

February 27, 2012

Mayor and Council,
District of West Vancouver

Subject: 1300 Block Marine Drive

I wish to convey that I have serious concerns regarding the proposed sale of the District-owned portion of land on the south side of the 1300 Block of Marine Drive to Grosvenor development group.

Why is Council entertaining a sale agreement that hinges on approving the developer's rezoning application later this year? Height and density are matters of utmost concern for most residents. Putting off discussion of this matter while laying the groundwork to go forward with a development that will significantly impact these critical aspects is wrong.

Council is well aware that Grosvenor's plans are directly linked to a substantial density increase. By entering into a sale agreement Council is giving tacit approval to the developer's anticipated zoning and OCP amendment requests. Council and staff's repeated assurances that the district will still have control is misleading when council has already inferred acceptance.

Throughout the drafting of the Ambleside Town Centre Strategy, members of the community expressed concern or opposition to allowing 4 storey buildings*. Certainly there was also concern about exempting three "special sites" from the OCP. In attempting to create an environment that would encourage individual landowners to take the lead in redeveloping their properties, previous Councils have contributed to a lack of progress in the revitalization of Ambleside. Allowing special sites to be rezoned on an individual basis has promoted uncertainty and contributed to landowners adopting a "wait and see" attitude. If a site is deemed "special" based on size, what's to stop a developer from buying up the next block and maximizing profit through increased height and density when precedent has already been set? What incentive is there for existing owners to redevelop a two-story building if there's potential profit to be had by selling to a large developer?

(Note Grosvenor was able to acquire their currently owned portion in less than eighteen months).

The Ambleside Revitalization Commission supports the sale as a "unique" opportunity, even though it seems that the main factor for their support is the financial benefits that may be derived. While this should certainly be taken into consideration, may I remind Council that the Commission's mandate was solely to advise the district on how to negotiate the best possible sales agreement -- in other words, their opinion is driven by business and finance to the exclusion of

Ambleside resident concerns regarding height, density and loss of village atmosphere. Quite frankly, it is more than a little galling to read that the "Commission's citizen members firmly believe the proposed agreements are in the best interest of West Van residents"*** when the Commission, a handful of unelected individuals selected exclusively for their real estate, development and financial backgrounds, cannot possibly represent the broader view of the majority of residents, particularly given their limited mandate. To follow the lead of the Commission would ensure that any community vision for the revitalization of Ambleside would be limited to generating maximum revenue to invest in critical infrastructure. While the Ambleside Village Centre Strategy may identify the 1300 Block as a potential site for redevelopment, it certainly makes no reference to "seizing the opportunity to generate significant revenues and invest in critical infrastructure***".

I'm not opposed to generating revenue and I believe most residents, myself included, support revitalization and redevelopment, but not at the cost of gutting our OCP with precedent setting height and density. Council must balance the Commission's opinion with the main concern of area residents, which is: density, height and retention of village atmosphere.

Council has placed themselves in a clear conflict of interest by being the arbiter of the sale of this district-owned site (with the stated need of maximizing the value to pay for a new Public Safety building) while also being responsible for overseeing the Official Community Plan: a document created to restrict density and ensure a sense of predictability. Accepting public comment on the proposed sale when the District and developer have already completed negotiations on the terms for the sale in no way exonerates Council from their duty to ensure due diligence to all vested interests, business as well as residents.

I'm sick and tired of attending workshops, town-hall meetings, idea fairs and writing letters, all variations of the same theme. As another resident observed, perhaps it is Council's intention to just wear people down?

Council needs to settle this uncertainty once and for all by balancing fiscal consideration with resident concerns and settling on an acceptable density level, then sticking to it. With a definitive Official Community Plan established, property owners could get on with business and make the most of their properties rather than waiting to see what changes are in store, and residents could get back to their busy lives without the stress of monitoring piece-meal rezoning applications.

Sincerely,

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*District Of West Van Council Report, File # 2515-21, Pg. 6

**District of West Van 1300 Block Commission Q & A's, #20

*** District of West Van 1300 Block Overview Questions and Answers Pg. 1

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