

April 26, 2026

Re: Public Hearing for the Ambleside Centre LAP

Mayor & Council,

I am writing to share concerns regarding the Ambleside Centre Local Area Plan (LAP) and to offer constructive recommendations on how to move forward.

Procedural shortcomings, combined with a plan driven primarily by accommodating arbitrary housing targets, have undermined meaningful public engagement and eroded confidence in both the process and its outcomes. Regrettably, Council's last-minute decision to remove the two special sites from the LAP may best be described as "too little, too late".

Proceeding to a Public Hearing despite the Province's mandated implementation of the LAP has added to public confusion and risks reducing public engagement to a procedural exercise rather than a meaningful decision-making process.

Community Vision

The community has consistently articulated a clear vision for Ambleside's commercial centre: **a small-scale, charming seaside village built around independent businesses, walkability, and local character.**

This is not anecdotal—it is firmly rooted in decades of planning work and reinforced through extensive public engagement. The 2018 *Ambleside Town Centre Plan* survey asked residents to describe their vision for Ambleside in 2040, generating responses such as "quiet with a village-like atmosphere", "walkable", and "an area of low-rise buildings". These themes were echoed and refined through the *Imagine Ambleside* initiative, which identified "charm," "locality," and preservation of a "village atmosphere" as central community priorities. Across multiple processes and over many years, community input has remained consistent in its core message: growth should enhance Ambleside's cherished village character, not erode it.

Ensuring that the LAP aligns with this long-standing community vision remains critically important. However, arbitrary and controversial housing targets embedded in the Official Community Plan (OCP) are driving the LAP. These targets are ill-suited to a high-level policy document and have resulted in a plan with a scale of development that fundamentally conflicts with the community's vision for a charming, small, **retail-focused** waterfront village.

Lack of Transparency and Procedural Integrity

A number of significant deficiencies have made it difficult for residents to fully understand and meaningfully engage with the LAP, including:

- Limited incorporation of community input; while some suggestions were reflected in the LAP—including the removal of Hollyburn Corner—other key concerns consistently raised by ADRA and the public remain unaddressed
- The absence of an alternative **low-density, village-scale option** for public consideration

- The lack of key supporting information, including **3D imaging, building heights expressed in metres/feet, and clear depictions of** shadowing, view, and streetscape impacts
- Inconsistent and, at times, limited public access to the draft LAP through the District's website
- **OCP amendments made behind closed doors**, without stakeholder vetting
- No public notice of amendments or first reading to remove the two special sites
- Introduction of the amended LAP at the March 30 meeting under "New Business" despite **the agenda explicitly indicating that no items were scheduled.**
- Addition of the amended draft LAP at the end of that meeting, after most attendees had left.

These issues, among others, have contributed to a process that undermines public confidence and falls short of the principles of open, transparent, and accountable governance.

Establishing Community Sentiment

There is a substantial and consistent record of public input collected over many years that clearly supports a village-scale vision for Ambleside. In that context, the apparent uncertainty about the level of community support for a higher-density LAP is difficult to reconcile, given that decades of engagement have repeatedly reaffirmed residents' desire for a low-rise, human-scaled, and charming seaside village.

Given the magnitude and long-term consequences of this decision, community sentiment must be clearly and transparently established—not assumed or implied to align with a preferred outcome. This requires a consultation process that is **well-supported by clear information** and genuinely designed to **test different planning scenarios**. Presenting the public with a single option, modified only by the removal of two special sites, does not constitute a real choice.

Economic Considerations

There is widespread community support for maintaining a resilient commercial centre; however, a prevailing narrative that suggests a substantial increase in residential density is necessary to revitalize local businesses has not been substantiated. This assumption is often presented as self-evident, despite a lack of transparent analysis or evidence, and despite well-documented examples of successful, low-rise, village-scale commercial districts.

Ambleside's strength has historically been its **independent businesses and village character**. The proposed LAP lacks clarity on how it will support these qualities and ensure that future development enhances, rather than diminishes, this identity.

The draft LAP does not explain:

- How the plan will **support small, independent businesses**
- How it will avoid **further erosion of Ambleside's village character**
- **How public realm improvements will be implemented in a cohesive manner**

This approach risks undermining the very commercial fabric the LAP purports to strengthen.

Inconsistent Response to Provincial Intervention

Perhaps most concerning is the lack of a timely, consistent, and transparent response to Provincial intervention in local planning:

- Aside from participating in a joint letter to Premier Eby with 16 Metro Vancouver mayors, the District took no proactive steps to **challenge the Province's arbitrary housing targets**
- No evidence of **Council obtaining legal consultation** regarding a Judicial Review or other remedies
- Conflicting statements from Council members regarding whether legal advice was even sought, including a refusal by one Councillor to answer direct questions on this matter
- A tepid and unclear response to the Judicial Review advanced by the *District of View Royal v. British Columbia (Housing Targets Judicial Review)*
- A lack of clarity as to whether West Vancouver has joined this effort
- A lack of **timely, transparent updates** regarding communications with the Housing Minister

This raises serious concerns that Council is acquiescing to Provincial overreach at the expense of its residents.

Moving Forward

While the process has been impeded by shortcomings—including a lack of clear direction to staff and Council's inability to agree on a clear path forward—there remains an opportunity to reset and proceed constructively. With decisive leadership, **Council can still develop a plan that reflects community priorities and is ready for implementation when conditions allow.**

I ask that Council recognize that mistakes have been made so that we may correct these flaws rather than repeat them. I also ask that Council:

1. **Begin work immediately on a revised, community-aligned LAP**

This includes:

- Directing staff to prepare a **genuine village-scale alternative**, with clearly defined building heights
- **Providing 3D computer imaging and accurate, clear visualizations** that allow residents to grasp the real impact on scale, shadowing and views.
- Providing side-by-side comparisons of different approaches

Even if formal adoption is restricted in the short term, this work can ensure the District is well-positioned to act when the opportunity arises.

2. **Strengthen the public engagement process**

This includes:

- Ensuring all materials are easy to find, clearly presented and understandable
- Allowing sufficient time for residents and stakeholders to review, assess and provide informed feedback
- Providing clear and timely notice of decisions, amendments and key milestones
- Structuring consultation in a way that **clearly and transparently establishes community preferences**

3. **Actively defend local planning authority using all available legal means**

This includes:

- Seeking independent legal advice
- Exploring all available avenues for Judicial Review or injunctive relief
- Disclosing whether legal advice has been sought and the District's position regarding any legal challenges
- Disclosing all communications with the Provincial Housing Minister relating to housing targets and the LAP
- **Publicly committing to and supporting the *District of View Royal v. British Columbia (Housing Targets Judicial Review)* as a critical test of municipal authority**

Closing

Ambleside is a unique and valued community, and residents and stakeholders have participated in this process with the reasonable expectation that a Public Hearing represents a meaningful opportunity to influence outcomes. Proceeding to a hearing on a plan that is predetermined—or constrained to cursory changes—undermines both the purpose of the hearing and public confidence in the process.

Ambleside deserves a plan shaped by its community, one that protects its character and supports its independent businesses, not one driven by arbitrary targets or flawed assumptions. That outcome remains achievable, but only if Council uses the Public Hearing as a genuine point of accountability and acts decisively now to correct course

Sincerely,

Melinda Slater
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West Vancouver

PLEASE DO NOT REDACT
