



Developers push new zoning's envelope

DNV's new C9 zoning for Marine Drive was intended to be strict

BY TESSA HOLLOWAY, NORTH SHORE NEWS APRIL 17, 2011

North Vancouver district councillors are raising questions after the first three projects approved under the new C9 mixed-use zone for Marine Drive asked for height variances.

That wasn't the plan, said Coun. Mike Little, who said he thought the prescriptive zoning created in 2007 was meant to be strict in its conditions and allow developers to skip having to obtain a variance from council.

"What's the point of setting a height restriction if you're not going to enforce it?" said Little after the council meeting on Monday night.

The C-9 zoning was created in 2007 with the goal of improving the Marine Drive streetscape and changing the auto-oriented development along the strip into mixed-use retail and residential.

The option of towers was discussed during the consultation, but area residents identified height as a major concern.

The issue came back to life at council after a proposal came forward for The Ivy, a new project proposed for 1265-1279 Marine Drive, which sought an 8.5-foot height variance to allow for ceiling height and architectural features that slope upwards from the roof of the building towards the street.

Couns. Little, Doug MacKay-Dunn and Mayor Richard Walton all opposed the height variance, which passed 4-3.

"I sensed that the envelope is being pushed quite a bit," said MacKay-Dunn, who also expressed concerns around height, which he said was the most common issue raised by the community during the rezoning.

Staff supported the change and actually encouraged the developer to move forward with an 8.5-foot variance rather than a minimum of three-foot variance in order to add architectural flourishes, but also because they said there were no adverse effects of the development. Because the development is on the south side of the street, there will be no shadowing of houses, and the non-linear roof line adds visual interest, according to the staff report.

A previous development, The Drive at Bridgeman Avenue and Marine Drive, originally was proposed to fit within the existing height limit, but was encouraged by staff to seek a variance of approximately four feet to allow for architectural features.

The C9 bylaw doesn't allow the district to collect a height bonus as part of the variance, which could pay for improvements but was turned down by the community during the consultation.

Several councillors said those features are important, as they create a more varied, interesting streetscape and a better community since the variances are usually of a few feet and do not extend for the entire length of the building.

Coun. Alan Nixon praised the transformation going on at Marine Drive and added that this is exactly the kind of place where density is needed, as transit service is good and it's near shops.

"It's going to have a dramatic impact on the way Marine Drive looks, how it acts," he said.

Coun. Lisa Muri said the variance would help prevent having all the new buildings look the same.

"We are getting a lot of the same look, there's not an eclectic feel to the area, and I wish there was more of that on Marine Drive," she said. "I'm confident that there's been a good discussion and good consideration over this site."

Architect Marque Thompson, who represented the developer at the meeting, said the height restriction gave very little room to manoeuvre with a four-storey building.

"We're left with very little room to do any architectural treatment of the roof," he said, adding he worked with staff every step of the way and there hasn't been any objections to the project prior to coming to council.

Ironically, the developer of The Ivy could have built their building even higher under existing bylaws and had a smaller variance by building a steeper slope on the roof line, thanks to the district's slope bylaw, even though in this case the design isn't a traditional pitched roof and would actually increase the effect on the streetscape.

Coun. Little said that went against the intent of the bylaw and should be revisited.

Though it was a close vote, Little said he didn't see any appetite on council to reopen the zoning to make any changes.