

# Council trims 1300-block proposal

BY JEREMY SHEPHERD, NORTH SHORE NEWS MARCH 6, 2013 9:41 AM



A computerized drawing of what the gateway to the Ambleside business district in West Vancouver would have looked like if the original plans were approved. The District of West Vancouver has told developer Grosvenor to come back with drawings for a shorter tower.

**Photograph by:** illustration supplied, for North Shore NEWS

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## GROSVENOR ASKED TO CUT 30 FEET IN HEIGHT AND RESUBMIT DESIGN

THE Grosvenor development at Ambleside will be resized following a contentious West Vancouver council meeting Monday night.

West Vancouverites packed council chambers and spilled into the adjoining hall to watch council eventually pass a motion to reduce the Marine Drive 1300-block development's two largest towers by 30 feet.

Grosvenor unveiled plans in October 2012 for mid-rise, terraced buildings peaking at eight storeys, or 108-feet, on the west side of the street and seven storeys and 100-feet on the east. The project was assailed by many community members for being too big, too broad and out of step with the village character of the neighbourhood.

By losing the eighth floor, reducing ceiling heights and blending the mechanical penthouse into a lower floor, the eight-storey building would likely be cut to about 80 feet tall and contain seven storeys, according to James Patillo, senior vice-president of Grosvenor Americas. The seven-storey building on the east side of the street would be similarly chopped, retaining the same number of storeys but measuring approximately 70 feet.

The development should continue to shrink until it blends with the neighbourhood, according to Coun. Craig Cameron who introduced an amendment to reduce the maximum height an additional 10-15 feet.

The amendment, which was defeated with Cameron and Coun. Bill Soprovich on the losing side, raised the ire of Mayor Michael Smith.

"Council does realize this is not our building?" Smith asked. "Here we sit at 11 o'clock at night, picking numbers out of the air," Smith said to Cameron. "Are you a planner? Are you an architect?"

"Where I'm basing my conclusions on are countless urban areas throughout the world where six storeys is seen as somewhat human-centred development," Cameron said. "Your arbitrary 30 (feet), I'm replacing with what I believe is more of a standard 45 (feet)."

Cameron also advanced an amendment to decrease the average size of the 88 planned units. The amendment was defeated.

Describing the area as a disgrace, Smith discussed the urgency for bringing development into Ambleside.

"Right now, our real estate agents refer to the 1300block, north and south side, as the Gaza Strip," he said.

Council is attempting to exert too much control over the proposal, according to Smith.

"Members of council seem to have great ideas for what should go in Ambleside," he said. "Put your money up, buy a piece of property and build a building."

Grosvenor is not part of a crowded field vying to invest in the neighbourhood, Smith said. "I don't see businesses lining up to invest in Ambleside. We finally have a quality developer . . . we want to send him out of this council chamber with their tail between their legs."

The 1300-block is one of three special sites in Ambleside where buildings could exceed four storeys contingent on council approval.

With many in chambers sporting No More Than 4 stickers handed out by members of the Ambleside Dundarave Ratepayers' Association, concerns ranged from disjointed development to precedent-setting height.

Speaking for ADRA, director Keith Pople submitted a petition he said featured the signatures of more than 1,400 West Vancouver residents opposed to the development.

The project received strong support from real estate agent Stephanie LaPorta, who said she collected 200 signatures from West Vancouver residents in support of Grosvenor's plans.

"It's an exciting building in true West Coast style, and not just another box like so much of our architecture," she said.

The scope of the project, which has a horizontal width of approximately 500 feet, was too much for some residents.

"Monster houses, monster towers, what's the difference?" asked Robbie Innis.

While the majority of speakers opposed the project, the development got a boost from the West Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and resident Erik Morin, who credited Grosvenor for their willingness to make significant concessions.

"Being close to a vital and urban development may in fact . . . increase their property value, simply because of the opportunity of being able to just walk over to a really great part of town," Morin said.

A recent survey conducted by the Mustel Group showed strong support for the project, but those numbers are misleading, according to Janet Rothwell.

"I hope that council will review the survey results as being very biased," Rothwell said, explaining the survey steered her away from expressing criticism.

The prospect of the development's 88 units being purchased by offshore millionaires was also a concern.

"They're going to cost many millions, so who's going to buy them?" asked Phil Etches. "We're going to create another Coal Harbour and half the lights will be out at night."

Besides the height reduction, staff also requested additional parking and more office space in the development, both of which may prove tricky, according to Patillo. "It may be quite costly to introduce another level of parking on our site. The permeability of the soil gets a lot worse as you go down," Patillo said.

Other requests, such as designing the development to ensure the west buildings are distinct from the east, and ensuring the attractiveness of the roof, should not be a problem, according to Patillo.

The project has come under fire for the district's decision to sell, rather than lease the land. However, many public amenities are funded by land sales, according to Coun. Trish Panz. "Land sales have done incredible things for this community," she said.

Open houses and workshops have been held on Grosvenor's plans, and those meetings carry a bill, according to Panz. "I think we've already spent \$1 million of public money getting to this point," she said.

Despite the money spent, Coun. Michael Lewis cautioned the process was still in the early going. "This is really just the first dance, people," he said.

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