

Grosvenor presents redesign to council

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A shorter, more architecturally distinct version of the mid-rise development earmarked for the 1300-block of Marine Drive in West Vancouver took one more baby step towards realization.

Council voted unanimously Monday night to hand the revised blueprints to its design review committee.

The height of each building has been reduced by one storey and between 20 and 27 feet from the original design. At seven and six storeys, the two terraced mid-rises would now measure 79 and 68 feet, respectively.

The buildings would also feature smaller units than originally planned, giving the project 100 units with an average size of 1,771 square feet.

The vast majority of those packing council chambers heaped praise on Grosvenor development group and reminded council of the dire consequences of passing on the project.

The Grosvenor development adds an opportunity for seniors to downsize without leaving their communities, according to Mark Ballard. "As a community we need to think bigger. We need to think of not 2013, but 2040," he said.

Ballard likened the sprouting of a development in Ambleside to a tree climbing towards the sky.

"Buildings grow, and that is the natural evolution of the urban environment."

He also stressed that while property values may dip, that trend will quickly be reversed due to the excitement provided by the development.

"Aggregation of development will really create a 'there' there," agreed Jennifer Marshall.

Responding to a 1,400-signature petition requesting building heights be capped at four storeys, Cliff Du Fresne was one of several speakers who called on council to move quickly lest Grosvenor take their offer off the table.

"You're deciding between seven storeys and no storeys," he said.

The only note of strong opposition at the meeting was voiced by **Melinda Slater**.

"I will never believe that putting up that kind of height and density on the waterfront is ever a good idea," she said.

Ambleside retailer Christin Fernandes also expressed support for the project. "It'll make us relevant again in the looming face of Park Royal," she said.

Ambleside is a dying woman with blue lips and a faint pulse, and Grosvenor's development is a defibrillator, according to Maggie Pappas, West Vancouver Chamber of Commerce's head of advocacy.

"History will judge those who let her die," she said. Other advocates for the project included former mayor Pam Goldsmith-Jones and former councillor Shannon Walker.

Some of the support may have been overly effusive, according to Coun. Michael Lewis.

"There was a whole lot more hyperbole here tonight than in past meetings," Lewis said before addressing Grosvenor architect James Cheng. "This has been called a 'game changer,' the design's been called a 'masterpiece.' I'm not sure it's the Eiffel Tower, Mr. Cheng, but it's not the London Wheel, either."

The consequences of the project are more mundane and less dire than some believe, according to Coun. Craig Cameron.

"The world's not going to end if this building is built, nor will it end if the building is not built," he said.

Project supporters and opponents have each invoked the district's official community plan to justify their position.

"The reality is the OCP provides virtually no guidance about this proposal and how we should assess it," Cameron said.

The contentiousness of the debate is not Grosvenor's fault, he added.

"They unfortunately have wittingly or unwittingly blundered into a uniquely West Vancouver debate," Cameron said. "No matter what we decide we're going to be described as idiots, sell-outs, scaredy-cats."

At a council meeting in March, Mayor Michael Smith chastised Cameron for submitting a request for a smaller development building.

"Are you a planner? Are you an architect?" Smith asked at the time.

"To those who said at the beginning, we shouldn't have even said anything back to Grosvenor because we're not architects and planners, I say, well it's a good thing we said something," Cameron said, complimenting the new design as being "less monolithic" than previous incarnations.

One lingering question remains just who will buy the units in the building, and how often they will be in Ambleside, according to Cameron. "A building that's half-empty is not going to improve the vitality of Ambleside," he said.

Smith was interrupted by applause three times while he praised Grosvenor for their community engagement and urged council to get on with things.

"They don't want to put their name on an inferior building," he said of Grosvenor.

"This is a tremendous financial opportunity for the district," Smith continued. "It allows us to lever those funds into a new public safety building."

None of the project's opponents have provided ideas about an alternate way to generate \$40 million plus \$1 million in new annual tax revenue to fund the public safety building, Smith added.

The development might allow a community meeting place in the covered area between the buildings, a notion that holds some appeal for Coun. Trish Panz. "We don't want a gathering place at a mall," she said.

Coun. Bill Soprovich said he wasn't committing to anything except keeping an open mind.

"I'm a man of few words," he said, drawing laughter from many in attendance.

The project is expected to return to council June 17, possibly being considered for approval in October following a public process in September.

Coun. Mary-Ann Booth recused herself from the Grosvenor discussion as usual.

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Credit: Jeremy Shepherd; North Shore News

Illustration

Graphic Grosvenor / ONE of the illustrations of Grosvenor's redesigned 1300-block Marine Drive development (from 14th Street) presented to District of West Vancouver council Monday evening.; Caption:

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