

north shore news

District density, traffic debated in Lynn Valley

Maria Spitale-Leisk / North Shore News

October 29, 2014 12:00 AM



District of North Vancouver council candidates at the Lynn Valley all candidates meeting. Photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

Tough questions relating to traffic congestion, density and housing affordability were tackled by an eclectic group of District of North Vancouver council hopefuls at a packed all candidates forum Friday evening. The Lynn Valley Community Association hosted the first of a series of debates leading up to the Nov. 15 municipal election.

After brief introductions, the 14 councillor candidates answered questions put forward by audience members at the Lynn Valley Community Recreation Centre. Acclaimed Mayor Richard Walton was also in attendance.

The topic of transportation, specifically the perennial bottleneck at the Ironworkers Memorial Second Narrows Crossing, weaved its way into most of the debate. The congestion conversation hit close to home for a good lot of the candidates, 11 of whom live in Lynn Valley or the Seymour/Deep Cove area.

Incumbent Roger Bassam spoke about Seylynn traffic solutions already in the works, including the district's recent \$5-million dollar purchase of the shuttered Keith Lynn school site to be used as part of a reconfigured Highway 1 interchange system - and the widening of the Keith Road bridge. "It's going to give us an opportunity to create an east-west flow of traffic, which is really what everyone has desired," said Bassam, the district's liaison to the committee working on the plan.

Political newcomer Mathew Bond, a professional engineer with transportation experience, offered a fresh perspective on the traffic puzzle. "What we can do is we can make real alternatives to driving the car," said Bond, who suggested residents part ways with their second vehicle. He pledged to place a priority on "vulnerable road users," pedestrians, cyclists, seniors and

students walking to school.

Longtime council watcher Hazen Colbert has been studying Sydney, Australia and San Francisco's water taxi systems. Colbert said he is working with the Bay Area's harbour commissioner on a series of recommendations for expanding North Shore's water transit system, to be presented to district council and TransLink.

Connie deBoer told the crowd that answers may lie in a future federal and provincial-funded study on how to twin the local stretch of Highway 1. Incumbent Robin Hicks suggested creating more affordable housing to attract professionals to both work and live in North Van.

Candidates were later asked what their approach to density in the district would be going forward.

Amelia Hill, a 20-year-old student, said there should be housing options for young people and seniors on fixed incomes. "I believe things such as laneway houses create a great opportunity for affordable housing for people to have their families close by," said Hill.

Kevin Macauley spoke about sticking to density targets, with some room for re-evaluation, set out in the district's official community plan, which he says included ample public input. "I think slow, thoughtful growth, density where it's appropriate, and where the services can handle it ... has its advantages; it also has some disadvantages," he said.

Macauley said rapid growth in Lower Lonsdale, for example, has resulted in property value declines, prompting a closer look at density as a whole.

According to Jim Hanson, with the current traffic problems, we shouldn't bring a lot more people into the district. "So, my comments on densification in the short term: Let's put on the brakes, let's focus on transportation infrastructure," he said. "Once that has been accomplished I personally, generally do support the philosophy and themes of the official community plan that involves concentration of peoples in areas of transit corridors."

Mortgage broker Linda Findlay broached the idea of having the next council explore creating a policy for rental-purpose buildings. "There is right now, with the way that interest rates are, ... a window of opportunity for some rental-purpose builds to be done by private owners," she added.

Incumbent Lisa Muri said district growth involves careful assessment and planning to allow infrastructure to catch up. "As a councillor, my concern is that we are moving too quickly," said Muri. "We need to retain land use control and not be pressured by market conditions."

On the subject of pedestrian safety, Wayne Hunter would champion using a portion of community amenity contributions from new developments to improve the district's walkways. "I think maybe the crosswalks we have here should be better lit," said Hunter, generating applause from the audience.

Longtime district resident Len Laycock said with his diverse business background he has seen all kinds of budgets, and understands financial struggles. He wants to be the voice for change at city hall.

Fellow longtime resident Glenn MacKenzie, a high school teacher, considers himself a fiscal conservative who supports a low-cost, low-spending and low-tax district.

Incumbent Doug MacKay-Dunn, who is seeking his fifth term, spoke of his past successes, including championing North Van's first artificial turf field, and the building of the North Shore's first addictions recovery house for women.

The next district allcandidates debate is Nov. 4 at Capilano branch library.