



City council approves Oakridge 'mini-city'

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A controversial \$1.5-billion plan to turn Oakridge mall into a virtual minicity was approved by Vancouver city council Friday by a vote of 6 to 3. The councillors opposing the Cambie corridor development project by Ivanhoe Cambridge and Westbank Projects Corp. were Elizabeth Ball, Adriane Carr and George Affleck, the only non-Vision members of council.

The vote came after two days of public hearings at city hall earlier this week.

The Oakridge Centre project will make the mall a Metrotown-like area, with condo towers soaring over 40 storeys and 2,900 new apartments built in a mixed-use village.

The plan offers \$148 million in community amenities, including a library, daycare facilities, office space, a seniors' centre and an elevated park and artificial lake.

Area residents had expressed concerns about increased density in their neighbourhood, the loss of views and the capacity of public transit to handle the number of people expected to come to live at Oakridge.

The project will be the cornerstone of city hall's vision of building vertically around stations dotted along the Canada Line.

"This project presents an unprecedented investment in community amenities, the most complete package we've seen on council," said Mayor Gregor Robertson Friday, in supporting the project. "I'm excited when I see the possibilities here. I wish the build out wouldn't take a decade."

He said the project "will support over 5,000 jobs, provide \$228 million in new community amenities, and deliver important new family and social housing on Vancouver's Cambie Corridor."

He said it will also address urgently needed new affordable housing, and offer remarkable community benefits.

"There is no question that Oakridge is ripe for change," he said.

However, Carr said the project is simply too dense, noting that "the people who live in the area don't

want this development.

"It's irresponsible to approve so much density without a guarantee of infrastructure that goes along with it," she said.

Ball noted that while there's always controversy moving projects ahead, there are fears that the Oakridge project will "drastically affect Vancouver" and change surrounding neighbourhoods with new towers.

"They (opponents) fear they're losing the Vancouver they love."

But Coun. Heather Deal said the plan did "an excellent job" of addressing the issues, offering a "much more urban type of complete community."

"The park will be magnificent. I look forward to seeing it built out."

Coun. Raymond Louie rejected arguments that the plan is another Metrotown.

"What we see is not a proposition to build a replication of what we've seen in Burnaby," said Louie.

"This is a significant addition to this area of the city. And it's not just for the local community."

However, Tracey Moir, chair of Oakridge-Langara Area Residents, said the need to consider the impacts and implications of the project were not properly addressed, "and that makes this development premature."

Local resident Linda Leong said she is "very, very unhappy" with council's approval, saying the Oakridge plan could be duplicated in other parts of the city. "We'll lose our Vancouver."

Graeme Silvera, Ivanhoe Cambridge's vice-president retail development, western region, said he is very pleased with council's decision. "It's been a lot of hard work to get to this point with the staff and the community."

He said the hard work now begins, including detailed design plans. "The framework now is in place and we're confident we can make it happen."

Council on Friday also approved several conditions to the project, including continuing to engage with Vancouver Coastal Health, Trans-Link and Vancouver school board to ensure their plans take into account population growth anticipated in the Oakridge development; **that staff examine measures to maximize occupancy of residential units**; and that staff work with the social services agency S.U.C.C.E.S.S. to identify locations for additional services for Oakridge residents.

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