

Vancouver considers higher-density housing plans for Cambie Street corridor

BY JEFF LEE, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 5, 2011



Canada Line trains near Marine Drive station. Vancouver is considering a comprehensive land use plan for five neighbourhoods along the Cambie corridor and Canada Line that will fundamentally alter the way the area looks and develops.

Photograph by: ian Lindsay, Vancouver Sun Vancouver Sun

Vancouver is considering a comprehensive land use plan for five neighbourhoods along the Cambie corridor and Canada Line that will fundamentally alter the way the area looks and develops.

From 16th Avenue to Marine Drive, postwar bungalows, ranchers and modest single-family homes have long occupied most of the frontage of Cambie's wide heritage boulevard. But under a proposal now before council, over the next 30 years the corridor would transform into a series of denser "transit-oriented" neighbourhoods with multiple-unit condos ranging from four storeys in the north to 12 storeys at Oakridge to 36 storeys at Marine Drive.

The plan, which could see as many as 14,000 new residents in the corridor by 2040, would capitalize on the new Canada Line and result in taller buildings lining the corridor. It is being supported by developers and hailed as visionary planning by some of the city's leading architects.

Planning director Brent Toderian described it to council as "the largest and most complex area planning exercise in the city's history." It covers the Riley Park, Oakridge, Langara, Marpole and South Cambie neighbourhoods.

But it's also raising concerns of some longtime residents who worry the dramatic changes being proposed will wreck their quiet neighbourhoods.

Todd Constant was the second of 125 speakers signed up to give council their thoughts. He's lived around Cambie and King Edward all his life and watched with consternation as five years of construction for the Canada Line caused his neighbours hardship.

"Now you tell me that because of that (line) you're going to double the density of the neighbourhood?" he told council Thursday. "From my point you're destroying the neighbourhood and the community where we live. And you don't have to."

He said under the plan his home would be surrounded by four-storey buildings that would eliminate his privacy.

But further down Cambie Bill Konnert had a different view. He's lived in the Langara Gardens area for half a century. He remembers when Oakridge and the Langara towers were first proposed and his neighbours set their hair on fire thinking the developments would destroy the area.

"Many of my neighbours signed petition after petition against the Langara highrises, and now they live in them," he said.

"I and many of my neighbours welcome this plan. Not only do we want it, but we need it."

The proposal, which is the second phase of a planning exercise the city started in 2009, has some controversial elements. The city is insisting that 20 per cent of all new housing to be rental, although several councillors questioned how effective that can be when the city has been unable to achieve more than 12 per cent in False Creek. The city also wants to take a high proportion of any potential rezoning profits — as much as 75 per cent — from developers in the form of "community amenity contributions" to pay for daycare services, seniors centres, parks and other public services.

Despite those concerns, groups like the Urban Development Institute and the Marpole Business Improvement Area believe the proposed plan would be good for the city.

In the first video recorded address to council ever, architect Peter Busby said the city needs to densify the corridor to take advantage of the \$2 billion invested in the Canada Line.

"The transit nodes represent fantastic opportunities to create mixed-use communities within walking distance of those transit access points," he said. "There are many other people in Vancouver who will thank you for supporting the Cambie corridor plan. It's the right thing to do."

Council expected to hear from only about half of the speakers by Thursday night. It will continue the discussion at a later date.

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