

North Vancouver City Council approves two new Lonsdale towers

Two new tower projects in Central Lonsdale were approved by the City of North Vancouver Monday following an all-night session of council

By Benjamin Alldritt, North Shore News July 27, 2011



City council has approved the North Shore Credit Union's proposal for a new headquarters on the southeast corner of 13th Street and Lonsdale Avenue in North Vancouver.

The city unanimously green-lighted plans for North Shore Credit Union to construct a striking three-storey corporate head office on the southeast corner of 13th Street and Lonsdale Avenue, below a 15-storey, 150-foot tower slightly to the east.

"It's all about making a place," said architect Walter Francl. "The corner plaza and roof overhang become a signature statement that will inform the design direction of the other three corners of the site. The building is intended as a place-making precedent for the gateway to Central Lonsdale."

The credit union and development partner Wesgroup went through an involved process to gather the 139,500 square feet of floor space they felt was necessary to make the building economically viable. The site itself, formerly a gas station, allowed for up to nearly 87,000 square feet. A further 15,160 was transferred from the credit union's current building on 11th Street, which Wesgroup will renovate and lease out as commercial space geared to medical professionals. The plans earned another 8,617 square feet by reaching a city-specified environmental standard, and the city created a new "employment generating use bonus" to give the project an extra 4,000 square feet. Lastly, Wesgroup purchased 25,000 square feet from the city's Presentation House site density bank for \$1 million.

The whole project's floor space is 4.18 times the lot area, creating close to 60,000 square feet of commercial space and 84 new homes. The project required three amendments to the official community plan.

Following endorsements from the Lower Lonsdale Business Association and the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, the public hearing was dominated by employees of the credit union, who extolled the company's progressive practices and the short commutes they enjoyed to work in North Vancouver.

Several councillors praised the design of the building and noted the absence of protest from neighbouring residents. Coun. Rod Clark, however, said there was too much parking for a site on two major transit routes, and took particular issue with the city's sale of Presentation House density at \$40 per square foot.

"Density is worth some money to you as taxpayers and as your defenders and guardians of the public purse, we should be aware of that," said an increasingly animated Clark. "The other thing is, we are creating a whole new density class for employment generation. And why are we doing that? Well, they happen to be 4,000 square feet short on the amount of density they want to build this pretty building. Again, something the city has to provide services for - fire, police, recreation, all that stuff. This doesn't come for free. We're left holding the bag while the developer goes off into the sunset."

Clark pressed for a \$92.50 per foot price tag, but his amendment failed shortly after midnight with only one councillor, Pam Bookham, supporting him.

"It's an amazing building," said Mayor Darrell Mussatto. "It will be one of the marquee buildings of the City of North Vancouver and the North Shore and it will speak to the quality of businesses we have here."

Earlier in the evening, council also unanimously endorsed plans by Citimark Group to build a 180-foot, 18-storey tower above six street-level retail units on the 100-block of West 15th Street. The building's height is within the area's OCP requirements, but still required transfer of density from four businesses immediately to the north, on West 16th Street.

Representing the developer, Chuck Brook told council the tall, slim building was a net benefit to residents of nearby towers Silva, Summerhill and Symphony.

"The key thesis is that under existing zoning, we could build two 120-foot towers on each of these sites . . . The proposal is to transfer most of that density into a single tower. The public purpose of this is to create a view corridor, an open area among the other tall buildings," he said.

Brook's argument seemed to ring true for many neighbours, although one said she was "devastated" by the loss of her view and another accused council of using an ad hoc approach to Central Lonsdale development.

Another aspect of the proposal is to include free office space and four adaptable homes for the Vancouver Resource Society, which provides supported housing for people living with disabilities. Several VRS clients spoke about the hardships they endured while looking for housing for themselves or their children. Before the vote, Clark suggested the developer reduce the amount of costly underground parking to find money for one more VRS unit.

"I think this is a good example of the kind of density that the Lonsdale corridor should be accepting," said Coun. Guy Heywood.

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