

SULLIVAN: Mega-village: livable or not, it's coming

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Paul Sullivan

For some reason, I found myself driving through Metrotown in Burnaby the other day.

Whoa.

Been to Metrotown lately? While our attention was elsewhere, Metrotown has become a magisterial cluster of highrise towers that dwarf what's left of Burnaby the Burb. "Metropolis" would be more accurate.

And it's not just Metrotown, but Lougheed, Brentwood, Edmonds; wherever the SkyTrain stops or plans to stop. It's not an accident. It was planned that way.

In fact, Burnaby the Burb has overtaken Vancouver as the highrise capital of the Lower Mainland. According to a recent Colliers survey, Burnaby is in the process of erecting 106 highrise towers, compared to "only" 68 in Vancouver. And the scale is stupefying. Of those 106, 47 are more than 40 storeys, many topping out at 65.

Attracted by a regime that's less complex and controversial than Vancouver's — where every proposed highrise is an opportunity for an outburst of passionate protest — developers are having fun in Burnaby. Next up, Coquitlam, where they are busily anticipating the Evergreen Line.

I bring this up because ...

This same frenzy for increased density is playing out across Metro. Even little sleepy Port Moody is in the process of becoming vibrant, bustling Downtown Port Moody.

Then we have North Vancouver. With the exception of the Lonsdale corridor, which is building on an urban tradition, North Van remains mostly suburban. And because there's no transit upgrade coming (with the elusive exception of that legendary third SeaBus), there's no developer catnip that will lead to the Burnaby-ization of North Vancouver. Right?

Wrong. Welcome to Lions Gate Village. Right now, it ain't much. Business in Vancouver calls it "the mid-20th-century wasteland of aging motels that welcomes visitors to North Vancouver."

Unfortunately it's mostly in the form of storage lockers! -cjk

Not for long. Transit or no transit, plans call for 100,000 square feet of commercial space, 180 more hotel rooms, and 2,000 residential units, with at least seven highrise towers to a maximum of 22 storeys. Not quite Metrotown, but it's a start. There's something called "Neighbourhood Infill" that makes you wonder: "Infill with what?"

Basically, Park Royal is going to leapfrog across the Capilano River and establish roots in North Vancouver and grow like crazy.

I have mixed feelings about all this. Generally, I see the need for increased density and I'd be a fool to argue that Denny's and the Travelodge have any value worth preserving. But do we need another metropolis masquerading as a village? I mean, whoever heard of a village with 22-storey towers?

I've already written about the quaint anachronism known as the Lions Gate Bridge. Metro's most charming bottleneck, all it needs is Mega-village at its north end. Unless there's a secret scheme to ban cars for all those 2,000-plus new residents who come with Mega-village, **by 2018 it will be easier to kayak over town.**

But there's more to this than good planning. Right now, just about everyone is wondering what makes Vancouver one of the world's most livable cities. I would argue a big part of the answer is the North Shore. Our mountains, rain forest and ocean beaches are still livable. Concrete and glass, not so much, especially at \$1,000 a square foot. So maybe there's a case for preservation.

Undaunted by doubt, the district's Dan Milburn told the media that Lions Gate Village is "going to dramatically change this area and create all the positive things we want." And then he rattled off the list of positive things we want: walkable community, commercial combined with residential, close to parks, close to Vancouver (that's if you can get over the bridge.).

Maybe he's right. There's nothing meaningful about preserving Earl's parking lot. But is another cluster of towers what we want next to the river? Or is there another option that contributes to the most livable city?

Whatever, we don't have a lot of time to think about it. Council approved the village in 2013 and has started cutting down trees. When I went to the website to **"get details of this work," I clicked on the link and was told I am "not authorized to access this page."**

Why do I have a bad feeling about this, Chewy?



Touche! -cjk

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