

**Subject: DVP's and the community****Date:** Sun, 1 Jun 2003 12:55:59 -0700**From:** "Ernie Crist" <ernie\_crist@dnv.org>**To:** "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>, <cagebc@yahoo.com>

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

The specter of monster houses and speculators reeking havoc in residential neighborhoods is once again rearing its ugly head. The regular circumvention of the existing zoning and siting regulations through the Development Variance Permit ( DVP ) process will require that District Community Associations become more alert and more effective - either that or they will risk losing all the gains made in the last 20 years - neighborhoods will once again become a free for all at the expense of livability.

Zoning and siting bylaws, serving the District for many years, are being circumvented more and more. The District Planning Department is using one excuse after another to justify variances. Urging Council to make exceptions is the order of the day. In one case, Council is being asked to adjust the height or set backs because it is in the back of the house and, in the next case, because it is in the front of the house. In yet another case, the excuse is that a variance is not visible because there are trees and yet, in another, because there are already homes with similar variances in the neighborhood - and on and on it goes. Some of the crassest examples are in the most sensitive areas such as the Waterfront where this pro development Council is making one concession after another.

The truth is that the Planning Department is taking its cue from the pro developer Councillors who, under the guise of allowing reasonable variances, are steadily undermining the process which has protected District neighborhoods. Taking advantage of an otherwise pre occupied public, it is rather easy to prove that neighborhoods are in favor of DVP's, even if they are not.

Applicants are quick to take advantage. One of the favored methods is for pro development elements to join existing neighborhood organizations just before a variance is being asked for. The result is that when it comes to a vote during information meetings the people who are opposed are outnumbered.

What needs to be done?

First, and where it is not done already, community organizations must insure that information meetings are chaired by them not by the applicants - they need to strengthen procedure to make sure that it is not being abused. People who are directly affected by a variance might be given more weight. Only people who are from the neighborhood and have been members for a certain period should be eligible to vote etc. Once a neighborhood and/or a community plan has been adopted it should be protected by a neighborhood constitution which forbids abuse - that is neighborhood democracy in action. Council will always have the final say but the neighborhood has the right to convey a clear and loud message.

The process must be saved from abuse or the livability of neighborhoods and the effectiveness of their democratic structure will be at risk. Some of the more pronounced pro developer elements on District Council would like nothing better than to do away with neighborhood organizations altogether. They have been a thorn in their side for a long time. You can easily spot them - they are in favor of virtually every application that comes before Council, using one excuse after another.

In a recent discussion I had with a Councillor, this matter came up and he indicated that he will bring forward a proposal to strengthen neighborhoods. If he does I will support him. I have attempted to do the same in the past but it was the neighborhoods themselves who were reluctant to accept more responsibility. This may have changed.


Neighborhoods must also shed the image of being "nimbi's". They must become more active and positive. They must deal with both social, as well as planning needs. This is not a pro development stance but merely a responsible approach to solving social, and planning needs and they need to work closer with some of the advisory groups especially the Transportation Advisory Committee.

It is a matter of either moving forward or being relegated to frustrations and

deteriorating effectiveness with the developers and speculators carrying the day. As I have pointed out when such DVP applications have come forward in the past - zoning and siting regulations and bylaws have been established for good reasons - without it North Van District would surely look more like Surrey than the District does today - the zoning and siting regulations should not be changed lightly. If they are no longer adequate then they should be changed but not because the developers said so but through discussion by and for the benefit of neighborhoods.

In fairness, neighborhood participation in the planning process in the District can point to significant successes. It makes the District unique in the region. Maplewood, Seymour, Capilano, Norgate and Edgemont in particular are some of the best examples, but there is always the danger OF UNDERMINING that success through DVP's. The existing District Healthy Neighborhoods policies provide ample opportunity for the community planning process to continue and to expand, but vigilance is in order. Large scale success in the overall community planning process can be quite easily undermined by allowing the whittling away of rules at the DVP level.

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