

HERITAGE SITE REVIEW

SQUAMISH UNITED CHURCH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. DESCRIPTION	3
2.1 Site Context	3
2.2 Building Description	3
2.3 History	4
2.4 Condition	5
3. ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE	6
3.1 Architectural History	6
3.2 Cultural History	6
3.3 Context	6
3.4 Integrity	6
4. NEXT STEPS	7
RESEARCH SOURCES	9

I. INTRODUCTION

Subject Property: Squamish United Church
Address: 38014 Fourth Avenue, Squamish
Historic Name: Squamish Presbyterian Church
Date of Construction: 1921
Builder: Frank Scott, Designer and Contractor

This heritage review provides an overview of the heritage value of the original Squamish United Church that will assist the Congregation in assessing redevelopment options for the site. It provides an assessment of potential heritage significance, and ensures a high level of due diligence in the planning and redevelopment process. The review has included an initial physical assessment of the building, based on a site visit that examined the interior, exterior and site context. The building's origin and evolution over time has been described, including alterations and additions, based on historical information provided by the United Church and through other sources. This is followed by an evaluation of the building's significance.

The church site exists within the local planning context of downtown Squamish, an area that is currently growing through new community development. The neighbourhood where the church building stands is mature and as downtown expands, the built form of the neighbourhood will change to include additional higher density buildings.

Now that the heritage context of the building has been assessed, appropriate strategies can be developed to allow the United Church to proceed with site redevelopment options. Further detailed studies may be required of condition, costs and municipal requirements before final decisions are made.



From A Journey in Faith: The Story of Squamish United Church

2. DESCRIPTION

2.1 SITE CONTEXT

Squamish United Church is located on the edge of the downtown Squamish business district, on a large corner site that composes five lots facing Fourth Avenue. The original church building is set far back from the street on the southern half of the site. The building is still used on a limited basis by the Church, a few non-profit groups and a private pre-school. The newer building on the north half of the lot was opened in 1963 and serves as the current sanctuary space for the United Church. There is a large paved parking area in the middle of the lot, between the original church building and current sanctuary.

There are three historic churches in the neighbourhood, including: the United Church; the former Catholic Church one block to the south at 37970 Fourth Avenue; and the former St. John the Divine Anglican Church at 38018 Sixth Avenue, built in 1912. Each church is housed in a modest building and the levels of maintenance vary, with the Anglican Church appearing to be in fair to good condition, the original United Church building in fair to good condition and the Catholic Church appearing to be in fair to poor condition.



Anglican Church, 38018 6th Avenue



Catholic Church, 37970 4th Avenue

2.2 BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The original United Church building has generally been well maintained, though it has been altered since its original construction in 1921. Typical of the remote and industrial nature of the early development of the community, the original portion of the church is a very modest structure with little elaboration. The Church was originally designed as a simple rectangular structure, approximately 20 feet wide by 30 feet long. The roof is a shallow-pitched front gable, with a small, attached front gabled porch/vestibule. In 1951, an addition was constructed to the rear of the building for use as a hall, kitchen and washrooms, extending to the east and south and more than doubling the size of the original. The original front entry is now closed off and used for storage, and the entrance to the building is now on the north side, accessed from the parking lot.

The 1921 building retains the following original features:

- Form and roofline
- Wood frame structure and construction, including wooden lapped siding, cornerboards, pointed bargeboards, triangular eave brackets, exposed rafter tails, cedar shingles and louvre in the gable end, and rooftop steeple

- Double-hung wooden-sash windows, 6/1 configuration on each side of the front vestibule and 8/1 configuration, two on each side in the original sanctuary
- Some interior features such as 5-panelled wooden doors and a fir floor

The style of the building is extremely modest and utilitarian, reflective of the constraints and austerity of the time of its original construction. The 1951 additions were carried out in similar austere postwar conditions and match the original in detailing. The triangular eave brackets and simple detail reflect the late persistence of the Craftsman style, which had reached the height of its popularity prior to the First World War.



The original United Church building and its rear addition

2.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first religious service in the Squamish Valley was held in 1891, by the Rev. Elihu Manuel, a minister in the Methodist Church. In 1894, the first Sunday School and Bible Class were held in the Valley. These services continued on an interdenominational basis until 1904. During 1894 and 1895 a number of Methodist ministers and students also found their way into the Valley to assist and encourage the area's worshippers.

In 1904, a 2-room school, known as Newport School, was built in Squamish. In 1912, the Anglican Church appointed a regular minister to the area, and the first Communion Service in the Valley was held on July 7, 1912. It was soon recommended that an Anglican church be built, which was opened on July 20, 1913. In May of 1913 the Presbyterian Church also held services in a nearby schoolhouse. In 1914-15, a new 4-room school (Mashiter School) was built and the old schoolhouse was used as a

hall for Church services. For the next few years' services were given by laymen of both the Anglican and Presbyterian Church. The first Sunday School in Squamish proper was opened during this period.

The search began for a permanent home for the Presbyterian church. In 1913, a Ladies Aid was formed and they were responsible for renovations to the old school building and they purchased the first Communion Service. In 1916, a Building Fund was started and a year later \$60.00 was turned over for the purchase of a lot just north of the present C.E. Centre. After a recess due to wartime activities, the Ladies Aid was reorganized in 1919 under the presidency of Mrs. Art Young. One year later, with Mrs. Jessie Bazley as president they approached Mr. Frank Scott with a request for plans for a church building. In 1921, the original portion of the church was erected by Scott on Fourth Avenue, north of the present sanctuary. Ladies Aid contributed \$300.00 to the Building Fund and another \$125.00 to reduce the debt. They also provided furnishings and improvements.

Church Union between the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalist was fast becoming a possibility, and on June 10, 1925 the majority of the three churches joined to form the United Church of Canada. However it was not until August 23rd, 1927 that the Squamish Presbyterian Church became the Squamish United Church. The Union Sunday School continued until 1927 when the Anglicans started a Sunday School in the Anglican Church. In 1929, a delegation from the Vancouver Presbytery visited Squamish for the purpose of placing a resident minister in Squamish. At that time the church did not have a Manse. In November of 1930 a lot was purchased and steps were taken to proceed with the building of a Manse. It was completed in 1931. In January, 1951, realizing the need for the carrying on of its Christian Education work in the church, the Official Board met with the Superintendent of Home Missions and the Chairman of the Properties Committee of the Vancouver Presbytery. They approved the plan to move the church to a new site and the building of a new hall. In 1951, the original church building was relocated to its present location on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Victoria Street. After the move, an addition containing a hall, kitchen and washrooms was constructed at the rear of the building. On the first Sunday in May of 1951 the Church was dedicated and the Hall was set apart for Christian Education work.

With the growth of the community, a new Christian Education Centre was built in 1963. The building was designed by Baxter & Whitley Architects & Town Planners of Vancouver. The Centre is a good example of modern, mid-century church architecture that reflects the West Coast style. Upon the completion of the new Centre, the original church building became known as the Annex. Retention of the 1963 building, which is in good condition, and has its own heritage merit and architectural significance, helps preserve the memory of the church function that has been characteristic of the site since 1921.

2.4 CONDITION

The condition of the building was assessed through a visual analysis to determine if there were any obvious signs of structural deterioration or distress. Overall, the building appears to be in fair to good condition. There are signs of lack of maintenance. The foundations appear to be inadequate, and have been reinforced under the rear addition where there is a drainage ditch and subsidence is obvious. The roof structure appears problematic, with an evident sag in the centre of each side of the roof. The exposed rafters appear to be 2x4s, which are inadequate to carry the roof load and snow loads, and they appear to be failing slowly over time. The surface materials are generally in reasonable condition.

3. ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE

3.1 ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

This is an assessment of a building's style representative of a local area's significant development periods. This can include:

- notable or special attributes of an aesthetic and/or functional nature including massing, proportion, scale, layout, materials, detailing, colour, texture, fenestration, ornamentation or artwork
- unique or uncommon building materials, or its historically early or innovative method of construction
- an architect, designer, engineer and/or builder who has made a significant architectural contribution to the district, province or nation.

ASSESSMENT

Squamish United Church is an extremely modest structure, with no special functional attributes or design features. It has minimal detailing or pretension to architectural style. Its materials and structure are common and typical. The designer/builder is of unknown significance. It therefore presents little architectural heritage significance.

3.2 CULTURAL HISTORY

This is an assessment of a building's cultural significance, which may include:

- association with a person, group, institution, event or activity that is of historical significance to the local area, province or nation
- association with broad patterns of local area or civic history including ecological, social, political, economic or geographic change

ASSESSMENT

Squamish United Church has some significance as one of the early surviving churches in the area, but is neither the largest nor earliest. It relates to the history of Presbyterianism, and later for its association with the United Church of Canada 1927-present.

3.3 CONTEXT

This is an assessment of a building's visual and neighbourhood context, which may include:

- 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
- continuity and compatibility with adjacent buildings and visual contribution to a group of similar buildings
- importance as a civic or local area landmark; a building's symbolic value to a neighbourhood, local area or the district

ASSESSMENT

Squamish United Church has very little significance as a landmark within the local area. Its site context was altered when it was relocated in 1951. Its context will change considerably when the site is redeveloped.

3.4 INTEGRITY

This is a measure of the impact of changes to the building on the appreciation of its style, design and construction.

ASSESSMENT

The original portion of the Squamish United Church has retained many of its original exterior features. The interior is also partially intact and the 1951 addition at the rear of the building does not detract from the heritage value of the building as it could be removed, however it has altered the form and scale of the original structure.

Overall, the heritage significance of the 1921 portion of the Squamish United Church can be considered to be of very low value. It is an extremely modest structure that has been altered. Some of its heritage value could be re-captured if the building could be restored to its original configuration and appearance, but this would be dependent on other site redevelopment factors.

4. NEXT STEPS

There are a number of options for the redevelopment of the site. The large amounts of open space on the site provide flexibility in how the site could be handled, however, the location of the original church building does constrain the built form that could be accommodated on the site in its present layout. Given the relatively low heritage value, any options need to be weighed against available resources and constraints that would occur if the 1921 building remains onsite.

- **Relocate Offsite:** The original church building could be relocated to another site, thereby freeing up the southern half of the site for redevelopment. This could be a more expensive option, depending on how far the structure is relocated. If the Church divests the building, commercial or other uses could be considered, however, an interested buyer or recipient for the building has yet to be identified. The District of Squamish may not offer consideration for heritage issues at the existing site if the church was relocated, however it may consider zoning or subdivision concessions at the receiver site. Given the constraints of relocation costs and the modest nature of the building, this is unlikely to be an economic possibility.
- **Relocate Onsite:** The church could be retained onsite as part of the redevelopment of the site, and the site conditions could be negotiated through a Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA). This negotiation allows for a great deal of flexibility, as an HRA can vary any or all subdivision and development requirements. This site, however, presents some unique challenges, and the retention of the building would constrain the proposed redevelopment plans for the site. It should be noted that if the 1921 building is relocated, it will require new foundations, substantial structural reconstruction and restorations, allow \$150 psf for 600sq. ft = \$90,000.
- **Demolish and Redevelop:** If the original church building is demolished, the site could be redeveloped as per the plan currently being developed. The District of Squamish is supportive of the plan to provide public amenities onsite, including the social service functions for the Sea to Sky Social Community Services Society.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the 1921 church building does have some historic value, its meaningful retention within any redevelopment scheme is highly problematic.

The Congregation has already explored options for retention, which appear to be minimal at best. Given its relatively low heritage significance within the overall context of the area, it is likely not possible to retain the structure. Therefore it should be documented, through good-quality photographs, and redevelopment can occur.



The original entrance to the United Church building



The south façade of the original United Church building



The 1963 Christian Education Centre Building

RESEARCH SOURCES

***A Journey in Faith: The Story of Squamish United Church.* 1988.**

United Church of Canada British Columbia Conference Archives

Squamish United Church fonds CA UCCBC

Dates: 1927-1983, predominant 1927-1957

The Fonds consists of Session minutes (1949-1957), Board of Managers minutes (1927-1941), Official Board minutes (1945-1951), Congregational meetings minutes (1947-1951); and Annual reports (1980-1983).

Anglican Diocese of New Westminster Archives

St. John the Divine Parish (Squamish, B.C.) fonds CA ANGNW

Dates: 1894-1896, 1912-1988

Fonds consists of records of St. John the Divine, Squamish, including associated points in the parish, and separate records of the associated congregations at Pemberton and Woodfibre. The Sous-fonds consists of parish registers (1912-1987), civil registers (1942-1948, 1967-1988), service registers (1912-1974), vestry and parish council records (1913-1957), financial records, women's organizations records, Sunday school records, histories, clippings. Includes Brackendale; Britannia Beach; Cheakamus; Daisy Lake; Garibaldi Highlands; Mill Creek; Pemberton, St. George; Whistler; Woodfibre, Trinity Church. Early records (1894-1896) are from the Squamish Valley Bible Class. Parish registers of St. John's include: baptisms (1912-1971), confirmations (1913-1986), marriages (1914-1986), burials (1920-1987), parish history (1922, 1936-1941).