

May 6, 2018

Mayor & Council:

I would like to address some comments from the April 9 Council meeting regarding Park Royal's development and rezoning application for 752 Marine Drive (former White Spot site).

In response to Councillor Cameron's question about the \$6.16 million cost for the child care space, Director of Planning Jim Bailey assured this is a competitive price and an accurate valuation of space adding that this is very valuable land at a very desirable location. Councillor Cameron still found this price remarkable and noted you could almost pay parents to stay home with their children. I too find the valuation of the child care space extremely high. There are no opportunity costs to obtain a better revenue by selling this property unless it's rezoned, so the value of land is actually limited. The audacity to claim it's a very valuable, desirable location and put a \$6.16 million price tag on a child care space is indeed remarkable. It's disconcerting to think Planning staff, who are negotiating these amenities, are involved in the valuation as well as recommending this development proposal – even if this isn't a conflict of interest, the optics are terrible.

Councillor Cameron said no one was complaining about the commercial component, just the residential; that we can't force Larco (Park Royal) not to build; and commercial development would generate 300 vehicle trips per hour. He also defied anyone to come up and complain about traffic generated by the child care space.

I would like to challenge these statements – for starters, the commercial component is not driving the rezoning application – commercial is not generating high-rise, high-density development – residential is. We're told residential generates less traffic than commercial development, but no-one is going to wait half an hour to get through the Taylor Way/Marine Dr. intersection to shop – they will go elsewhere. However, anyone who resides in the proposed residential units will not have that option – they will have to traverse this intersection.

The childcare space alone will generate an increase in traffic that could be avoided if it were at a location other than this busy intersection (such as near a park or school). So, yes, I do object to additional traffic generated at this intersection from parents dropping off and picking up their children when this is entirely avoidable.

As for Councillor Cameron's comment that we cannot force Larco not to build – perhaps not, but we *can* force them to build within existing zoning. So why not control what we can, which is rezoning and the type of development that takes place on this site?

While acknowledging that traffic (at this intersection) is "not great", Councillor Cameron noted it's "not of our making" and will continue to get bad even if we don't add any new units. However, Park Royal is a high-end, regional shopping centre dependent upon drawing customers from a wide base. As such it continues to cater to the convenience-oriented destination shopper who expects a parking space. To deny responsibility for their contribution to traffic congestion is absurd. The argument that residential will generate less traffic than commercial development might make sense if the proposal was for an entirely residential development, but it's not. We're not giving up one source of traffic in exchange for another, lesser source, we're actually taking on traffic generated by residential *in addition to* commercial, including the White Spot, who has not left the area, but just moved a bit further west.

Councillor Booth noted it's interesting that when Burfield Place was discussed (a proposal for 39 apartment units at the west end of Rogers Creek), no one stood up and complained about traffic at that intersection. It's stunning that Councillor Booth would equate traffic congestion at Taylor Way & Marine Drive with an intersection in West Van that most people have never even heard of let alone traversed.

Councillor Nora Gambioli agrees with both Councillors Cameron and Booth and feels that traffic studies indicate scientifically that traffic will be lower with this development than if this site remains at C1 zoning – “that’s a fact”, according to Councillor Gambioli. (Councillor Cameron also noted that people believe what they want and damn the facts.) But it appears Council is working with incorrect “facts”. Bundt’s traffic engineer said C1 zoning (allows) up to 70,000 sq. ft. of commercial, potentially generating ~300 vehicle trips per hour. However according to Planning staff, C1 zoning at this site allows up to 52,000 sq. ft. of commercial space. Further 52,000 sq. ft. may be an unrealistically high number given the constraints that accompany C1, such as parking requirements, set backs and height restrictions. Which of these “facts” is true? How do you damn someone for ignoring facts if your facts are incorrect or subject to change? Are the “facts” Council is using to make their decision faulty? It appears so. One would expect this would give Council pause before making a precedent setting, irreversible decision

Councillor Cameron also inferred that if you oppose building rental (and apparently this project with its 49 rental units), you are not supportive of immigrants. He noted that we’re a country of immigrants, (many) move to Canada every year and not all have a lot of money, but it’s (Council’s) responsibility to provide places for people to live – “we can’t just export our problems to other municipalities and expect them to clean up our mess”. He related a story of his 6-year old son’s friend from Egypt whose family rents an apartment in Park Royal towers; the father works overseas but moved his family of 5 here for the education. He noted that the way we can contribute is to build a variety of housing that meets peoples needs and added: So, if you have to wait another 30 seconds to get across the (Lions Gate) bridge, (so be it) because we’re giving downsizing families and people getting divorced a place to live.

A few things are troubling about these comments. Councillor Cameron’s claims that West Van must do our part to house new immigrants who do not have a lot of money by building a variety of housing is not supported. West Van currently has ~1,750 empty homes; our built form has increased while our population has decreased. For all the building that has occurred, not just in West Van but in Greater Vancouver, we haven’t made a dent in the affordability crisis. I also question the logic of attempting to house some of the most impoverished newcomers in one of the most expensive communities in Canada – it just doesn’t make sense, no matter how high your moral ground is. Further, West Van has no shortage of immigrants, we are a very diverse community, not some white, exclusive country club that Councillor Cameron implies.

Those who object to this development are not by default xenophobic or entitled and I take exception to Councillor Cameron portraying anyone with legitimate concerns about this project as such. This kind of negativity only serves to divide the community and is not helpful.

Another troubling aspect is that the demographic we’re attempting to house keeps changing – is it impoverished immigrants, divorcees, young, single professionals, retail and service workers or downsizing seniors and young families as our draft Official Community Plan (OCP) suggests? Exactly who are we trying to target?

Councillor Gambioli is unsympathetic to neighbouring West Royal tower residents concerned about shadow impact from the proposed development, going so far as to say West Royal will throw just as much shadow on this development as this development will throw on West Royal. Such insensitivity from an elected official to residents' quality of life is shocking.

Mayor Smith feels this is a logical place to put housing and "everyone knows that". He derides anyone who objects to this project as negative moaners and whiners, adverse to change and "retirees that are happy with no life". He feels this development is suitable for people in their 20's who want new, 550 – 750 sq. ft. apartments with "no dining room", but that have exercise rooms and roof top decks and feels concerns about traffic are "crazy" and "nonsense".

Councillor Gambioli noted that thank goodness we didn't approve this project 5 years ago because this (new proposal) is a much better project.

The only reason this wasn't approved 5 years ago is because many citizens realized this wasn't a good project or the right location and said so...the same people that are called negative whiners by the Mayor and not supportive of immigrants and oblivious to facts by Councillor Cameron. If this project is substantially better than what was originally proposed, imagine how much better it could be if public concerns were responded to in a meaningful way – with an area plan for the entire Park Royal neighbourhood, a traffic management strategy and a housing policy.

I support residential development that meets an identified need and is in line with the community's values, but I do not support precedent setting density in just about the worst location imaginable that reduces residents' quality of life and will have little to no impact on affordable housing.

As elected officials your duty is to represent the community. As such, I urge you to listen to the public. Unless there is clear support for this project, your obligation is to reject it.

Sincerely,

Melinda Slater
1058 Keith Road
West Vancouver

Please do not redact my name or address.