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Lower Capilano towers get green light

Council approves 23- and 19-storey highrises for Grouse Inn site

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June 25, 2014 12:00 AM

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An artist's rendering of how the intersection of Capilano Road and Marine Drive will look when two new towers are complete. Photo image supplied, North Shore News

Two new towers at Capilano Road and Marine Drive will etch their way into North Vancouver's skyline following district council's decision to bid farewell to the Grouse Inn Monday.

Despite conflict over traffic congestion, council voted to replace the hotel with 23-and 19-storey towers housing 262 residential units.

Bordered by Curling Road to the north, the development includes three-storey townhouse units, a restaurant, and a fourstorey 31,000-square-foot commercial building.

The project is a stone's throw from Lions Gate Bridge, which is "heavily used, will not be expanded, and it's just getting worse," according to Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn.

"We're not dealing properly as a collective community regarding roads, bridges, transit, traffic congestion, construction impact. .. and on the quality of our life."

Mayor Richard Walton differed with Mackay-Dunn, noting traffic on the North Shore's bridges has decreased by five per cent over 10 years.

Occasional gridlock is part of living in a bridge-dependent area, according to Walton.

"That's not changed in 60 years," he said. "It's a fact of life of living on the North Shore."

The project provides an additional left turn lane at a newly widened Capilano onto Curling.

"If we can't address the traffic problems in this area, we won't be able to sell condominiums in this area," said Michael Geller, planning

consultant on the project, at a public hearing.

The development incorporates land for bus and bike lanes on Marine, helping to ease congestion at Capilano and Marine, said Coun. Alan Nixon.

"I see substantial benefits to our traffic woes," he said.

"Marine Drive and Capilano Road have to be improved," MacKay-Dunn said. "That's something that we should be budgeting for, not putting our hand out to a developer."

Alleviating congestion by building near a bridge seems counterintuitive, allowed Coun. Mike Little, but it shortens commuters' trips.

Driving 400 yards to a bridge instead of four kilometers causes less strain on municipal infrastructure, according to Little.

During rush hour, Marine Drive and Capilano is served by about 27 buses an hour. It's likely between 11 and 13 per cent of the tower's residents will regularly use transit, according to Little.

North Vancouver is gripped by anxiety due to the plethora of developments, said Coun. Lisa Muri.

"This, folks, is just the tip of the iceberg," she said, listing potential developments in Edgemont, Park Royal and Taylor Way.

While this development is in accordance with the district's official community plan, everything is happening too fast, according to Muri.

"(The OCP) was continually sold to the community as something that would happen over a 20-25 year time span and it does not feel like that at all."

Council approved the towers one month after first reading and six days after a public hearing.

Muri said fears of gridlock are pervasive.

Some comments about traffic are "a little bit overzealous and a little bit over the top," according to Coun. Roger Bassam.

The 32-storey Seylynn tower - which passed after a similar argument - gained the district four lanes, "and the ability to address a transportation challenge that we've faced for decades," according to Bassam.

Community leaders should assuage misplaced concerns, Bassam said.

"How big of a change is it? Or more accurately, how small of a change is it?" Muri disagreed. "Coun. Bassam, you tell me that I need to go out and speak to members of the community as a leader?" Muri asked. "All I can say to them is, 'Well, another very large project passed,' because I don't know if we have the ability to be able to deal with all of these."

The market regulates growth rate, Bassam said.

"It is not going to go crazy because at some point the developers are going to look and say, 'We've got to slow this down ourselves because we don't want to saturate the market,'" he said.

The project overlooks the North Shore's affordability crisis, according to Don Peters, who spoke on behalf of the Community Housing Action Coalition.

"I don't think we are grasping an opportunity here to do something sensible about affordable housing."

High land prices result in tall towers, according to Coun. Robin Hicks. People, transit, and commerce exist hand in glove in most of the world's major cities, according to Hicks.

"We don't have an excess of land and I don't know what else of value could be built on these corridors."

The project includes three storeys of office space which could be converted to 18 additional residential units.

The applicant, Pacific Gate Investments, is on the hook for \$4.56 million in community amenities.

The vote was 5-2 with Couns. Muri and MacKay-Dunn opposed.

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