

Shelley Fralic: Heads up, Metro Vancouver mayors: A revolt is brewing

That something in the air? It's anger

BY SHELLEY FRALIC, VANCOUVER SUN COLUMNIST JANUARY 19, 2016



Great neighbourhoods are being destroyed, one old home at a time, writes Shelley Fralic.

Does it seem to you, as it does to me, that rarely a day goes by without yet another story of how Metro Vancouver real estate is being bulldozed, foreign-owned, over-priced, over-built, developer-designed and any other term to denote that our little urban world is changing faster than an ordinary taxpaying citizen can keep up with?

Does it also seem to you, as it does to me, although it's a strictly anecdotal and gut-based observation, that the accelerated pace of demolition and new construction that is so drastically transforming our neighbourhoods has finally awakened the sleeping giant?

No question about it. There is something in the air these days.

Anger.

Civic taxpayers seem to be shaking off voter complacency and replacing it with outrage and outspokenness, filling council chambers and development meetings and all manner of public forums with a unified message: **They no longer trust city hall politicians and bureaucrats to listen to their concerns or represent the greater public good in the face of unbridled growth and runaway residential and commercial development in their communities.**

Last week, a column I wrote about New Westminster's upcoming Official Community Plan, and the massive rezoning changes some of its proposed scenarios would foist upon the city, was meant as a wake-up call to residents. Speak up now, I enjoined, or forever hold your peace when your neighbourhood is suddenly unrecognizable.

And the inbox avalanche, from all over the region, began.

We agree, readers said, everyone needs to be involved in change. But there was also this overriding sentiment: We can't trust our growth-at-any-cost elected representatives; we fear decisions are made well before the public is given a say and thus our input is meaningless. Oh, and we're sick and tired of developers and consultants deciding how and when, if at all, our neighbourhoods should be rezoned and reimagined in the name of progress.

A sampling of the many comments:

"At what point is enough, enough? Do our leaders envision Los Angeles north? Should we aim to be larger than Toronto? Do residents really want more urban chaos and pollution and fewer trees and open spaces?"

"Developers are salivating and our elected officials have their own agendas."

"The 'planners' of Langley and Langley Township are sorely out of sync with the current population growth and the needs for infrastructure. Decisions are made in the same way as New West. Count on the lack of resident participation and charge forward without consideration of the area's immediate needs."

"It may be that this eagerness to permit excessive residential development has its origins in the generous donations by developers that keep elected officials in office. In any case, it is wise not to accept the official rationale for development in your neighbourhood at face value."

"Density is not destiny. It is a choice. Density does not add one more square inch of parks or roads. In fact, it subtracts at the margins. It is very puzzling that the population has bought into the 'one million people are coming by 2040' statement without any significant questioning of the wisdom thereof."

"Welcome to West Coquitlam. They want suggestions for a new name? I sent in Bosa Town. Our lovely 60-year-plus neighbourhood is going away, house by house. We were told by Major Stewart and his merry band of councillors you have to look at the 'big picture.' West Coquitlam was a great place to raise our family. That way of life has now changed to make way for the high rises. Time to head for the hills. Oh wait, no more hills? They're gone and replaced by multiple dwellings."

Granted, it's hardly a scientific sample, but if I were a Metro Vancouver municipal official, I wouldn't discount the simmering anger that has been building of late among the folks who pay the bills and have a vested interest in what you are doing to their streets.

Your people are mad as hell, and if the sound and fury of their growing discontent is any indication, they are not going to take it any more.

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