

FILM

Documentaries probe Little Mountain evictions

Blind couple who faced relocation among residents whose stories are told

SHAWN CONNER

VANCOUVER SUN

A film screening that was meant to be a call to action will instead be a celebration.

When David Vaisbord originally planned to screen six short films about the Little Mountain social housing development this evening, it was to bring attention to the plight of the last remaining inhabitants. Four households and six people, including an elderly blind couple, were facing eviction.

But with an agreement confirmed Thursday between the city and the developer, Holburn Properties has now agreed to begin construction of new social housing immediately. And the tenants, who live in the last building standing on the former social housing site, will be allowed to stay on until that new building is ready for them.



Joan and Sammy Chang are two of the last six residents of Little Mountain.

Vaisbord still plans to screen the films at Little Mountain Gallery on Friday night. But now the screening will salute the people Vaisbord believes helped make the change.

These include the Vancouver Renters Union, who sponsored and organized previous screenings of Vaisbord's Little Mountain films. The VRU also initiated a rally that was

scheduled in support of the residents, including Sammy and Joan Chang, an elderly blind couple who have refused to leave Little Mountain. (All but four of the 224 families in what was the city's first large-scale social housing project have been relocated.)

Vaisbord said former NDP MLA David Chudnovsky was instrumental in helping bring attention to the residents' story. And activist/tenant Ingrid Steenhuisen, Vaisbord said, was the core advocate for the tenants. "She stuck her neck way out."

Vaisbord screened one of the short films, The Eviction of Sammy and Joan, for City Council on Oct 3. "I think it affected the audience. I'd never screened a film for an audience that had power to affect change."

Vaisbord lives three blocks away Little Mountain, which is how he first became interested in what was happening — or not happening — to the 6.2-hectare parcel of land.

"When I started shooting, I thought, 'Oh great, let's get rid of that old bunker and redevelop.' Then I started poking around with my camera and realized there was another story."

Vaisbord said that he's about midway in the Little Mountain Project film series, which is potentially a 10-year project. "For me, it's an ongoing investigation in the re-envisioning of Vancouver either as affordable or simply a playground for the rich."

The Little Mountain Project films will screen at 7 p.m. at the Little Mountain Gallery, 195 E. 26th Ave.

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