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Park Royal highrise decision on hold

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The proposed Park Royal towers as viewed from Marine Drive and Taylor Way. Graphic supplied

Park Royal will have to deliver commitments on a traffic reduction plan and a decrease in building height before West Vancouver council makes a decision on the mall's longstanding proposal to add two commercial and residential highrise towers on the former White Spot site.

Mayor Michael Smith made the motion at Monday night's council meeting to put the Park Royal matter on hold, deferring to staff to work with the developer on a more refined proposal — one that has already been at least four years in the making.

Traffic alleviation tops Smith's laundry list of asks, which include a congestion mitigation strategy for the perpetual bottleneck at Marine Drive and Taylor Way, Wardance Bridge improvements and a new Pound Road exit for westbound drivers heading onto Marine Drive.

Park Royal's proposal to build a 27-storey east tower and 12-storey west tower for a combined total of 251 units has already been scaled back from a previous iteration.

Smith is seeking a "clearly defined reduction" in building height, and clarity around the number of rental units and spaces for office use, child care and affordable housing — all supported by demographics.

Right now Park Royal is promising 10 of the units would be set aside as non-profit housing for people with disabilities, while 40 of the units would be rentals for a minimum of 10 years.

"I clearly believe personally that there should be residential development at Park Royal, and the reality is there is going to be . . . ,” said Smith.

Adding to congestion concerns around Park Royal are other large-scale projects happening in tandem with the shopping centre's plans, including the Squamish Nation looking to add serious development to its lands. Meanwhile, five minutes down the road from the mall (traffic permitting), a 451-unit development is slated for the newly configured Lower Capilano community.

"And we need to also work with the two North Vans because we've got basically an unregulated situation on the North Shore now," said Smith, adding he first learned about the Lower Capilano Marine Village plan through a newspaper article. "This is not very sensible planning for the North Shore."

The packed council chambers erupted in applause at that point, reflecting a general community sentiment towards the Park Royal project. An online survey conducted by the District of West Vancouver found 58 per cent of respondents were not in favour of adding more residential use to the mall.

Coun. Christine Cassidy said council has heard clearly the public is specifically opposed to the height, massing and density outlined in the proposal.

"We heard what you had to say and we have acted accordingly," said Cassidy.

Coun. Mary-Ann Booth echoed Smith's sentiments about needing a well-defined scope for the project, adding a suggestion that staff undertake an independent traffic study.

Addressing the congestion issue, Coun. Bill Soprovich said the transportation ministry should kick in some funding for new road infrastructure in the area, and control the lights at the Marine Drive-Taylor Way intersection in real-time based on traffic conditions.

The Park Royal density decision can't be made in a silo, according to Coun. Craig Cameron.

"For years I have been saying that we really need to stop making ad hoc decisions and spot zoning and try to develop a plan," said Cameron.

Coun. Nora Gambioli agreed with Cameron on that point, arguing she couldn't support the motion unless a Park Royal area plan was included. She also laid out some specifics for building height that she feels comfortable with: midrises between seven and 14 storeys maximum.

Meanwhile, Coun. Michael Lewis doesn't believe putting the decision on hold will accomplish much more, especially without a local area plan.

"We are going to get to the same place, just following a different path," said Lewis. "I don't think we have necessarily bought ourselves anything tonight."

The motion passed with Couns. Cassidy and Gambioli opposed. It's anticipated the tower proposal will be back before council sometime between three to six months from now.

A representative from Park Royal was unavailable for comment on the council decision.