

north shore news

Density and development heat up City of North Vancouver debate

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

October 24, 2014 12:00 AM



City of North Vancouver council candidates at Tuesday's debate. Photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

A **jam-packed Lucas Centre** crowd watched the City of North Vancouver's prospective mayors and councillors duel over density and development at an all-candidates debate Tuesday.

Mayor Darrell Mussatto touted his vision of a walkable community benefited by development. Mussatto urged the audience to support a public transit referendum scheduled for next year, which may lead to the first transit upgrades in the city since 2007.

Competing mayoralty candidates Kerry Morris and George Pringle both took aim at the mayor.

The pace and scale of densification is beyond what the city's infrastructure can absorb, according to Morris.

"We've been growing because every developer that is walking in front of council is owed something, principally because they've made a magnificent donation to get members of council on council."

During questions from the audience, **Mussatto was asked if there were any development projects he'd opposed over the previous term.**

"Off the top of my head I can't think of too many that I haven't supported," he said, explaining applications go through a lot of work with staff before being presented to council.

The City and District of North Vancouver should amalgamate, streamlining services and lowering costs, according to Pringle.

"Some people in the city, the mayor in particular, looks at the people in the district as, 'They're the enemy.'"

The city should make a bid to ease traffic congestion by working with other North Shore municipalities to establish a construction schedule, according to candidate and council-watcher Amanda Nichol. The city also needs an enhanced partnership with the North Vancouver school board. While the school board leaves density decisions with council, city council washes its hands of the board's sale of school lands. "To me, that's a discrepancy between the messages and a lack of communication," Nichol said.

When discussing traffic jams, Coun. Don Bell discussed the need for collaboration. "We have to work with the District of North Vancouver because all the roads of the City of North Vancouver go through the District of North Vancouver," he said. Dorothy Bell, who is running alongside her husband Bill, defined herself in contrast to the other Bells. "I'm the third Bell, and in case you're wondering what the difference is, I don't have a moustache and I didn't vote for a skyscraper at the Safeway site," she said, taking a dig at Coun. Don Bell's support of the Onni project at Lonsdale Avenue and 13th Street.

Densification will not provide a path to affordability, according to Dorothy. "The promise of more condos meaning affordable housing for people, that is just such a lie."

Secondary suites and coach houses will make housing affordable in the city, according to Coun. Craig Keating.

While ushering in less than one per cent annual growth, the city has accrued approximately \$500 million in community benefits, including a library and 600 units of social and rental housing, according to Keating.

Bill Bell, who referred to himself as Dr. No when discussing development, challenged Keating's figures on population growth.

During his previous council reign, Bill said the maximum population for the city was set at 42,000 residents.

"Now we're well above 50,000." Bill, who has staunchly opposed candidates accepting developer dollars, faced a question about taking developer donations when running at the federal level. "When I ran for the Liberals. .. I was not in charge of zoning," he said. "I didn't have to sell anything." Coun. Pam Bookham took issue with Keating's comments about the community benefits funded by development. "We are looking to developers to provide all kinds of amenities within the community and we play a game regularly called Let's Make a Deal." The density does nothing to remedy the dearth of ground-oriented family housing in the city, according to Bookham.

Candidate and bookkeeper Kathy McGrenera emphasized the importance of affordable housing, saying increasingly few can enjoy homeownership.

Council must guard against both crowding and urban sprawl, according to Coun. Linda Buchanan. "I believe we need to look at single-family residences and taking some of that density, creating affordability for people to age in place or allow young people to come back to their community," she said.

Risk manager Tony Valente called for balancing growth by facilitating different forms of development. "We need to look at getting three-bedroom (homes) back into this community so families have somewhere to go when that two-bedroom is just too small," he said. The city's growth needs to be accompanied by urban gardens serving as gathering places.

"We need places where we can sit and talk to each other. .. and that's what's going to keep our community really healthy and strong," Valente said. Business owner Joe Heilman promoted more turf fields and slowing the proliferation of condos. "Let's keep something like what we've got," he said. "Transportation will be the key. Transportation is a result of densification."

Keating and Coun. Rod Clark sparred over the Harbourside development. Council's decision to support residential development on the Harbourside waterfront is a blunder that will haunt the city, according to Clark. "We need to have jobs on the North Shore," he said. "We've already cut our throat on that one."

Keating disagreed. "We did not eliminate any job uses at Harbourside, we added residential uses to it," he said.

Via Fearnley also branded the Harbourside rezoning as a misstep. "They have rezoned Harbourside from being an industrial land, a job incubator, to become another residential project. That should not be."

The city's prosperity is due to responsible development and the nurturing of small businesses, according to candidate Iani Makris.

Council suffers from lack of cohesion and an inability to move forward, according to Makris.

"Harry Jerome should have been done years and years ago. That place was a dive when I was nine playing hockey, and it's a dive now." Matt Clark echoed Makris' call for co-operation on council.

The current council is split, which sometimes means residents are left in the lurch, according to Matt. "Think about the six that are going to work the best together," he said.

Both Matt and Holly Back discussed the need for affordable housing. "We can create smaller lots that would bring your cost down on your housing because the biggest price is the land," she said. Halting growth and "pulling up the drawbridge," is not the answer, according to Back.

Communist candidate Ron Sostad said he favours both amalgamation and a ward system. "I call my campaign: touch of COPE," he said.

© North Shore News