

# West Van approves taller towers at Park Royal

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West Vancouver council has approved a proposal to add five more floors to two rental highrise towers already under construction at Park Royal. Council voted 4-3 to approve the plan, which will see one of the two towers go from 14 to 19 storeys and the other rise from 11 storeys to 15 storeys, following a lengthy public hearing and council discussion Thursday night.

Increasing the number of floors on the buildings already under construction at the former White Spot site on Marine Drive at Taylor Way will mean an addition of 95 rental units to the project, including 89 permanent rental units. The total number of units in the project will increase from 203 - which council approved in May 2018 - to 298.

The municipality will also collect an additional \$10 million in community amenity contributions, for a total of just over \$21.8 million in cash contributions, as well as just over \$10 million in in-kind contributions towards 11 supportive housing units and an on-site childcare facility.

The public hearing Thursday night pitted comments from those who said the need for more rental housing to attract young families and downsizers should be seized upon against those who worried reopening a decision on a project already in progress would set a bad precedent for developers coming back to ask for more density and render the local area plan meaningless. Coun. Sharon Thompson acknowledged, "This is a highly charged and emotional issue" but said the project presented a chance to quickly add needed housing options. Coun. Nora Gambioli agreed the request to reopen the previous decision and add floors was unusual and "has put us on council in a very difficult position" but said she had to consider the interests of the whole community.

"We know we need new rental units," she said. "We need housing diversification."

Gambioli said the official community plan supports tall highrises on the site.

"Some people have said that council is in the pocket of developers," she said. "That is absolutely not true." Coun. Craig Cameron pointed to other projects, like the nearby West Royal highrise towers, which were controversial over 30 years ago. The council of the day voted to approve them, despite opposition, he said. "They felt it that was the right decision."

Cameron said the substance of the decision being voted on must outweigh concerns about process. He said there was no better place to put 95 more rental housing units.

"There's no neighbourhood character to speak of at Marine Drive and Taylor Way," he said. "It's a bunch of parking lots." Coun. Peter Lambur, Marcus Wong and Bill Soprovich voted against the project.

Lambur said the project won't provide affordable housing, because the rents will still be too expensive for most people. He added developers will soon be lining up and saying "me too" to get more density approved for their own projects. "I dread the path going forward."

Soprovich said he also didn't like the principal of reopening the previous council decision, which was difficult to reach to begin with.

More of those who spoke at the fivehour public hearing - either in council chambers or on the phone - made comments in favour of the project, while more written submissions were opposed.

Nancy Farran, chair of the West Vancouver Community Foundation, said the housing project addresses the needs of the "missing middle."

Charlotte McLaughlin said the project provided housing that's "been missing for the past 40 years."

Others spoke of the difficulty of finding rental housing in West Vancouver.

But not everyone agreed. "It's a way to get in and change the rules," said John Lesow.

"It's an opportunity to get more by gaming the system," he said of the developer's request. "You get what you want and you go get more."

**Melinda Slater** told council, "I think it's wrong to consider this request," adding the public had already been "dragged through an incredibly exhausting and bitterly contested process."

Mayor Mary-Ann Booth cast the deciding vote in favour of the additional storeys, saying council has to make a decision in the best interests of the community. "Our job is to think 30 to 50 years from now," she said.

"We have the right to change our mind and we should change our mind. ... This is an excellent opportunity we cannot ignore."

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