.
- Ensure that building materials are consistent with the 1930's theme and materials. Examples are horizontal, narrow (3"-6") wooden siding.
- Ensure that windows are hung wood frame in design and multi-paned.
- Ensure that doors are wooden. Preferably multi-panel. Encourage inset store bays.
- Encourage a consistent 1930's colour scheme on buildings.
- Encourage a unity between sign types on businesses, creating a 1930's theme. (See signage section for more information).

The more businesses that were willing to buy into the guidelines, the greater the overall impact it will have on attracting tourists and commercial development to the area. In addition, the building enhancements would have two strategic purposes.

Firstly, it clearly identifies the extent of the shopping/commercial area. The second purpose is a psychological one. Most people, whether they are tourists or residents, find a clean, bright, attractive environment to be a highly satisfying juxtaposition. Residents take more pride in the community, investors are more likely to buy into an existing, marketable community, and tourists are more willing to stop and spend a longer period of time.

To implement these changes it was agreed that the majority of the desire and funding would have to come from the individual merchants and business owners. However, it was also noted that the District of Wells plays an important role, and may wish to consider implementing an incentive program to assist merchants. Such as:

- Applying for funding through various existing programs for grants to help pay for façade improvements.
- Initiate and coordinate a "bulk" purchase of various materials such as paint, to capitalize on economics of skill.
- Establish a student summer works program to assist in painting of existing municipal buildings, and possibly formulating a plan whereby the students are available for hire to small businesses for similar work.

Under the Heritage Conservation Act and municipal legislation, local government can also implement tax incentives as a method of encouraging heritage conservation.

Signage Guidelines

Although there wasn't a uniformity of opinion when signage guidelines were discussed, participants agreed that signage is an important tool that can enhance or detract from a visitor's impression of a community.

With that in mind four different types of signage were looked at. These include highway direction and safety signs, commercial advertising signs, community information signs, and building signage.

The Ministry of Transportation and Highways has sole control on highway direction and safety signs. With the remaining types of signage the District of Wells, merchants and property owners have more influence in the design, number, size and materials utilized in the signage development.

The following generic sign guidelines were found to be appropriate.

- The message must always be clear and concise. A motorist does not have time to read all the fine print. Symbols should be used over words when possible.
- The fewer signs the better. Merchants should not be competing against each other with bigger and bolder signs. Firstly too many signs will detract from the unique character of Wells, and secondly, the business owners should be working together to promote the community as a whole, as much as their individual businesses.
- There should be a unity between sign types. This is not meant to stifle the "individuality" or "creativity" of a merchant or business owner. Rather, the intent is to have merchants work together to promote the community. This can be partly achieved by recommending a few, broad standards for sign design and construction such as: size, clarity, theme, unity, durability and cost effectiveness.
- Signs must be attractive and well maintained. Signs assist or detract in developing a positive first impression of a community.

Other considerations include the ability of local firms to produce and maintain the signs, use of local products in the construction of the signs and sign supports, life span of the sign materials, and ease of maintenance.

It was agreed upon that the creation of "heritage signs" or "heritage plaques" to be added to all heritage buildings in Wells is a cost effective and necessary enhancement. These signs or plaques could either be mounted directly on the building itself, or self-supporting.

Development Blueprints for Public Spaces

As mentioned in the heritage inventory, there are several vacant crown and or municipal owned parcels within the community of Wells. It was agreed that the development of these high profile public spaces is necessary.

Taking into account the size of each parcel, site characteristics, proximity to services and utilities, reinforcing the "1930's Mining Town Theme" in Wells, and the community's desire for particular recreational facilities, the following ideas were discussed as possibilities.

Fred Wells Park

- Park signage, including history/plaque commemorating Fred Wells and founding of the park.
- Gazebo and information kiosk as the park's focal point.
- Renovation of the cairn.
- Handicap accessibility

Old Ball Diamond

- To be developed as the major community park.
- New home for the Wells Visitor Information Center.
- Stage/gazebo for larger musical, drama and community events.
- Lawn area for community events, picnics, and informal games/recreational activities.
- Static display of historical mining equipment.
- Attractive sign advertising businesses along Pooley Street.

Jack o'Clubs Lake Pullout

- Location for proposed entrance sign to Wells.
- Interpretive signs on the history of Wells.

- Boat launch to Jack o' Clubs Lake.
- Pavilion overlooking Jack o' Clubs Lake.
- Picnic sites.
- 21 stall parking lot

Willow River Parkette

- 18 stall parking lot to accommodate tourist access to existing businesses.
- Kiosk combined with information signs, maps, trail routes, handouts and upcoming community attractions.
- Picnic area.
- Trail system development and linkage to existing trails in the community.

The development of the above public spaces is an ambitious undertaking for any community. It is envisioned the majority of the funding would come from the municipality, with possible provincial government grants.

In all likelihood, park development will be phased in over a period of time, as funds become available.

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