

north shore news

Ridgeway Annex housing proposal to get public input

Chris Slater / North Shore News

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A proposal by Anthem Properties for nine single-family homes is being considered for North Vancouver's Ridgeway Annex school site. Photo Mike Wakefield

The former Ridgeway Annex school could well be replaced by houses in the not too distant future following council for the City of North Vancouver's decision to take a developer's proposal to change area zoning to allow for the project to go to public hearing.

The now vacant school, located at Ridgeway Avenue and Fifth Street, has been selected as a site for nine single-family residences by Anthem Ridgeway Developments.

Closed since 2011, the former school is owned by the North Vancouver School District, which would use the proceeds from its sale to help fund a \$49.9-million rebuild of Argyle secondary if the roughly 62,000-square-foot property is sold to developers.

For the project to proceed, the property would need rezoning from "public use and assembly" to "one-unit residential." The developer has already secured purchasing rights and conducted two public engagement periods. The city's official community plan would also need amending and would go to public hearing. Once the changes are made to both, the sale of the land will be complete. Although most on council were in favour of the motions, some thought differently.

"I think the school board is going in exactly the wrong direction with respect to this piece of property," said Coun. Rod Clark of the proposal.

Clark called the vacant building "a community asset," citing the property could be potentially used to house a daycare.

"This is a community asset which should be deployed as such, as a community asset. ... So for those reasons I won't support turning it into yet more residential density. It's a valuable piece of land and cannot be replaced."

Coun. Pam Bookham was also against seeing the former school, which still has a functioning playground and gravel field, demolished to make way for more housing.

Bookham cited concerns she had that the city should look at the future and the potential implications of selling open spaces like this, which is still used by area residents for recreational activities, as the city becomes more densely populated in ensuing years.

"We have need for areas of informal play, areas for quiet reflection, and the city is only going to become denser as time passes," she said.

"It's one thing to look for the term of this council, it's another thing to be looking out 50 or even 100 years from now thinking about what the city might look like ... where will the greens spaces be?"

On the opposite side, Coun. Linda Buchanan was in full support of seeing the development go ahead to public input, explaining that the money generated by the sale goes back into reinvesting into public schools.

"All public institutions ... they all come to the end of their life and we need to as taxpayers, start to take a look at how we are going to be investing in these properties and reinvesting in these properties," she said.

"This is a community asset yes, but an asset being sold to reinvest into other assets ... there's no greater asset than the education of children."

Council voted 5 to 2 in favour of bringing the motions to public hearing, with Coun. Bookham and Coun. Clark voting against.

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Selling public land to fund capital projects or operations is not a sustainable practice. It is akin to a farmer selling part of his land to purchase machinery, build a barn, or bying seed. Keep this up and eventually you will have no land to farm! -cjk