

DNV uses comedy to get OCP-creative

Open-minded forum attracts a crowd

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Saucy jokes and gales of laughter aren't usually associated with urban planning discussions, but both could be found at the District of North Vancouver's Official Community Plan forum Tuesday.

"We wanted people to come and participate and have some fun," said Mayor Richard Walton. "So we tried to keep the tone creative and open-minded."

The official community plan, or OCP, is the overall strategy for land use, infrastructure and district policy. The document is generally reviewed every 15 to 20 years. The District of North Vancouver's current OCP dates back to 1990. The Tuesday forum was the first of several events that will be held over the two-year review process.

Arriving at the district hall, some 125 residents were greeted with interactive displays designed to introduce the key issues and generate feedback. Later in evening, the North Shore News' Dee Dhaliwal led a discussion with four panellists: BC Hydro's Bev Van Ruyven, Peter Robinson, CEO of the David Suzuki Foundation, youth advocate Dane Nicholson, and North Shore medical health officer Dr. Brian O'Connor.

Van Ruyven confronted residents with the fact that they consume more energy per capita than the regional average. And while not quite as thirsty for electricity as people in West Vancouver, district residents draw more than 50 per cent more than their neighbours in the City of North Vancouver. Overall, said Van Ruyven, Metro Vancouver residents use 60 per cent more power per capita than Europeans in similar communities.

Robinson spoke to environmental issues on the North Shore and argued that natural spaces have considerable economic value beyond recreation and the extracting of commodities.

"I call these ecosystem services," he said. "This includes water filtration, slope stabilization and a whole lot of other things. If you lose these natural systems they have to be replaced with an engineered solution that is usually far more expensive."

Robinson said New York City spent \$1 billion on protecting the watershed that supplies its drinking water, a fraction of the \$8 billion required to build a filtration system.

Nicholson, a member of the district's community plan working group, said the district had to find new and innovative ways to reach young people and involve them in developing the OCP.

"And with all due respect, you can't send a councillor, in a suit, to say 'Yo!'" he said, to laughter.

On a more serious note, Nicholson said young adults were fleeing the district, driven out by high housing costs and slim employment options.

O'Connor opened his remarks by painting himself as a "mythical average citizen."

"I'm middle class, I'm well-established, I have equity in my single-family home," he said.

"If I was approached about what I would look for in an OCP, I might say I want more amenities, more conveniences to support my lifestyle. More trails, less development -- certainly not near my home -- and for sure, lower taxes," he said, over more laughter.

"I might choose options that contribute to my comfort, but they may not be the best choices to contribute to the vitality of my community now and 25 years from now."

Following the panel's remarks, Vancouver TheatreSports' Denise Jones swept into the room, in character, as a ditzy, flirtatious talk show host. She led the room in irreverent banter over some of the issues already raised, and also made sure Nicholson remained blushing throughout the evening. One of the main talking points was the lack of residents aged between 20 and 35, the "lost generation" as one speaker said. Housing costs, inadequate transit options, lack of employment and a dreary nightlife were raised as possible causes.

The next two OCP forums, Our People and Our Places, will be held June 20 and June 25, respectively. A larger summit-style event will be held in the fall.

The OCP is expected to be finalized in December of 2010.