Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I find evidence of underground tanks?
The fire insurance plans show locations of gas stations and pumps and occasionally other underground tanks. The Fire Department has records of gasoline tank permits from 1960-1991 which are open to the public.

Where can I find land use information for other municipalities?
The city directories cover other municipalities after 1914. In addition, we also have various maps that cover areas outside the City limits. Several other municipalities in Greater Victoria have archives (see Useful Resources). The BC Archives holds early tax assessment rolls for the Victoria District that covers areas outside the City boundaries.

Where can I find air photos?
Air photos are available at the University of Victoria’s Library and through GeoBC. For more information, see the Library’s website here: http://www.uvic.ca/library/locations/homse/map/aerial/index.php.
This brochure describes tools available for land use research at the Archives, and how you can use them.

Maps and Plans

Fire insurance plans and lot maps can be used for researching land use. Fire insurance plans show street numbers, the construction material used for each building, the number of storeys, type of roofing material, position of building on the lot, locations of out buildings, and sometimes the use of the building. The locations of gas station pumps also appear on some of the plans and may be useful to those doing environmental assessments. There are five sets of fire insurance plans between the years of 1903 and 1967. Early fire insurance plans are available online through the University of Victoria Library.

Demolished Building Plans

Building plans and applications for plumbing connections for demolished buildings are held by the Archives. These are useful tools for researching architects and homes, buildings, and businesses that have been demolished. Applications for plumbing connections will confirm the date a building was plumbed and the date it was demolished. For plans of existing buildings, contact the City’s Permits and Inspections Department: 250-361-0342.

Photographs

The Archives has an extensive photograph collection from a variety of sources. Search and browse scanned images from our collection through the Archives’ Online Search: archives.victoria.ca. Print reproductions are available for purchase.

Tax Assessment Rolls

1864-1948

Tax assessment rolls may be useful if you need to establish ownership of a property or the construction dates of a building. These records show lot size, name of owner, land value, and improvements to the land (i.e. house).

City Directories

1860-1999

City directories will provide an idea of what type of building was at a particular address (i.e. residence or business). The directories can also provide a rough idea of the age of a building, by the date the address first appears in the directories. The earliest directories list residents (not necessarily owners) in the city and environs, and include their address and occupation. It wasn’t until the 1890s that another section listing streets was added. Some directories cover only the city, others cover Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia. BC-related directories for the years 1860-1955 can be found online through the Vancouver Public Library: bccd.vpl.ca.

Keep in mind the following:
- Street numbers changed in 1907
- Street names changed often

Gasoline Storage Tank Permits

1960-1991

These records, available at the Fire Hall No. 1 (1234 Yates Street), include permits for the installation of gasoline storage tanks. They include the date, name of installer, location of tanks and pumps, and tank capacity.