

north shore news

Rental housing a go near North Vancouver's Phibbs Exchange

Six-storey development to span four lots near transit hub

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An artist's rendering of the 112-unit rental building approved for 1500-block Oxford St. Photo graphic supplied GBL Architects

District of North Vancouver council approved a six-storey development near Phibbs Exchange Monday, but despite being billed as affordable housing, the project's cost was too high for one councillor.

The 112-unit Oxford Street development showcases the need for amalgamation between the City and District of North Vancouver, according to Coun. Lisa Muri.

"There's tons of rental in the City of North Vancouver and if we were one municipality we wouldn't even be having this conversation," she said.

The project is a rezoning of four single-family lots between 1561 and 1583 Oxford St.

Muri was nonplussed by the building's size, its design, a lack of green space, and its location on a busy thoroughfare.

"The access onto the Second Narrows Bridge has been suggested to come out right in front of this building," she said.

Other councillors cited the project's location as a prime attribute.

"If ever there was a location in our community where it was appropriate to... potentially have a bit of a different model available for a building, this is it," said Coun. Mike Little, noting its proximity to transit.

Despite supporting the project, Little was sympathetic to Muri's concerns about density.

"I'm not interested in endlessly densifying our community. You take the density you need to take to get what you want," he said.

The units are between 416 and 963 square feet.

The floor space ratio, which measures the development's total floor space against the size of its lot, is 3.32.

Council needs to replenish the district's outdated rental stock, according to Little.

"I think the worst is yet to come, unfortunately, in terms of replacing the aging rental supply. Because we've only built two buildings in the last 19 years there's a whole bunch of buildings out there that are aging," he said.

Muri questioned the need for new rental housing, mentioning the new building above BlueShore Financial on Lonsdale Avenue in the City of North Vancouver. "It's half-empty and it's been open for six months," she said. "New stuff is not affordable, old stuff is affordable."

The building's studios will likely rent for \$1,000 per month. One-bedroom units will rent for \$1,200 and three-bedroom units will rent for \$1,750 per month, according to district staff.

The project is light on parking, with 86 spaces, but heavy on bike racks and bike lockers.

"I think the parking will sort itself out," said Coun. Robin Hicks, calling the project ideal for car sharing.

Speaking on behalf of Modo Car Co-op, Phil Baudin praised the development as a high-density area optimal for car sharing at a March 25 public hearing.

The development will add more congestion to an area already smothered in traffic, according to Muri. "One day, I guess the car will go away. I don't think that will be in my lifetime or my daughter's lifetime. I think the car is here to stay, certainly on the North Shore, which was built as a sprawl development," she said.

Many young people don't want to own a car, according to Mayor Richard Walton.

"We're trying to create a community which gives people the option of not spending a lot of time in their cars," he said.

The development exemplifies the challenge of being a social engineer, according to Coun. Alan Nixon.

"I happen to be in the business of renting out apartments downtown," he said. "This still represents a really good deal from a rental perspective compared to what students face in the downtown core."

Ultimately, the development will be a service to the community, according to Nixon.

"I don't think we can turn our back on the fact that there is a need," he said.

The development will likely include a small commercial element, such as a coffee shop.

Council did not grant Darwin Properties' request to waive approximately \$575,773 in development cost charges.

When the project receives final approval, Darwin will be on the hook for a community amenity contribution of \$50,000, which is earmarked for public art.

Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn did not attend the meeting and Coun. Roger Bassam was absent for the vote.

The project needs one more vote before final adoption.

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