

June 17, 2011

Open Letter to West Vancouver Council

Re: May 25, 2011 Grosvenor Ideas Fair III – 1300 Marine Drive – Ambleside Village

With reference to the proposed plans for the redevelopment of the 1300 block of Marine Drive, I wish to convey that I support redevelopment of this site **within the height and density requirements outlined in the existing Official Community Plan.**

Making an exception to the current OCP will open the door for similar towers to line the rest of Marine Drive. And let's be clear about this, the proposed two-8 storey buildings, terracing to 6 stories, then 5, etc., is not only a tower, but a series of towers.

Grosvenor plans to mitigate the impact of the increased height/density development by including cutting-edge design elements and community amenities including art work. Personally I don't believe any amount of art work or elaborate design components can compare to vistas currently afforded by the existing OCP. West Vancouver is blessed with a topography that naturally slopes towards beautiful ocean views. Any development that puts high buildings on the ocean front is unacceptable.

The traffic impact increased density will have must also be taken into consideration. Traffic along Marine Drive and particularly at Marine Drive and Taylor Way is already a problem and we haven't even begun to feel the effect the Evelyn Drive development will have or the proposed towers at Park Royal.

At the May 25 Grosvenor Ideas Fair I asked architect James Cheng about the possibility of developing within the existing OCP. Mr. Cheng responded this would not happen; Grosvenor would either develop with (the proposed) increased height/density or things would remain unchanged, as they are now. A sentiment echoed by West Vancouver Chamber of Commerce vice-president, Maggie Pappas who said it's not financially feasible to develop otherwise. Perhaps this is true, but without any facts or figures to substantiate this claim I'm inclined to be sceptical. I would also like to point out that while Ms. Pappas may be the voice of local business, she is not representative of area residents.

We are being told development of 1300 Marine is only viable with increased height and density. The same argument was made when 17th and Bellevue was redeveloped and the community was offered the "carrot" of a community theatre. Council at the time had sense to say NO. What do you know? A one story CIBC (nicely landscaped may I add) ended up being viable.

By entering into an agreement to work with a developer who refuses to work either within or significantly closer to the existing OCP, council has tainted the concept that the community is being given a choice. Residents have not been asked if they support optimizing the redevelopment of this public owned asset, rather we are being asked to select which one of two massively increased height/density options we would prefer and which amenities will make this more palatable. It supports the feeling that residents are not really being given a choice, rather the process is just steering things towards the outcome that council and the developer wants (more density = more \$).

This feeling is further reinforced by a WV district council report dated January 19 on the AmblesideNow initiative which states "Public consultation and input will be integral to the project and will shape what gets built and the projects timing. Meetings in a variety of formats will be held throughout the process, reflecting the information to be presented and the **type of feedback desired**". The report goes on to say a web site (www.amblesidenow.ca) will be established through which the public will be able to submit comments. However as of June 8 there was no capacity to post a comment on the web site. While I understand this has now been rectified, if public consultation is

important why has it taken so long to include a link for comments and why will only “*the type of feedback desired*” be reflected?

At earlier meetings held by Grosvenor, participants were encouraged to “shout out” their ideas and to only provide positive feedback, no negative comments. Anyone who was not comfortable “shouting”, was hard of hearing (let’s not overlook our large senior demographic), or was too polite to interrupt, went unheard. The developer claims they’ve listened to what the community wants, I suggest they’ve only listened to some. These “Ideas Fairs” put on by Grosvenor do not constitute public consultation.

Council has a conflict of interest by being the arbiter of a project where the district owns half of the 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 densification and ensure a sense of predictability). I don’t fault council for this predicament, but I do expect that they recognize they have an enhanced duty to ensure due diligence and transparency.

To achieve this council must ensure pertinent information is clearly presented (such as existing OCP height and density requirements) and that tax-payers are also given a serious option which meets these requirements, and not just options the developer supports. Council should also disclose what funds have been set aside so far for a new police station and how much more is needed, as well as provide a cost analysis of the various plans. Council should then ensure everyone has the opportunity to voice their opinion rather than just seeking “desired” feedback from pro-density factions. Let’s consider ALL the options, not just either a concave or convex high density development.

I attended a meeting at the senior’s centre on March 10 regarding proposed plans to redevelop the Safeway Site at 1500 Marine Drive. The overwhelming response from the overflowing crowd was people are in favour of revitalization of Ambleside, but on a scale that’s consistent with the village atmosphere. If presented with a development option on a much smaller scale I’m sure the majority of the community would support this.

Selling off public assets and maximizing density to fund a new Public Safety building is a short-sited move. Surely there are other infrastructure replacements that will be required in the coming years, what will council do to fund these? Sell off the rest of our OCP? By then the precedent will have been set, so why not more towers?

There has been much talk of how to shape West Vancouver for the next millennium. Previous councils had the vision to create a well-used sea walk and public parks, legacies we can all be grateful for. I don’t think future generations are going to thank us for a high rise/high density development with trendy retail outlets and upscale condos.

Sincerely,

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