



Density, housing dominate OCP meeting

60 residents weigh in on District of North Van's planning blueprint

BY EVAN DUGGAN, NORTH SHORE NEWS MAY 21, 2011

District of North Vancouver residents filled district hall on Monday night to voice concerns about council's proposed new official community plan.

More than 60 residents stepped up to the microphone during the public hearing that pushed on towards 11 p.m. forcing a second round of presentations on Tuesday evening.

Mayor Richard Walton and council listened as residents shared their thoughts regarding the new 166-page civic planning blueprint that will guide the district's residential, commercial, industrial and transportation infrastructure for the next two decades.

Concerns about plans for greater density in several district neighbourhoods, lack of affordable housing and the need for more community input were key issues for many speakers.

More than half of the speakers expressed general support for the OCP -- which predicts the district will grow by 20,000 residents by 2030 and seeks to tailor that growth. But several speakers favoured it only conditionally, calling for a referendum on the matter. Others rejected it outright.

The evening began with presentations by some younger members of the community. They called on council to approve the OCP bylaw, expressing worry that the community they grew up in has become too expensive for youth.

Those concerns are also echoed in the document itself, which points to the district's lack of affordable rental housing, and community "vibrancy" as two of the causes of the region's "lost generation" -- those aged 25 to 40 who have departed the North Shore.

Other youth speakers called for more accessible transportation systems and revitalized recreation opportunities that would encourage and include residents with disabilities.

At the heart of the OCP is proposed densification of several of the district's town and neighbourhood centres. Areas including Lynn Valley, Lower Lynn, Maplewood and Lower Capilano/Marine Drive have been earmarked to absorb the majority of new developments and subsequent residents.

That has some residents worried that the North Shore will lose the character that attracted them here in the first place.

Jerome Irwin, the founding president of the Lower Capilano Residents Association, said

the North Shore's iconic natural identity is at risk if higher density housing pushes out single-family dwellings.

"At stake is the survival of the past century's rich human legacy, traditional heritage and character of our single family communities," Irwin said during his address. "Will identity 2030 preserve what little is left of this fragile heritage? Or will this plan actually cause it to perish?"

After his presentation Irwin said he understood the need to accommodate more people in the district, but he and many of his neighbours are concerned developers would have too much freedom to build and that higher density will squeeze those already living in the area.

Irwin also feared that increased development would overwhelm transit services. "They're talking about more densification, at least 1,500 more residents on Marine Drive, and those people are going to be taking the bus," Irwin said. "Where are they going to get the TransLink buses to handle all this?"

Joseph Bowes, a resident of Parkgate who has been vocal during the two-year OCP consultation process, told the council he supports the new plan with two "provisos" -- that residents vote on the OCP in a district-wide referendum, and that the new OCP, if enacted, would not eliminate existing local area plans or reduce their mandate.

Bowes also called on officials to include the advice of community associations in land-use decisions moving forward.

"Too bad they were pretty much ignored this time around," Bowes said during his presentation. "Where are their formal recommendations on the new OCP?"

Other topics where contrasting views emerged during the six hours of presentations included the OCP's expected population increase for the region, as well as the capacity of the new plan to curtail rising greenhouse gas emissions.

With the OCP public consultation process wrapped up, council will now decide if any further changes need to be made before a third and final reading tentatively scheduled for May 30.

Consideration of formal adoption of the OCP bylaw by council is set to happen at the end of June.