

Park board faces dilemma at Jericho

Joshua fought the battle of Jericho
And the walls came a-tumblin' down

By JAKE VAN DER KAMP

Joshua had a relatively easy time of it. A few trumpet blasts and the walls of old Jericho crumbled.

But his modern counterpart in Vancouver, the park board, may need more than trumpets to perform the same feat.

There are six old leftover army buildings in Jericho Park and the board has decided that when Habitat Forum is over at least two of them are to be torn down and others may follow.

Forum organizer Al Clapp isn't pleased with the prospect. After spending months getting the buildings in shape for the conference he would like to see them all used for community purposes.

The question now is whether Vancouver residents will see the same promise in the old hangars that Clapp sees and if so, whether they will exert enough pressure on the park board and other levels of government to get funding enough to keep them in use.

The park board has no definite plans for all of Jericho. The board wants to see the park developed over a number of years and to fit in changing ideas. Demolition of the buildings was ordered after public hearings because studies claim they are unsound, too dominating and too costly to renovate.

But on that point the board is split. Chairman May Brown and commissioners Evelyn Atkinson and Theo DuMoulin want to continue with plans for destruction of at least the two buildings.

Commissioners Bowie Keeler, George Walborn, Bill Gibson and Andy Livingstone, while they do not commit them-



selves to retaining the structures, say Habitat Forum has changed the picture and declare themselves open to further public input. But all stress that financing is crucial.

The two buildings slated for destruction are buildings No. 13, used by a sailing club, and hangar No. 3, the farthest west of the three waterfront hangars.

The sailing club has told the board building 13 is not totally suited to the club and a new structure would be appreciated. Hangar 3 has suffered tidal erosion that has undermined the floor and the surrounding piles are deteriorating.

The buildings that are definitely to remain are numbers 7 and 8, large wooden hangars set well back from the waterfront. The board is discussing the uses of these buildings with the B.C. Sports Federation. No. 7 is designated for an indoor track and No. 8 for indoor tennis and other sports.

Of the two other buildings, No. 5, the central waterfront hangar, was proposed as the site for a recreational centre by an architect's report commissioned by the board. No. 6, the eastern hangar, is in limbo. No uses have been proposed and no plans made for destruction.

Cost is the biggest obstacle to renovation of the buildings after the Forum is over. The Canadian Armed Forces were not plagued with strict civic building codes and when the hangars were turned over to the city and the provincial government they were not deemed suitable for public use.

Mrs. Brown estimated it will cost at least \$250,000 each to bring hangars 7 and 8 up to minimal standards. Renovating any of the other buildings will cost at least several hundred thousand dollars more, she said.

But the board has little money to spend. With the failure of the last five-year plan at the hands of voters, the board has only a limited capital budget and much of that is already spoken for.

In fact when city council refused the board \$500,000 for clean-up of the site last year, the area had to remain closed to the public for fear that visitors would injure themselves in the buildings.

The board is now awaiting about \$800,000 it expects to gain from the sale of civic properties. But some commissioners estimate it would cost up to \$2 million to bring all the structures up to code and improve the grounds.

And since the decision to demolish some of the structures was also the fruit of several public hearings, the board has officially, so far stuck to its guns.

Clapp disputes the board's figures and opinions.

In an interview, he said workers at the Forum site have already done much to bring the buildings up to code. Wiring, plumbing, lighting and repair work have all been done to the satisfaction of building inspectors, he said.

He listed Premier Bill Bennett as among the admirers of the Forum site. Bennett, he said, told him during a visit Friday that he would like to review a contract between the Forum organizers and the park board that states the site must be returned to its original condition when the conference is over.

"He told me it would be a shame if something happened to it," Clapp said.

Mrs. Brown said city officials have been

purposefully lax in granting Clapp permits for the conference because it is a one-shot affair and takes place during summer.

But she said if the board decides to retain and use all the buildings regulations will have to be improved for winter use.

Commissioner DuMoulin said he would like to see all the buildings remain standing until autumn but insisted "I don't think there's any doubt that some will come down."

"I would go along with keeping the stuff there for a few months but not much longer," he said.

Mrs. Atkinson said she wants everything to revert back to the original plan once Habitat Forum is over.

"It (the Forum) is kind of a one shot deal," she said. "I haven't changed my mind about that."

Keeler said he wants to "assess very carefully the facilities built at Jericho."

"I'm extremely impressed by what the organizers have done," he said. "They've made it into a tremendous facility on the waterfront."

Walborn said he is worried about the problems associated with keeping all the buildings but said he is open to further discussion.

"If people want them to stay, we may," he said. "We'll go into the community. I'd have a second look. My mind's open."

Livingstone said he has always been on record as opposing the destruction of any of the buildings if there is any conceivable use for them.

He said he has been receiving phone calls recently from people concerned about the fate of the hangars.

Gibson said if other sources of funding can be discovered and the public appears to want all the buildings kept, he would agree to keep them.