

north shore news

Disillusioned by municipal process

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January 19, 2014 12:00 AM

Dear Editor:

Martin Millerchip's column (Big Development Drives Big Change) in the North Shore News Jan. 5 struck a chord. I also thought municipal politics was kind of a "last frontier" as far as individuals having an ability to influence and affect change. Having spoken with most members of the District of West Vancouver council, I genuinely like the politicians I have met, (even though I may not always agree with them) and believe they are decent, principled and hardworking. Regrettably, I also agree with Mr. Millerchip's observation that it is no longer possible for residents to shape their community when it comes to the big decisions; particularly if their ideas do not line up with those of developers. I have closely followed the process that approved Grosvenor's development application for the 1300-block Marine Drive. Of interest is that early on many residents predicted the fate of the 1300-block was essentially a done deal and there was nothing they could do about it. I was skeptical myself but nonetheless felt it was imperative to follow the process closely, make an educated decision and ensure my opinion was heard. What spurred me along was the notion that a majority of residents were of similar opinion regarding the density proposed for this site. The Ambleside Dundarave Ratepayers Association's petition, which collected over 1,600 signatures requesting a smaller scale development, supported this concept. But how naive I was to think our politicians (with the notable exceptions of councillors Cameron and Gambioli) would respect the wishes of the majority of taxpayers who took the time to weigh in on this matter.

What was the point of an exhaustive (and expensive) public consultation process if council ultimately decides to ignore the feedback? It's really just a public relations move to let residents think they have a say when in fact the only aspects the public was encouraged to influence were whether they'd prefer a massive increase in density in a concave or convex form, and how about some art with that? It was apparent from the get-go that there was never any appetite to address fundamental matters of height and density.

Our elected officials have let a developer determine the fate of Ambleside Village against the wishes of a significant number of residents. Perhaps dazzled by financial gain, there was no hope for a balanced solution that could have seen a modest increase in tax and density which would have satisfied almost everyone.

To accept any development proposal without first determining what the community will support puts the cart before the horse and the developer in the driver's seat. After witnessing other major flaws, including the absence of an open bidding process, one can't help but be left with the impression the District of West Vancouver is seriously incompetent or (more likely) that it was working with a specific agenda.

I am disheartened and disillusioned. Not because we didn't "win," but because the process through which the decision was made is so inherently flawed and even though I did my best to do something about it, I could not make a difference. Thank you Mr. Millerchip for voicing what many of us have been feeling. That's exactly what a community newspaper should do.

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West Vancouver

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