

north shore news

LAUTENS: Park Royal towers back up for debate

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This
JUST IN
Trevor Lautens

Abandoning my usual wishy-washy views, I have a strong one on the proposed Park Royal towers project. Kill it, West Vancouver council.

Nora Gambioli. Christine Cassidy. Craig Cameron, maybe. They're council's most likely giant-killers of the density-leaping 27-storey and 12-storey residential-plus towers sought by the Lalji family on the White Spot site at Marine Drive and Taylor Way.

But, if the three councillors are opposed, like playing bridge they'd need a fourth when the March 30 debate resumes Monday.

The soothing soft-sell is in full flood. Non-profit housing for the disabled. A walkable area — to those glittering Park Royal stores, otherwise a hike to anywhere else. And bus service. Sure, purchasers of these suites, many if not most costing seven figures, will happily join the masses at the already busiest bus stop in town.

Here's an innovation: a bicycle valet. More cars? No fear. Rick Amantea, Park Royal's vice-president and genial frontman, says there would be only one parking space per unit.

Just one? Positively Dickensian.

The pressure on council is huge — as in the Grosvenor development issue, when popular veteran poll-topper Bill Soprovich broke critics' ranks and voted to allow a project that some councillors wanted to shrink, and was punished at November's election by slipping to fourth place.

That was then. But, a stupid provincial change, all B.C. councillors now have nearly four years of amnesia and controversy burnout as their cushion against voter wrath. Few remember the uproar — and suspicions of dirty work at the crossroads — around the 312 Taylor Way project, directly across from the currently debated site.

Debate seems over in the court of public opinion. Town hall's own online poll indicated 58 per cent against the development, especially at one of most paralytic traffic spots in Metro.

Typically, Melinda Slater — with her council-watching sister Scenery they're amusingly self-described as "S2" — questions why "council has moved this application along under the premise of obtaining public feedback."

Doesn't matter. Money drives all.

Every special interest is ranged in favour: business, labour, media, and the planning department — the handmaiden of growth in the

hottest, costliest real estate market in the country.

“Official” concern about monster homes, protecting character, and consulting neighbourhoods is mostly sham. As the old Frenchman said — it was probably an old Frenchman — the gift of speech was given to us not to reveal but to conceal what we really think.

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At this writing, two North Shore MLAs, Ralph Sultan and Jane Thornthwaite, say Yes to the proposed transportation expansion tax; two others, Naomi Yamamoto and Jordan Sturdy, are silent — which suggests, at the very least, No doubts about it, so to speak.

If Yes prevails, next step: road pricing, the euphemism for charging drivers per kilometre, or for driving into the downtown core, or over bridges or through tunnels — a tangle of various jurisdictions. But it would delight those who could afford it, many happily putting the cost on their expense accounts. You'd think anything so discriminatory to Jane and Joe

Average would anger the little-people-loving leftists. Nope, they're all for it.

The Metro Mayors' Council has long been quietly kicking this around. Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore, a big Yes man, bloviates that the plan is “committed to implementing comprehensive mobility pricing on the road network as the most fair and effective way to reduce congestion.”

But proposed relief from the gasoline tax would undeniably be a carrot.

North Vancouver District Mayor Richard Walton has another vegetable in mind: The transit tax proposal is “a political hot potato. It's about tax room and not wanting to go into an election and take any political heat.” My, my, who'd have thought it?

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One-time (and deservedly so, some unkind persons might say) New Democrat Party premier Michael Harcourt wrote a curious piece in The Vancouver Sun last month. It strongly hyped Woodfibre LNG's proposed plant in Howe Sound, without — other than the obligatory throat-clearing that “we can never compromise when it comes to our environment” — one word about liquefied natural gas tanker traffic.

Odd omission, considering what acclaimed UBC anthropologist Wade Davis calls “the most glorious fjord in the world.” No worry, Woodfibre LNG vice-president Byng Giraud asserts. Absolutely safe. Not one loss of “containment” in the last 50 years.

Reverse conflict-of-interest disclosure: I hold shares in energy companies and also Fortis, which would supply (lots of) electricity for the project. So my narrow self-interest is, hey, do it.

What troubles me most is our yes-in-somebody-else's-backyard hypocrisy. Why, if consistent, don't we comfortable, dividend-cashing West Vancouverites oppose oil and gas transportation through our “remote” areas?

(Breaking news: An oil leak from a ship is fouling our own English Bay.)

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