

## Ridgeway Annex redevelopment plan gets public input

### Residents say redevelopment will enhance neighbourhood

Chris Slater / North Shore News

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A proposal by Anthem Properties for nine single-family homes is being considered for North Vancouver's Ridgeway Annex school site. file photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

The redevelopment of Ridgeway Annex is one step closer to approval after a public hearing at North Vancouver City Hall Monday, though its critics say the developer is getting a bargain price.

Developer Anthem Properties is asking for zoning and official community plan amendments in order to complete the sale and allow for the construction of nine single-family homes on the school site at Fifth Street and Ridgeway Avenue. The 62,000-square-foot property, purchased for \$5.1 million by the developer in 2013, has been vacant since 2011.

Although a large majority of neighbourhood residents are in support of the project, some speaking at council Monday think the school board needs to renegotiate its original agreement.

"If this rezoning is passed, the developer will be purchasing lots for \$567,000 each," said nearby resident Carol Abbott, citing a recent Globe and Mail article that claimed one-third of detached properties in the City of North Vancouver were worth a million dollars or more in July of last year.

"This does not include an increase in real-estate values to July 2015."

Unsustainable concept! - cjk

Abbott said the influx of families moving to North Vancouver from even pricier neighbourhoods like Kitsilano will continue to drive the need up for such schools in future years and the school board, which will use the funds from the sale to go towards debt incurred from the Sutherland secondary and Westview elementary overhauls, needs to go back and dicker for a better price or retain the site as a school.

"We have all seen a resurgence of young families with children who come into our community from Keith Road to the water and from St. Davids to Park & Tilford," said Abbott, who explained the site could house a new learning facility in the future.

"With the right planning in place, the future school could house kindergarten to Grade 3 and privately held daycare within the building. . . . A little bit of cleaning up and the school and grounds can be used, until then, for a private daycare facility, which is much needed in the City of North Vancouver and on the North Shore."

Retired teacher and neighbourhood resident Linda Riddell echoed those points, saying the developers should "get back to the table and renegotiate a higher sale price if that's possible."

Resident Sandy Parkinson, who lives just four houses away from the site and whose son attended the now decommissioned school, expressed her support for the nine single-family homes, seven of which will include secondary suites and two more with laneway houses.

"I'm in support of the zoning application of the former Ridgeway Annex site by Anthem Properties," said Parkinson, who described the rarely used current site as "a poor investment."

She said she looks forward to the influx of new neighbours the redevelopment would bring and estimates the new homes would raise property values in the surrounding neighbourhood.

Council was also supportive of allowing Anthem to move forward with its development.

"The changes being proposed, the OCP and zoning bylaw, is consistent with the surrounding neighbourhood and it's supported by the neighbourhood," said Coun. Linda Buchanan, who was against the idea of the decommissioned site being used as a school again.

"I put the question back to the community in terms of, if they don't want the board of education to move forward in creating solid new facilities for students and want to put children back into a 1950 building that is filled with asbestos, is not seismically sound, that doesn't make much sense to me and quite frankly, who's going to pay for that?" she asked.

"Rezoning takes years. Every project that comes in front of us has taken years. If we were to say everybody should go back and renegotiate then we'd never get any business done in the city."

Coun. Holly Back agreed.

"I certainly wouldn't put my children, no matter how old they were – I wouldn't put them in that building," she said. "Also, to renegotiate a price after the sale? I'm sorry I've never heard of that. These people bought the property in good faith and I don't think we can go back and renegotiate the price and ask them to pay more."

Council member thinks that purchase means one can ignore public input and concerns of a public hearing! - cjk

Coun. Craig Keating, acting as mayor in Mayor Darrell Mussatto's absence at Monday's meeting, explained that negotiating a price is not the city's place.

"At the end of the day, I think the interests that the city controls is in fact not what the purchase price is. Our interest is land use and whether or not this land use is either appropriate for that neighbourhood and whether or not it has neighbourhood buy-in."

Coun. Rod Clark was absent from Monday's meeting.

The preservation of public property for future use should also be paramount. - cjk

The project will be back before council on Oct. 5 for second and third reading.

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