



Housing Committee Meeting Date: July 13, 2007

To: Housing Committee

From: Heather Schoemaker, Manager
Corporate Relations Department

Date: June 28, 2007

Subject: **Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues: *Housing – The Price we Pay***

Recommendation:

That the GVRD Board:

- a) Invite the housing dialogue panelists to review and provide comments on the Draft Regional Affordable Housing Strategy in consideration of the discussion generated during the dialogues; and
 - b) Forward this report to member municipalities, and other related agencies for their information and comment.
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1. PURPOSE

To provide information to the Housing Committee on the June 5, 15 and 20, 2007 Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogue: *Housing – The Price We Pay* as well as the original session held on March 27, 2006 at the SFU Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

2. CONTEXT

The Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues is a series of discussions intended to help decision makers shape the future of the region by presenting a range of views to challenge and stimulate fresh thought on a range of regional issues.

The attached summary (Attachment 1) provides an overview of the discussion of the dialogue. Further background information is available by request. Attachment 2 provides a schedule and details on the 2007 Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues.

3. KEY MESSAGES

Building on the housing dialogue hosted at the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue March 27, 2006, the discussion was expanded to include three additional venues – South of the Fraser; Central/Northeast and the North Shore.

Focusing predominately on housing affordability, in the mainstream market, the dialogues examined the impact of high housing costs, the impediments to developing an adequate supply of livable, affordable and sustainable housing, and innovative mechanisms to help

address this issue. What follows is a synthesis of the discussion – details on the individual dialogues can be found in Attachment 1.

Why we have a Housing Affordability Problem

Participants expressed the belief that we may be a victim of our own success. Greater Vancouver has been consistently voted one of the most livable regions in the world by the United Nations. We have worked hard to achieve this reputation and have promoted and marketed the region to the world. The result is that many people want to move and live here. We will be in the global spotlight again with the Olympics in 2010.

However, we are not a country club and can't expect to keep people out. We will continue to grow and develop with current projections estimating the need for 22,000 units of new housing a year. We've benefited from the strong, continued housing demand and the rising land values, but we have a limited, fixed supply of land as we are constrained by mountains, ocean, the US border and the agricultural land reserve. We are an increasingly urban community; however, participants commented that the GVRD has not used its constrained land very well.

While we may be one of the most expensive places in Canada to live, we are not unique in facing this housing affordability problem as this is being experienced in communities throughout BC and Canada. There are some aspects of this problem that we can't change – escalating land values, rising cost of construction, interest rates, and a constrained land base – and there are other aspects that are within our control – the amount of density within Greater Vancouver, the availability of public transit and transportation choice, innovative housing designs and fast-track approval processes.

Spectrum of Housing Needs

As defined by the dialogue participants, the housing problem is not a single problem but a bundle of problems that span the spectrum of housing needs. Finding solutions to address affordability in the mainstream market requires a different set of policies and actions than addressing the issues of homelessness and social housing.

For the homeless, the challenges are often first and foremost mental and physical health issues, substance abuse problems, street crime issues and the lack of money and employability. In the case of low-income people in the region, the challenge lies in that these people are not able to participate or compete in the housing market even if the market was not superheated. Solving the housing problems of the homeless and low-income sectors of society require a greater level of involvement and financing from senior levels of government to provide social housing.

There is a central role for the provincial and federal government to play in providing financing for social housing and in changing taxation policy particularly for new and rental housing. However, success will only come with the cooperation of all levels of government.

Implications of a Housing Affordability Problem

The conventional housing market faces difficulties in a rapidly growing and robust urban centre with a constrained land base. Where will our children live? In one sense, we are always faced with a housing affordability problem if that means that some people must settle for less than their ideal housing solution. However, participants believed this becomes a critical region-wide problem when the fight to lower-cost housing and lower land values

directly impacts our quality of life, creates massive transportation and land-use challenges, when labour shortages emerge because workers can't live close to where the jobs are, when residential land values become so high that industrial or office development becomes a lower priority and we have trouble finding new space to accommodate employment.

For those already in the housing market, this may be a good situation – for those who are not it's a bad situation and an enormous challenge. In Greater Vancouver, people pay 68% of their pre-tax income to their home for their mortgage, taxes and utilities. This is also a social justice issue and impacts the vitality of the urban core. Growing market failure in the economics of the housing market in its ability to provide housing to the region's residents can lead to urban decay if businesses and offices can not find support workers as people move farther away. A longer daily commute for these workers not only increases demands on the transportation system and impacts pollution levels but also places pressures on families. Greater Vancouver is at a tipping point in addressing this issue creatively.

Density and Partnerships as Key Solutions

Reinforced in previous dialogues, participants again identified the need for increasing density as one part of the solution to this problem. Sprawl is not an option and significant, responsible, intelligent densification can ensure that Greater Vancouver can continue to be a model of livability and sustainability. Density can be achieved through creative densification, including the conversion of garages into carriage houses, the legalization of secondary suites, the building of low-rise livable dense complexes, front row houses where there used to be two single detached dwellings, and the rezoning of single family housing lots to accommodate double lots. There is enormous potential to increase the density of single-family neighbourhoods without radically changing their character. Different types of density will solve different problems in the region, including the issue of creating balanced communities which can accommodate people of different ages and allow for aging-in-place.

The assumption that density is the solution rests on the notion that an increase of supply will start to solve the housing issue because of the economics of housing provision. By increasing the supply, you can hopefully get enough new stock to make some of the existing stock affordable. However, there are indications that the problem is more complicated than this and that specialized arrangements need to be made. Exemplary partnerships amongst developers, municipal governments and not-for-profit organizations to develop affordable housing projects have required specialized arrangements, including re-zoning, relaxed bylaws, and targeting the profits and added value of parceled land into community needs (e.g., building daycares within housing projects). The private sector has a role to play in promoting progressive development practices to adapt to the changing needs of society, including engaging in partnerships with municipalities and non-profit organizations.

Density bonuses will only yield a certain limited return in terms of increased supply. When municipalities grant rezonings, they are creating an enormous lift in land value for the developer and as communities we need to negotiate for shares in that lift in land value to create revenue that funds community amenities including affordable housing. An increase in zoning increases the value of the land and therefore provides a source of revenue that can be captured by municipalities and diverted into affordable housing by various mechanisms. This is called inclusionary zoning and can particularly be fruitful in places such as downtown Vancouver where the unit prices are so high.

The Role of Local Government

Participants believed municipalities need to be more creative and flexible in what they allow developers to build and what they require from them. For example, they can actively facilitate the development of affordable housing by developers through rezoning initiatives. The currency which municipalities have is bonus density, streamlining regulations and approvals, and creating more flexibility in allocating land use. They need to remove red tape, fast track approvals on affordable housing, and reduce conflicting regulations across municipalities (e.g. building codes) that undermine creative solutions with developers. A number of municipalities have been involved in innovative arrangements in which they allow developers additional density in exchange for the use of part of the developed land for public goods (e.g., nonprofit office space, daycares, waterfront walkways, rental housing, social housing). Municipalities can also require rental housing as part of large new developments. However, they need to create a mechanism to translate some of the rise in land value that comes from rezoning for density into substantial contributions towards constructing social and affordable rental and market housing. Municipalities have the capacity to convert and develop government land and divert the resulting income into affordable housing investments; however, this requires balancing housing needs with other needs in the community. There are also key linkages between housing decisions and land-use and transportation planning. Municipalities have the capacity to shape mixed-use neighbourhoods that bring together people of different ages, and combine live-work-play opportunities and transportation nodes within walkable distances.

The issue is complicated with dialogue participants expressing the belief that some municipalities resist taking action on affordable housing as they view this issue as the mandate of senior levels of government and they need to prioritize other claims on their municipal budgets. Participants viewed municipalities as being critical players in resolving the housing issue with some experts advocating for all municipalities to absorb a fair-share of regional growth and build affordable housing around transportation nodes.

Education and Communication

A key issue identified by participants is the level of education of the public on housing issues. Proposals for densification and construction of affordable housing are frequently met with strong public opposition (NIMBYism – not-in-my-backyard). Advocates for affordable housing are in the unusual position of applauding municipal governments for standing up to public opinion and deciding to allow development projects that are unpopular with neighbourhood residents. The reality is that affordable housing solutions, such as densification, require citizens to make decisions that are not directly in their interest, particularly if the residents seek to maintain their neighbourhood in its current state. In order to make social decisions, there is a need for conversations about what the housing issues are and how they can be resolved for the benefit of both current residents and future generations.

We need to move away from the American Dream of equating success with a large single-family lot. In the future, most people will likely live life in some form of a multi-family home and that is ok. We need to create a critical mass of awareness amongst the population which can bolster political decision-making. This education step enables the political process to make the right decisions while respecting democracy. Conversations about solutions can be greatly aided by visualization tools that depict densification as “gentle densification” and as an attractive option that enhances neighbourhoods. In the past we over-glorified citizen participation and now we are under-emphasizing its worth. The solution is to get all the parties around the table and to discuss solutions.

Regional Growth Strategy

A message from participants was the need for all municipalities to “buy in” to a regional growth strategy - to consider regional planning as a way of co-ordinating and mandating increased densities on a regional basis. Participants believed we have the ability to build affordable housing if we can get higher density, but the political will may be missing.

Innovative Solutions and Sharing Best Practices

There is evidence that there are many innovative partnerships and solutions being developed in Greater Vancouver to address the housing affordability problem; however, participants expressed a level of frustration that these innovations are not widely shared. An option discussed by participants was the need to form an association, engaging all levels of government, the private sector and the non-profit sector - an association that would carry the message, encouraging partnerships, dialogues and a continuous forum for exchanging best practices.

At the conclusion of the housing dialogue series, panelists voiced their appreciation for the dialogue forum and expressed their desire to continue the discussion working toward concrete actions. It would be appropriate and of value to invite this panel of experts to review and provide comments on the draft Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

Attachments:

1. Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogue – Housing – The Price we Pay
2. Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues 2007 Schedule
3. Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogue – Media Clippings

Future of the Region Sustainability Dialogues

Housing: *The Price we Pay*

March 27, 2006, Vancouver - Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
June 5, 2007 – North Shore – Hollyburn Country Club, West Vancouver
June 15, 2007 – South of the Fraser – Eaglequest Coyote Creek Golf Club, Surrey
June 20, 2007 – Central/Northeast – Inlet Theatre, Port Moody

Panel Members

- Maureen Enser, Executive Director, Urban Development Institute
- Ward McAllistair, President & CEO, Ledingham McAllister
- Tracie McTavish, President, Rennie Marketing Systems
- David Negrin, Senior Vice-President of Development, Concord Pacific Group Inc.
- Jim O'Dea, Consultant, Terra Housing Consultants
- Peter Simpson, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association
- Peeter Wesik, President, Park Lane Homes
- Jay Wollenberg, Principal & President, Coriolis Consulting Corp.

Moderators: Rafe Mair and Peter Holt

Chairs: Mayor Richard Walton, Councillor Judy Villeneuve, and Councillor Mike Bowen

Participants:

- Vancouver: 120
- North Shore: 65
- South of the Fraser: 75
- Central/Northeast: 56

Building on the Housing dialogue hosted at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue March 27th, 2006, the discussion was expanded to include three additional venues - South of the Fraser; Central/Northeast and the North Shore.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION BY REGION

North Shore

North Shore Challenges

There are examples of dense development on the North Shore; however, there is concern about increasing the density of the North Shore and placing additional pressure on the two bridges. Is one solution encouraging businesses to locate outside of the downtown core and Richmond Centre to the North Shore and other municipalities? West Vancouver has a skewed housing market with high housing prices of over a million. The District of North Vancouver is also faced with the problem of a fragmented jurisdiction which can limit the capacity for political action. The City of North Vancouver is faced with a push to develop housing rather than commercial space and a lack of housing for workers with low-end jobs to support the City's businesses. They seek to have their elderly people, young families, and working people in the community and to live the life they want to live.

Bowen Island

Bowen has a population of 4,400 on an area the size of Manhattan but has a housing problem because people move there to have 10 acre lots. Snug Cove is becoming a sort of ghost town and is in need of revitalization; however, the workers can't afford to live on

Bowen to supply the businesses with staff. Creating beautiful, environmentally friendly, pre-fabricated houses will also lower the cost of housing.

The Example of San Diego and Vancouver's Eco-density

San Diego serves as an example of how to reverse urban decay due to a housing affordability problem. Central urban core businesses were losing their capacity to attract workers who were being forced to move farther and farther away and commute longer distances to work. Over time, these workers were choosing to leave their jobs and find work closer to their homes. The vibrancy of the urban core was being undermined; however, this was reversed through increasing housing density and creating affordable housing. Vancouver's Eco-density Initiative was also highlighted as an example of municipal action on increasing density.

Creating Balanced Communities

An additional problem is the lack of choice for elderly people to move to higher density living in West and North Vancouver. Seniors on the North Shore are frequently asset-rich but income-poor and they need support as they age from younger people living in their communities. They currently don't have many options for aging-in-place and remaining within their neighbourhoods. The North Shore is also facing the closure of schools which has an impact on attracting families to the neighbourhoods and on the commute for parents driving their children to school. We need to anticipate what the population will be and its likely demographic structure and then make sure that the community has the facilities to meet their needs. School closures are a direct result of North Shore neighbourhoods not accepting higher density which would make the area affordable for families.

The North Shore can take a lot more density but it has to be the right kind of density (e.g., the type that will get people out of their cars, improve quality of life, keep appropriate facilities open, allow aging in place) and in the right locations. Density can be developed in an attractive way, such as through allowing secondary suites, and can provide people with choice. Many people would sell half their lot if they would be allowed to subdivide the lot.

Linking Transportation and Land-use

There would need to be an increase in public transit and transportation choice to accompany densification. Density developments would need to be placed in locations that are inherently servable by transit and ride-share / car-share options and along transportation corridors.

Development Cost Charges

Development cost charges are not considered to be the cause of the housing affordability problem, because land values will rise to address these costs.

Secondary-suites, rentals

Developers can provide secondary suites or lock-off suites that can be incorporated into the main house or condo or can be used by the owner as a rental suite and mortgage helper. These secondary suites can also be built above garages. Rental housing stock needs to be protected both in terms of physical units as well as rental price. This requires balancing the need for affordable rental housing with the need of home owners to use secondary suites as a mortgage helper.

Fear of Density

Developers and municipalities need to address the fear of density in neighbourhoods by providing images of what higher density developments could look like. High density does not necessarily mean high-rise towers, but often people picture this when they are told about densification. Low-rise projects of three and four storeys can be built with a floor area ratio of 2 because you build out to the street instead of creating big setbacks.

Absorbing costs of unsustainable locational choice

There is some support for establishing penalties (such as road pricing) for regional residents who decide to live in areas that require extended commuting time to access work and amenities, and incentives for those who choose to live in compact communities. Lower price housing and land values exist farther away from downtown and major urban cores because they have poorer accessibility. People who choose to move to a lower-priced area have to accept the consequences of their choice and absorb the cost of transportation for making an unsustainable locational choice. We shouldn't build a third bridge but manage transportation demand and price the roads.

Innovative solutions

There are a number of examples of developments in which the municipality provides a developer with more density in exchange for establishing a piece of their land for a nonprofit organization, social housing or daycares. These innovative solutions are created in partnerships amongst municipalities, developers and nonprofits. There is an option of creating developments which shift from predominately rental housing to social housing over the years. Decisions about affordable housing should be made by municipalities rather than at a higher government level.

South of the Fraser

Definition of Affordable Housing

The definition varies from community to community. The City of Richmond has established an affordable housing bylaw which mandates that a certain number of units need to be affordable housing and rented at a specific price.

Regional Perspective

We need to adopt a regional perspective when addressing this issue. In 2006, there were more housing starts in Chilliwack than in Abbotsford because everyone is going up the valley.

Taxes as Affordability Impediments

The taxes across the municipal, provincial and federal levels including housing taxes, property transfer taxes and taxes on development cost charges are seen as impediments to affordable housing – in particular property transfer taxes.

Density and Fast-tracking Approvals

Solutions include allocating density for construction in former industrial areas, encouraging the building of smaller units, fast tracking municipal approval processes for affordable housing, building density near public transit to reduce the need for parking spaces, and promote secondary legal suites. Housing lots are already smaller than they used to be.

Defining a Livable Community

A definition of a community is where you can walk to have breakfast or don't have to own a car.

Abbotsford

Abbotsford is a young city and is building a number of high-rises to respond to the housing pressure while keeping the agricultural land reserve steady.

Changing our Expectations – Lot Sizes, Renovations and Building Detail

We have to change the way we build our homes as well as our lot sizes, not least because of energy costs. There are also new expectations in terms of building details. In the 1970s, building structures were a lot simpler and now the costs of housing construction have increased because of the demand for more detailed design. The scale and frequency of renovations has also increased as well as the desire for one bedroom per child. We've been spoiled for a long time.

Developing Transit before Densification

There is some value in adding density in areas that are served by transit and then designing transportation corridors ahead of future development. South of the Fraser is 50 years behind North of the Fraser in terms of access to rapid transit.

Rental Housing

There needs to be significant tax incentives by the provincial and federal governments to continue to develop and maintain rental units in Greater Vancouver. One solution is to legislate a fixed percentage of rentals in multi-family developments. Another solution is to have municipalities and the province donate land for rental; however, the municipalities are reluctant to offer these lands at little or no cost because they feel they have a duty to their community to get economic rent or value from them. Another option, then, is for municipalities to negotiate for community amenities with developers and include affordable or rental housing as part of that. Toronto introduced rent control but it led to derelict, badly maintained buildings.

Alternate forms of Tenure

There may be an option for reintroducing leasehold properties, encouraging co-op housing, and housing agreements as options for increasing affordability.

Regional Growth Strategy

It is important that all municipalities buy into the Regional Growth Strategy and come to common agreement about accepting and dealing with their fair share of growth and allocating where density increases should be.

Incentives for Municipalities with ALR and Greenspace

Municipalities that steward the flood plains and parklands and preserve agricultural lands should receive bonuses for protecting urban containment boundaries.

Development Cost Charges for Affordable Housing

Richmond has set additional fees that are placed in an affordable housing unit; however, these costs will inevitably rest on the shoulder of the consumer. Reducing DCC charges is a red herring in terms of solving the affordability problem because housing prices are determined by the market and don't reflect a change in a few thousand dollars worth of DCC charges. The key is for municipalities to provide developers with lead time on the DCCs so that they don't get stuck once they've set their budgets and had the land appraised.

Predictable Rezoning

Municipalities have the capacity to rezone for density; however, they should do this within the context of a comprehensive community development plan. If this doesn't happen, then there will be speculation as to which land parcels will be rezoned for density and this will drive land value prices up. Municipalities can be reluctant to rezone because they want to negotiate an amenity package with the developer when the development application arrives; however, certainty is important for developers and through OCP planning you can maintain a degree of negotiation room within the high density zones.

Abolish the ALR?

If you abolish the agricultural land reserve today and turn it into residential housing, would it dramatically affect housing prices? Although the houses would sell, it is a short-sighted solution to where we want to be in 20 and 50 years. The question is how we connect our housing needs and our sustainability. The debate has to include the future of the automobile and where we will live and work given we will run out of oil soon.

Central/Northeast

BC wide perspective

The housing problem is happening across British Columbia in places such as Vernon, Cranbrook, and Kelowna which are feeling housing demand pressures and finding their housing prices and land values increasing. This is partly due to people coming from Alberta to buy homes in BC.

Tri-cities area

Port Moody has developed higher density housing in an attractive way through the creation of mixed use neighbourhoods, including Newport Village with condos, shops and restaurants. Coquitlam is also considering ambitious densification. Burnaby has engaged in innovative negotiations with developers and traded higher density amounts in exchange for the inclusion of social or family housing in developments.

Build for people and not cars

Why does every house need to have a two-car garage? We should house people before cars. Change the zoning bylaws and allow for more carriage homes constructed in garages.

Bring everyone to the Table

Developers need the municipalities to be at the table to ensure that creativity is not hampered by bylaws such as the number of doors allowed in an apartment suite.

Demand for Green Buildings?

Three years ago, the consumers were not willing to pay for green amenities. This has likely changed and will be proven with the selling of upcoming developments.

Rental Housing and Investors

35% of all our buyers today are investors rather than buyers and that provides a rental market. A solution for developing rental housing is providing tax exemptions for developers building rental.

Developers need to pressure Municipalities

Developers need to place pressure on municipalities to demand more non-market housing in exchange for density.

Referendum for Affordable Housing Funds

Municipalities can ask the community if they are prepared to pay an amount towards affordable housing and social housing every year, rather than loading the cost on specific projects.

Construction

With the rising cost of and demands on construction, developers and individual homeowners are experiencing longer timetables on construction and renovations. This is being exacerbated by the labour shortage in the constructions industry and the lack of new young people entering into the trades. The older people in the construction would love to retire but have to remain to do the work and mentor new young workers.

How long is the lifespan of a building? How long are we building for at the moment? The building codes have responded to issues such as earthquake preparedness and the issue of leaky condos and rain screen protection. Consumers should investigate the track record of the development company or architecture firm from which they are purchasing their house.

Subsidized Housing

At the Burnside Gorge Association in Victoria, residents who are subsidized in their housing are supported in creating a financial management plan to gradually increase their income. As they build credits and their income, they are not subsidized to the same degree but have built the job skills and work experience through the program. There is a problem when subsidized housing recipients have \$40,000 cars and have cellphones and other expenses. There are choices and tradeoffs that need to be made and the subsidized housing should go to those who really need it.

Businesses offering Loans for Mortgages to Employees

In Eastern Canada, one company had a difficult time keeping long-term employees because of housing prices in the area. They provided employees with a \$20,000 loan to secure a mortgage for a first home and this loan would be written off over ten years if the employee remained with the company.

Cooperation is important but so is action

The key is not to wait for a big multi-sectoral collaborative forum but to use the tools that municipalities, developers and non-profits have at their disposal and start to act.

Internet as a Learning Tool

We need an online hub that outlines successful solutions that municipalities, developers and nonprofit organizations have created to address affordable housing. Could it be the GVRD, or the GVRD and the UDI together, who could develop a sort of "Development 101" for municipal councillors, who, getting re-elected every four years, need to be brought up to speed? It would be wonderful for them to know about 12 or 20 successful projects that have

addressed affordable housing through these innovative arrangements (e.g., rezoning, increasing density in exchange for amenities etc)

Vancouver

Sustainability

Some people think sustainability is avoiding dependence on a growth economy – that a steady state is more comfortable. In this region, we don't have the ability to achieve a steady state. We are going to capture a big enough share of population growth that we will be under pressure. Sustainability means accommodating development with much smarter approaches to urban transportation, and embracing green building technology and ways of living that create a smaller ecological load while accommodating more people. This requires a long-term vision and addressing the needs of the less fortunate in our community.

Critical issues affecting affordability

Critical issues affecting affordability are the supply and cost of land; the drawn-out approval process, the increasing cost of approvals, the dramatic increase in construction costs, and our critical shortage of workers.

Climate change and sea level rise

There is a real possibility with climate change and sea level rise that we may have to abandon Richmond and Delta. We have to start thinking about the impact of climate change on our planning.

Supply vs. Demand

The basic problem is an imbalance between supply and demand and as there is little appetite to control for demand, the problem has to be addressed through supply side solutions. On the supply side, densification is preferable to sprawl.

Density Solutions

Densification can occur along arterial roads. We are not making the best use of densification options. Calgary is an example of a city that embraces densification and has created a vibrant downtown core; however, we should avoid Hong Kong style density. We can create density without necessarily going above 6 or 7 storeys. Short squatty buildings may not focus on view but can be comfortable for family-oriented living. SFU UniverCity on Burnaby Mountain is an example of a development that has focused on creating secondary suites and townhouses and holding 25% of the equity of development to make the housing affordable for employees. Other examples are high density projects at 41st and Oak, 12th and Arbutus, Coal Harbour and King Edward Village at Knight and Kingsway.

Nonprofits

Nonprofit housing providers have to focus less on government subsidies and more on working with developers.

Problems with the Planning Process

There is a major problem in the planning process; the initiative is left to developers to make proposals in which they have to invest considerably and have no certainty of succeeding. The planning process and planners have been reduced to focusing on negotiating public amenities, servicing and other contributions to the municipality as a condition of success. This is a costly and uncertain process which discourages the needed densification process.

We need to put the planning back into planning. Municipalities need to identify and pre-zone areas suitable for densification and then charge the appropriate development fee. If municipalities are politically constrained from exercising the needed leadership, there may be a role for the Province or the region (preference expressed for the latter) to provide the lead through targets, incentives or even requirements.

Leadership in Articulating a Vision

Politicians at the local and regional level, leaders in the planning and development community, and planning staff need to be able to make the case and articulate the vision. They must make the direct connection not only between density and environmental sustainability but also with economic and social sustainability. This vision needs to be supported by analysis.

Attachment 2

FUTURE OF THE REGION SUSTAINABILITY DIALOGUES 2007 SCHEDULE

Note: Dialogues are hosted from 11:30 to 2 p.m. (lunch will be served from 11:30-12:00)

SOUTH

Eaglequest Coyote Creek Golf Club ~ 7778 152nd Street, Surrey

Labour and Immigration	Wednesday 7 February
Transportation	Wednesday 4 April
Housing	Friday 15 June
Industry	Wednesday 4 July
Drugs and Crime	Wednesday 19 September
Regional Economy	Wednesday 7 November

CENTRAL / NORTHEAST

Inlet Theatre ~ 100 Newport Drive, Port Moody

Labour and Immigration	Wednesday 14 March
Transportation	Wednesday 9 May
Housing	Wednesday 20 June
Industry	Wednesday 5 September
Drugs and Crime	Wednesday 17 October
Regional Economy	Wednesday 12 December

**Executive Plaza Hotel, Coquitlam for 12 December session*

NORTH SHORE

Hollyburn Country Club ~ 950 Crosscreek Road, West Vancouver

Labour and Immigration	Thursday 29 March
Transportation	Thursday 3 May
Housing	Tuesday 5 June
Industry	Thursday 19 July
Drugs and Crime	Thursday 4 October
Regional Economy	Thursday 6 December

REGION-WIDE DIALOGUE

Wosk Centre – SFU ~ 580 West Hastings Street, Vancouver

Energy	Thursday 18 January
Fit / Fat	Wednesday 21 February
Security and Safety	Tuesday 8 May
Culture	Thursday 28 June
Topic to be decided	Thursday 25 October
Topic to be decided	Wednesday 28 November

SPECIAL REGION-WIDE DIALOGUE

Newlands Golf and Country Club ~ 21025 48th Ave, Langley

Agriculture	Wednesday 21 March
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Metrovalley Newspaper Group

Housing tax talk vexes regional mayors

Friday, March 9, 2007
Page: 0014
Section: Surrey Leader - News

The Greater Vancouver Regional District will continue to advance its ideas to combat homelessness even though several cities object to one suggestion they band together to raise \$50 million.

Some mayors declared the notion dead in the water even though the GVRD board voted last Friday to send a discussion paper on possible housing solutions out for public comment.

Among the recommendations is the idea GVRD cities raise \$50 million that would, along with federal and provincial contributions, form a \$250-million fund for affordable housing projects.

"Our council categorically rejected the concept of levies," said Pitt Meadows Mayor Don MacLean, who noted the provincial government has already ruled out participating. "I don't know why we're pursuing it."

Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan, who also voted in opposition, said raising the \$50 million would have the effect of jacking up taxes in his city by four to five per cent.

"This is the most wrong-headed approach to take," he said. "The fact is property taxes do not reflect people's income. I have pensioners on \$600,000 worth of property earning \$30,000 a year. They cannot subsidize social housing."

Corrigan said the fund would mean stepping into an area of provincial responsibility.

GVRD staff see the money not coming from property taxes but potentially from higher garbage tipping fees or water charges.

But Corrigan said he sees no reasonable way to funnel proceeds from those fees to an affordable housing fund.

Vancouver Coun. Kim Capri was among those who spoke in favour.

"I would be open to looking at a tax increase specifically for providing housing," she said, adding Vancouver city hall is getting queries from people who want to donate money to fight homelessness.

GVRD chair Lois Jackson said the issues raised in the paper should go out for debate even if they are contentious.

The paper urges a variety of measures, including density bonuses and other incentives to encourage developers to blend some affordable housing units in with market housing.

White Rock Mayor Judy Forster said she also supports the paper going out for discussion although she's unsure whether she supports a levy.

Housing options will get more debate at a GVRD workshop in March, as well as public dialogues May 28 in Surrey, June 7 in West Vancouver and June 20 in Port Moody.

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North Shore News

'You ain't seen nothing yet'; Forum hears density key to region's future

Sun 10 Jun 2007
Page: 11
Section: News
Byline: Tessa Holloway
Source: North Shore News

Density was the magic word at the GVRD Sustainable Region Forum on affordable housing Tuesday at West Vancouver's Hollyburn Country Club, but it's still a four letter word for many North Shore residents.

The forum, entitled Housing: The Price We Pay, brought together stakeholders from around the North Shore with a panel comprised of Maureen Enser of the Urban Development Institute, Ward McAllister, CEO of Ledingham McAllister Properties Ltd, Jim O'Dea of Terra Housing Consultants and Jay Wollenberg, president of Coriolis Consulting Corporation.

Deborah Spicer, director of the real estate board of Greater Vancouver, summed up the problem.

"We currently have 286 listings in West Vancouver. Just less than 10 per cent of those 286 or 25 of those listings are priced at under a million dollars. Over 20 per cent of those 286 listings are priced at over \$3 million."

The panellists and invitation-only audience gave their solution: Density is key.

"All of us in this region have to change our expectations. This region is becoming more urban whether you like it or not," said Wollenberg. "You ain't seen nothing yet."

He said the only way to lower the price is to dramatically increase supply, and with limited land for the region to grow that means added density. There was no shortage of ideas as to how to raise supply, from making secondary suites easier and density bonusing to carriage suites built over garages.

"The issue here isn't do we have solutions to the problem. There are so many different ways we can create more housing," said Enser.

Instead, she said, the issue was how to get that new stock on the market, but to do that projects have to first get past municipal councils.

"With all due respect, they're the chicken (before the egg)," said McAllister of municipal councils. "We need a higher level of government to mandate rates of housing and densities to the municipalities so they have somebody to point the finger at."

Yet some areas of the North Shore aren't buying in.

While panellists complimented the high density corridors of Lonsdale and Ambleside, the forum itself was held at the Hollyburn Country club in the

high-priced, sprawling British Properties.

Recent proposals for higher density in the District of North Vancouver have drawn controversy. District council recently backed down to public pressure over proposals for density bonusing along Marine Drive that could have seen zoning for higher density, opting instead for something more moderate.

District Mayor Richard Walton, who opened the forum, said more needs to be done to convince residents.

"People need to feel that the additional density is somehow going to make their life better," said Walton. "We have to do more a compelling job as public officials and myself as mayor in engaging people in this discussion."

The forum was the third of six sustainability workshops scheduled for this year, with future workshops focusing on industry, drugs and the regional economy. For more information, visit www.gvrd.bc.ca/sustainability/.

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The Vancouver Province

Eco-density zealots must recognize that condo living is not for everyone

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Byline: Derek Moscato
Column: Derek Moscato
Source: The Province

Greater Vancouver's civic leaders are talking a lot about density these days -- elevating the D word to almost mythical status. Indeed, there's a lot to like about people moving into compact places like the downtown core, since land in our region is finite, while the population continues to grow.

But density isn't for everyone -- a point that some density boosters fail to see.

In their rush to squeeze everyone into a lifestyle of condominium living -- complete with seawalk strolls, yoga studios and low-fat lattes -- they run the risk of demonizing those who, for a variety of good reasons, opt for suburbia.

No doubt about it, there are many positives to urban densification. People living in these neighbourhoods use up fewer environmental resources and are more likely to take advantage of public transit than those who live in sprawling suburbs.

Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan continues to promote his EcoDensity initiative as a means to creating "green, livable and affordable" housing.

At a GVRD forum on housing earlier this month, the pro-density argument again was put forward as a way of taking the froth off prices in Greater Vancouver's red-hot real-estate market by ramping up the supply of multifamily units. Translation: More highrise condos are on the way.

But, before we overdose on density, we need to ask ourselves if the push to compact living is right for everyone.

The B.C. census numbers for 2006 seem to tell a different story from the one the density advocates would like you to hear. For one thing, the biggest growth in our region isn't happening in the city of Vancouver. It's in Surrey, Mission, Chilliwack and Abbotsford -- where single-family homes still rule.

Between 2001 and 2006, Surrey alone enjoyed a population increase of 13.6 per cent. And the city of Vancouver's growth rate lags behind not only Surrey, but that of the GVRD as a whole.

So why aren't more Lower Mainland families embracing the high-density lifestyle? For starters, there's the perception, right or wrong, that compact neighbourhoods are the domain of childless singles and well-to-do retirees.

Also, raising kids can be a challenge in the inner city.

Yaletown has new schools and parks to bolster its case for being family-friendly. But other highrise neighbourhoods have not followed suit.

Then there's the affordability issue for people with families. The cost of buying a two- or three-bedroom condo in central Vancouver can be astronomical.

So what can the density cheerleaders take from this picture? Let's hope a healthy respect for those who've taken a pass on the downtown lifestyle, for starters.

It's about choice, really.

A family guy taking care of four kids and a dog is about as fond of condo living downtown as the hipster from Main Street is of living in an Aldergrove cul-de-sac.

In urban and suburban circles, the old expression still holds true: To each his own.

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Metrovalley Newspaper Group

Greater density in Greater Vancouver's future

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Denser building and living is the only strategy that can help keep home prices from spiraling out of reach for more of the region's residents.

That was the consensus of a panel of housing and development experts who spoke last Friday at a GVRD dialogue on housing affordability.

"Densification is upon us and is the way of the future in the region," said Peter Simpson, president of the Greater Vancouver Home Builders Association.

Panelists also agreed one of the best methods is to use density as a carrot to encourage developers to build more rental housing or affordable housing units blended with other market units.

"If you can double the density it's like creating free land," said Jay Wollenberg, president of Coriolis Consulting.

The forum came amid fresh signs it's getting tougher to afford to live here.

The median price of a single family house in the GVRD cracked \$700,000 for the first time in May.

And a new Royal Bank study found it takes 70 per cent of the median Vancouver income to afford a typical two-storey house.

With 45,000 new residents coming to Greater Vancouver every year, prices will continue to climb fast unless the supply of housing rises as well.

And in a region tightly constrained by mountains, ocean, parks and agricultural land, that means building up.

But while civic leaders agree on that goal, some of them also fear the wrath of angry residents who oppose any move to densify their neighbourhoods.

"We have to deal with Dick and Dorothy from down the street," Delta Coun. Scott Hamilton told the forum. "These people will line up out the door at public meetings."

Panelist Ward McAllister, a real estate developer, said cities that push the burden of growth onto their neighbours must be punished.

"For those in the future that don't accept density, there should be penalties," he said, suggesting the return of federal gas taxes should be cut off.

"Sprawl is not an option," he said. "It's vital that Lower Mainland municipalities all buy into a regional growth strategy."

The GVRD is in the midst of a process to redraw its Livable Region Strategic Plan, and McAllister said it may be time to contemplate a move to regional planning to end the patchwork of local planning decisions.

One of the key challenges is the fact virtually no rental apartment buildings are being built because their income stream simply can't compete against the returns that come from selling condos.

Burnaby Coun. Colleen Jordan noted many three-storey walk-up apartments are 40 to 50 years old and huge pressure is growing on councils to let them be rebuilt as condos for sale.

She suggested zoning areas as rental only might be one answer, but could risk creating ghettos.

The panel also heard calls for lower development cost charges (DCCs), the fast-tracking of permitting and legalization of secondary suites.

Peeter Wesik, president of Parklane Homes, said increased development close to public transit corridors offers potential for more people to live with fewer vehicles and devote their savings to housing.

One of the things that must change, he said, is "the attitude that public transit is for losers."

While the audience heard predictions more people will one day live all their lives in multi-family buildings, none of the panelists saw any ebbing of the influx of people that comes with Vancouver's desirability.

"Our region is not a country club - there are no bars to entry," McAllister said. "People are coming and it's come one, come all."

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Coquitlam Now

Housing forum highlights relaxed zoning rules as potential solution to home affordability crunch

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Byline: Stephen Thomson
Source: Coquitlam NOW

One strategy to cope with soaring housing costs in the province is to relax zoning rules, according to a panel of regional development experts.

"It all comes down to regulations," said Jay Wollenberg, president of Coriolis Consulting Corp.

Wollenberg, a professional planner and real estate consultant, was among five Lower Mainland experts who spoke about potential solutions to the affordability gap that is steadily pushing home ownership out of reach for many British Columbians.

The forum -- titled Housing, the Price We Pay -- was held as part of the Greater Vancouver Regional District's sustainable region initiative, which has seen a series of similar discussions take place in surrounding communities beginning last year.

One of the underlying causes of the affordability problem, Wollenberg said, is the difficulty some have competing in a housing market fuelled by the popularity of West Coast living.

"What we've done is create one of the most attractive places in the solar system," he said, adding that the high demand for housing could be met by changing municipal zoning bylaws to give developers more room to build.

The event was held Wednesday at the Inlet Theatre in Port Moody, drawing more than 45 attendees, including a handful of municipal politicians from the Tri-Cities.

The panel of development experts also included: Tracie McTavish, president of Rennie Marketing Systems; David Negrin, a vice-president with Concord Pacific Group and president of the Urban Development Institute, Pacific Region; Peter Simpson, CEO of the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association; and Peeter Wesik, president of ParkLane Homes and chair of Wesgroup Income Properties.

The group brought its expertise to bear on a range of issues gripping the B.C. development industry, including skyrocketing land prices and the shortage of skilled labour available for construction projects.

Simpson agreed that land use regulations should be more flexible for developers, calling densification the "future of the region."

"Whatever land is left is pricey, so we better make good use of it," he said.

Negrin noted that housing affordability is a provincewide issue, with many people forced to put more than half of their incomes into keeping their homes. "We have 12,000 families in British Columbia that are looking for a place to live," he said.

McTavish, who is involved with marketing the Olympic Village in Whistler, questioned how the growing popularity of the West Coast would affect housing prices.

"How are we going to stop the world from coming here and keep it affordable?" he asked.

Wesik pointed to denser living, an improved transit system and innovative design as means of providing affordable and sustainable housing.