

Habitat Forum: an alternative

By NANCY SOUTHAM

There are nine wornout muddy men sitting in Al Clapp's office, sharing thoughts about the Habitat Forum site. It is another typical Vancouver day — wet and miserable.

They have spent the day shaking the roof on the boardwalk, and moving logs around the site. It's been a long day.

It's 5:30 p.m., and most of the Jericho work force has left the site. Only these few workers remain behind.

Roger, the fellow in charge of Hanger 7, where the social centre and media display will be, walks in with a case of wine.

"Here are a few bottles of wine we might bring in for the bar. I need some tasters. Anybody want to try some?" he asks.

Such is a typical afternoon at the Habitat Forum site, where the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) will be based, later on this spring. Spontaneity is second nature.

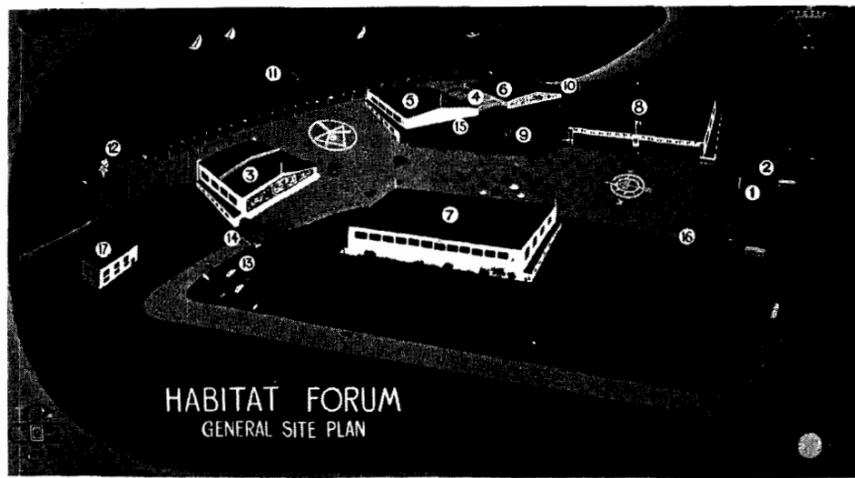
Habitat Forum — what is it about?



outlined by the NGO committee for Habitat to serve as the subject for the daily plenary sessions at the Forum.

The man-made and the natural environment, land use and ownership, community involvement in improving the quality of life, human settlements in rural areas, and national settlements policies are some of the themes.

As well there will be daily workshops for



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|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1. ENTRANCE | 4. COVERED COURT | 9. STAGE AREA | 14. WEST GATE |
| 2. TOTEM POLE | 5. PLENARY SESSION | 10. EAST GATE | 15. COVERED BOARDWALK |
| 3. ALTERNATIVE ENERGY & DISPLAYS | 6. COMMITTEE | 11. DOCK | 16. COVERED WALKWAY |
| | 7. SOCIAL CENTRE & RESTAURANT | 12. WINDMILL | 17. PRESS & ADMINISTRATION |
| | 8. ALTERNATIVE ENERGY & DISPLAYS | 13. CAR PARK | |

Clapp, who is responsible for the huge endeavor, has an amazingly cool presence about him. His manner is low-key and easy. His calmness and ability to deal with the venture keeps the work force in check.

"We control this space," he tells the men

space and alternate energy displays. At the moment it holds workshops for painting, sewing, and woodworking, as well as the management offices.

Hanger 7 will be the social centre, with an international food village, bar, seating area, stage, and entertainment centre. The stand-up 200 foot bar is being made from red and yellow cedar. West coast Indian, Japanese, Mediterranean, and East Indian food will be served.

Wines from B.C., California, and Europe, as well as beer is proposed. Hopefully, the wine will be served from old wooden kegs... but the Vancouver Health department is not sure on that one.

In Hanger 5, most of the talking and discussions will take place. It will hold 2,500 people, upon layered tiers, made from fir, hemlock, and some cedar. The plenary sessions will be held here.

Hanger 6, to the right of Hanger 5, will be equipped with bleachers for performance events. On each side of Hangers 5 and 6 are smaller meeting rooms of various sizes, holding between 20 and 150 people.

Hanger 3 houses the sawmill, which will remain operational throughout the conference. It has been loaned by the Provincial Government and has been sawing logs salvaged off beaches from Horseshoe Bay to Bowen Island.

This hanger will also hold alternate energy displays and exhibits. But the building has caused some headaches.

The northend of the hanger, which extends over the water, is caved in. The latest idea for the hole in the floor is for the Vancouver Aquarium to make a tidal pool in it.

Connecting all the hangers is a boardwalk made from cedar, fir, and some pine wood. The effect of the boardwalk creates a sense of continuity, by linking the vast expanse of space.

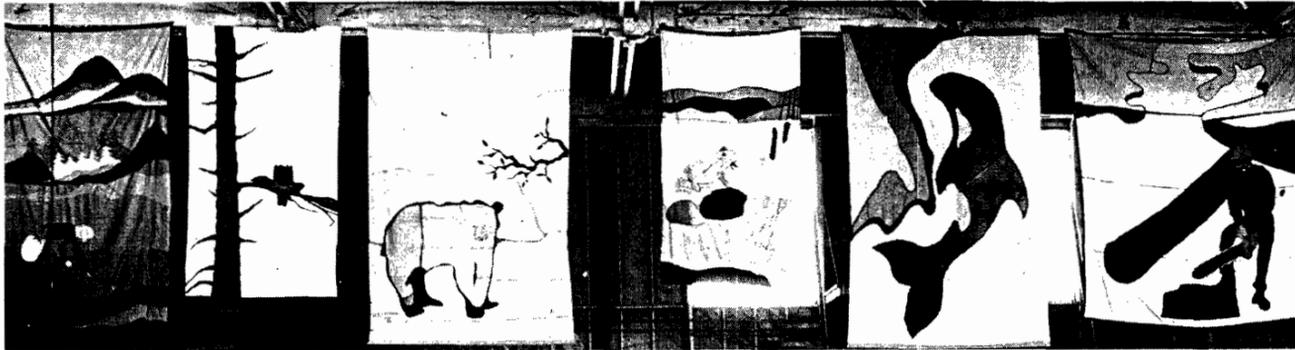
(And there always is that lingering thought that it might just rain...)

There is still a considerable amount of work to be completed before thousands of non-governmental advisors, planners, architects, environmentalists, and engineers arrive.

But when you visit the site, (there are public tours on Sunday afternoons), it's never quiet — even when the work force has finished for the day.

During the weekdays, there is a constant hum of chainsaws, hammers, and telephones ringing.

And when the day's work is done... there is usually somebody riding around the site on a bicycle, whistling.



HABITAT FORUM BANNERS... displayed in former hangar

—erol baykol photos

Habitat Forum is the collective name for the NGO activities related to Habitat: the United Nations conference on Human Settlements that will be taking place in Vancouver May 31 to June 11.

Anyone may participate in the Forum — as an individual or through an organization. According to some estimates, the Forum will attract at least 300 participants, but other estimates have reached 10,000.

This 'alternate' or 'counter' conference could well be far more interesting than the official conference in that there are many issues governments either cannot, or will not, discuss in public.

Habitat Forum will be centred at Jericho Beach Park, the 17-acre, former RCAF seaplane base. Five large aircraft hangers grouped around a large paved area are being transformed into meeting rooms, theatres, exhibition halls, workshops, restaurants, lounges and snack bars.

The theme and decorative style will be early British Columbian, to recall the fact that Jericho was a meeting place for the Coast Indians, long before the city of Vancouver was even thought of.

The Indians called it 'Eyalmoche', which means good camping ground.

The work of renovation and construction is being done on a very low budget with a maximum use of donated and recycled materials by a work force numbering some 100 persons employed under a special federal-provincial joint program.

The Forum will start May 27, four days before the official UN conference begins. To date, nine central themes have been

smaller discussion. Workshop ideas include: post-disaster housing, tall buildings, women and human settlements, transportation planning, building with nature, and co-operative housing.

Al Clapp is the 'producer,' the bull of the woods, at Habitat Forum. He is a former B.C. Television news producer. He also was the man who co-ordinated the Greenpeace anti-whaling expedition send-off at Jericho last summer. Why did he get into this?

"To save these buildings," he answers quietly, as he looks out his office window at the hangers. He sits at his desk, feet up on it, twirling his tweed cap.

"The Greenpeace endeavor happened because I wanted to expose as many people as I could to this space. People in Vancouver thought this site to be just a deserted air force base. You know — the fence around it, all empty.

"They would drive by it in their cars and stare, thinking it would be there the next time they drove by.

"Well, they didn't know there was a demolition contract up for buildings three, six, and 13," he says.

So Clapp suggested, to a preliminary meeting for Habitat Forum at the Mac-Millan Planetarium a couple of years ago, the Jericho site for the alternative conference.

"If people don't pick up on this space during the conference, well... then that's it."

The Jericho site belongs to the City of Vancouver, specifically the parks board. This means the fate of the site after the conference is over is in the hands of Vancouver city council. And no one at city hall is saying anything about post-Forum plans for the site.

But Mayor Art Phillips' on-again-off-again attitude towards holding the UN Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver has had little effect on the plans and energies of the Forum.

Last fall, Phillips was against holding the UN Conference in Vancouver because of the alleged hostile threat the Palestinian Liberation Organization's presence would have. He was worried about security, which was a valid argument.

Phillips even went to the extent of voting on the conference at a city council meeting, after Ottawa had signed an agreement with the UN stating Vancouver would be the site for the Conference.

Council voted nine to one to cancel Habitat, citing concerns such as possible confrontations and the need for heavy security measures would be provided. And so it goes.

Mayor Phillips visited the site for the first time last Saturday. It was an unofficial visit. He came with his lady friend, Carole Taylor. They toured the site, children in tow, checking things out.

at the Friday afternoon meeting, as they drink beer. "It's ours and we are building it. Don't let those official people get you down, when they come down here and try and rearrange our designs.

"They are no different or higher up on the pole than we are. Keep that in mind," he tells them.

He constantly reassures them. Some of them worry the site won't be finished in time.

"I hate to get into this space, but we aren't cleaning up enough. Let's tighten up a bit."

Clapp tells the assembled fellows they're all in it together. They are running the show. It's a loose arrangement, but that's to be expected. They are all equal. That's basic.

His message to the workers at this meeting was simple. They have to start thinking ahead of their immediate space.

"We have to start thinking about the content of what will come down at the conference," he says. "Right now we are too into building, and thinking of how the site will look.

"That's cool, but we have to begin talking about what will come out of the conference. Think about the content."

There have been times though, when he has come down on workers. Some people have been fired and others have left because of disagreement with the way the site should be run.

The Forum site consists of five hangers, with one other building that will house the press and security people.

Hanger 8 will be given over to meeting



LOG RAISED... walkway under construction

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