

Re: proposed development at 8151 Bennett Rd., Richmond, BC (Brighthouse United Church)

Your honour, councillors and guests,

Thank you for the privilege of being able to speak this evening to the matter of a housing development put forward by Brighthouse United Church at 8151 Bennett Rd. My wife and I live down the block from this site. On occasion, we have attended this church in lieu of our own, which is Peace Mennonite on Daniels Rd., and we know Pastor Appenheimer, his wife Anne and other members of his congregation. We have been keeping in touch with them as to the progress of this.

My wife and I moved to Richmond 14 years ago when I obtained a position with Vancouver Coastal Health here. I worked as a consulting and treating psychiatrist in this capacity for ten years. As such, I know firsthand from my patients their needs for affordable housing and the struggles they go through trying to make their way with mental illness without adequate housing.

I also speak, albeit on my own, as the chair of the Mennonite Church of BC's Service, Peace & Justice Committee. One of our agenda items is regularly housing and homelessness. We are all aware of the pressing need for affordable and rental housing in our city. We see that as a justice issue in that it is unjust that so many of our citizens are being priced out of the market. Others cannot find suitable places for rent. We have been encouraging our own congregations to look at this approach to improving the housing situation in our area.

We also know that a number of other churches in our region have taken their understanding of this aspect of the mandate of the Christian gospel seriously in working at solving this problem on their own. BC Housing, to their credit, has been willing to be involved. There are even agencies such as Catalyst Community Development Society that specialize in promoting housing in this way. I am sure many of you are aware of the massive housing development initiated on Burrard in Vancouver by First Baptist. The Presbyterian Church on Thurlow has already completed a large project. Grandview Calvary Baptist, also in Vancouver, has likewise established a housing development on their property. Indeed, a number of United Churches in Vancouver and even Coquitlam have completed or are working on housing developments on their properties. When I googled 'church housing developments,' three results also came up in Langley (Christian Life Assembly, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran). So, as I am sure you know, this is not something new.

Our current government has designated millions for such housing. As we heard on the news this morning though, they have barely made a dent in beginning to use this designated money. This city has, I believe, for the last 12 years had a policy and fund for such housing, built up from contributions from developers. However, the roadblock is the availability of land that its owners are willing to put forward for this. Here we have an opportunity to move forward in this area. Let's not pass it up.

I do not believe this development will be a strain on our neighbourhood. There are already large housing complexes on Granville just back of the church and low rise condominiums and rental buildings as well as numerous 2-3 story townhouses on the street. Bennett is a wide thoroughfare with room for cars traveling both ways with parking on both sides. We are used to traffic, not least vehicles going to and from McDonald's, as well as people using it as a shortcut from St. Alban's to No. 3 Rd. There has been both a pre-school and childcare on the premises and a number of congregations make use of the building so we have already had that traffic. In spite of all this, parking has not become a major issue on Bennett.

Furthermore, we are in walking distance from all the amenities of downtown Richmond, including the social agencies such as CHIMO, Pathways and SUCCESS that serve many clients who need this housing. Public transit is also readily available with buses on No. 3 Rd. and Granville, and the Canadine is only a 15-minute walk away.

Schedule 1 to the Minutes of the
Public Hearing meeting of
Richmond City Council held on
Monday, November 18, 2019.

Given all of this, my wife and I applaud Brighthouse United Church for their vision in wanting to go down this road. We attended their open house and have kept in touch with Pastor Appenheimer to see how things were going. We are obviously totally in favour of this project and wish it every success.

Thank you for your time this evening.