

Visions of a riverside 'renaissance'

AQUA REVIVAL PLAN: False Creek, Coal Harbour and Granville Island rolled into one

BY KENT SPENCER
STAFF REPORTER

Growing population

Predicted population for Richmond city centre:
2007 — 41,000
2021 — 61,000
2057 — 120,000

A new vision for development in Richmond calls for a trendy Granville Island-style riverside and 80,000 more people downtown by mid-century.

"Richmond has never seen anything like this. We're a suburban community," said Coun. Derek Dang.

"This is an exercise in urban densification."

Council has approved a plan for a "renaissance" on the river with walkways, waterside bistros and boats on the Middle Arm of the Fraser.

The changes would make the area appear much like a combination of Vancouver's West End, False Creek and Coal Harbour: Clusters of high-rises with condos for thousands of people and a waterside atmosphere with markets, plazas and aqua buses.

"The idea of people and cars sharing space on a promenade is adopted from Granville Island," said Richmond planner Terry Crowe.

The newly-built UBC Boathouse would be home to small-craft races, with space for thousands of spectators between the Dinsmore and Moray Bridges.

"Vibrant human interaction" would be fostered by a new pedestrian bridge at Cambie Road, a marina and artists' work.

Wetland areas and channels with native vegetation would be home to waterfowl.

As many streets as possible would be connected to the river's edge.

The riverside cleanup and redevelopment of adjacent industrial areas can't come too soon for Vancouver Marina owner-manager John Short.

"I've always advocated making the river look nice. If they are going to



Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie, with the Olympic Oval site behind him, backs the idea of a Vancouver Island-style riverside. SAM LEUNG — THE PROVINCE

have this many people, it should look good. It's not pretty [at the moment]. There are auto and welding businesses. Some of the marinas are run down.

"The trouble is, Richmond has no control on the river," said Short, who has been in the area for more than

40 years. "It's controlled by the North Fraser Port Authority."

The city planners' 21st century outlook proposes villages, libraries and community centres a few hundred metres from the riverfront.

No cost estimates have been developed for the ambitious project,

which would be built over the next 50 years.

Roughly 10,000 to 20,000 people would live in each village, many of them in high-rises on the seismically challenged river delta.

The villages would be clustered around three SkyTrain stations being erected on the Canada Line.

"Taxpayers are investing \$2 billion in the Canada Line," said Maureen Enser of the Urban Development Institute.

"Densifying the transit hubs is strongly supported."

The city centre plan encompasses an 11-sided area north of Blundel Road, roughly bounded by No. 4 Road in the east, the Middle Arm on the North, and Gilbert Road on the west. A complete look at the plan is available on the Richmond City website at www.richmond.ca.

Planners say residents will spend their leisure time at the \$178-million Richmond Oval, slated to become a giant community centre after the Olympics.

Crowe is hoping the latest environmental technology will be

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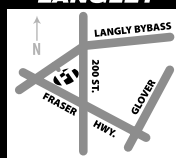
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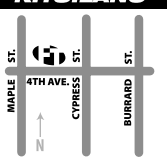
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— or a disastrous 'densification'?



Vancouver's seawall at Coal Harbour is among the models for Richmond's proposed new riverside areas: Clusters of housing for thousands of people and a waterside atmosphere with markets, plazas and aqua buses.

employed with green roofs and geothermal power.

Coun. Evelina Halsey-Brandt, who supports the plan along with Mayor Malcolm Brodie, said the mix of people should be balanced between the rich and poor.

"We don't want to create ghettos

by putting all the affordable housing in one area," she said.

Mindful of aircraft noise from nearby Vancouver International Airport, residences would stay clear of the loudest zones to the north of Sea Island Way.

Despite the buffer, Claudio Bul-

fone of the airport's noise committee, said putting thousands of residents within five kilometres of the south main runway is not a good idea.

"It may lead to future noise complaints and demands for restrictions of aircraft operations," he said.

Richmond's environmental advisory committee said the projected population increase was "too large" and will cause "increased vehicle pollution." It said thick sound-proofing should be required.

Michael Wolfe of the Green Party rejects the plan.

Flood, seismic worries need addressing

Flood and earthquake protection needs to be undertaken before a population surge can take place in Richmond, says a GVRD planner.

"The [guidelines] say Richmond has to be careful and do its homework first," said planner Chris DeMarco, responding to Richmond's plans to densify its city centre. "An agreement with the province on flood and seismic protection is required."

DeMarco said the guidelines are in place because not all places in the Lower Mainland are fit for growth.

"The idea behind the Livable Region Strategic Plan is not to grow wherever people feel like

growing," said DeMarco.

She added that if flood and seismic concerns are met then Richmond is "a good place" to increase the number of people living there.

Richmond currently has 182,000 residents. Under current regional guidelines, it is allowed to grow to 212,000 by 2021.

Richmond planner Terry Crowe said the city will not exceed its 2021 targets, leaving no need to revise its statement to the GVRD. The city centre has 41,000 people now. Guidelines allow 61,000 residents.

The plan calls for a buildout of 120,000 in roughly 50 years' time.

"The Garden City farmlands would have to be destroyed," he said.

"Urban impacts should be reduced." The public will be invited to open houses in March.

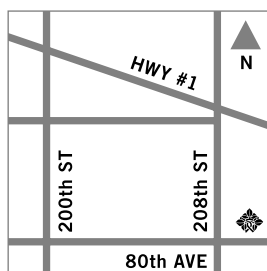
Staff hope to have a zoning bylaw ready for approval in three months.

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