

Mr. Mayor and Council.

The development of the area known as Fantasy Gardens is like deja vu for me. About 18 years ago I was a member of a citizens committee created by the council of the time to influence and give input into the Dover development at No 2 Rd and Westminster Hwy. You probably recall this, as some of you were on Council then.

It was through the Dover committee that I first met the young developer Rick Ilich of Townline Homes and Lauren Melville of the Richmond Planning Dept, who later became his wife.

Since then I have loosely, but with interest, followed the developments Townline Homes has been involved in over the years.

There are many similarities between Dover and Fantasy Gardens:

Dover was a mixed use residential development. Fantasy Garden's OCP has a mixed use designation which includes residential with a mix of limited commercial, business & industry, private institutions, and community and pedestrian oriented uses. Both are located at key entrances to Richmond, both are next to a bridge or an overpass. Both have & will have childcare facilities

The proposed Fantasy Garden development will create an impressive gateway entrance to Richmond. The European theme of the site is kept and will be very attractive. Too bad this site was not ready for the visitors of the upcoming Olympics.

Speaking to the modifications of the original site plan:

at the last workshop many people felt that the revised site plan shows almost too many concessions the developer had to make : he not only gave up 12 acres of the botanical gardens in the ALR to the City, he also has to make concessions for turning lanes, for future road allowances, as well as a bay for buses. There is also a 10 ft landscape strip between the park and the development, a signalized intersection at No 5 Rd, all at Townline's expense, a childcare facility, some affordable housing units and to top it off there is the request for a 50 foot riparian setback along the ditch on the east side of the property line, a setback which I think is excessive. (15 metre .)

Because of the cutting into more and more of the developers space the new plan shows the townhouses gone and the apartments with a much more massive density and a larger footprint - , which is less attractive than the original plan with more buildings - with a smaller foot print.

The only way to achieve less mass of the building footprints as they are now is to allow for more height. I think an 8 story building in the eastern corner is needed to provide more open space.

Again here is a comparison to the Dover development: At Dover there is a 8 story building by the No 2 Rd bridge. This building does not appear to be a much higher building than the rest because one looks at it from the height of the bridge and the on/off ramps. Also, it is stepped back in appearance and it looks really good, (almost like a ship.)

Like the No 2 Rd Bridge approach to Richmond, the Steveston Highway approach over the overpass would present a much more attractive view of a taller 8 story building at the eastern edge. This is much better than to look at the low roofs under the Oak Street bridge, for instance.

A 8 or 10 story building is always built with cement and is a much more permanent structure than a 4 or 6 story building built with wood.- With cement there are no leaks, (only maybe the windows or roofs.)

It is the botanical park, that makes this "Gardens" development so very attractive, as well as the views of the mountains and the agricultural land reserve to the north and the east. A 8 story building allows many more people the opportunity to enjoy these views. Since the "Gardens " have a European village theme it stands to reason that there would be a taller building. In Europe this is usually a church, but in this case it could be a 8 story building. (As an aside-there is always a fountain with a plaza in every village.)

Richmond planning department should give an additional roof height allowance for the 4 and 6 story buildings, so that they can have angled and peaked roofs and not all be flat. (except if there are roof gardens, of course )

I would ask the developer to use an innovative architect to design the form and shape of the buildings, as this is so important. There are already too many unimaginative and un-attractive rectangular apartment buildings with flat roofs in our city. . The all flat, all 16 story high profile of downtown Richmond's skyline has long bothered me as there could be a much more imaginative approach to the airport's height restrictions on Richmond.

(I am very aware and sensitive to the shape and form of buildings, since before I immigrated to Canada I worked for an architect office in Germany.)

There is another concern and that is about the maintenance of the now widened riparian setback in the new plan which I feel is excessive. The now 50 feet wide riparian area is situated along the length of the east side of the property.

original plan:  
8 metres.  
new plan:  
15 metres

My concern is about the maintenance of this un-accessible strip of land. It may soon be full of blackberry bushes and look unkempt like the property across the street ( at the car dealership.) Those blackberries create a habitat not for ducks but for rats. It would be much better to give access to this area to the public via a pedestrian walkway, which could also be used as a maintenance road. The beautiful mature cedar hedge, so helpful in cutting down noise and exhaust pollution -, would stay. The area would be closed to dogs, of course.

On the positive side: some of Townline's efforts to create a " green " site really resonated with me. For instance their re-use of rain and grey water, and the use of roof gardens and maybe geo-thermal heat. It will be interesting to see who the target market for this site is. Most of the workshop attendants were retirees, who showed much interest in the "Gardens". If retirees are the majority target then the medical/ dental building with Pharmacy and seniors housing next door makes absolute sense. But overall I hope for a good mix of different age groups and income levels .

In summary: Rick and Lauren Ilich of Townline Homes have crossed their T's and dotted their I's when it comes to this development proposal . They absolutely did their due diligence.

There were 4 workshops for public input. I attended all of them. The input was compiled and acknowledged.

I felt we were listened to, and many of our suggestions were used in their plan. Most people at the workshops said the same.

I am so pleased that Rick Ilich is the owner of this site. He has an excellent track record. He is a developer who always was and still is way ahead of his time. (He was profiled last year in B.C Business Magazine. He is the recipient of many awards. He loves heritage buildings: in 2004 he bought the iconic Hudson's Bay building in Victoria. He converted some Yaletown heritage buildings to loft-style condo's.

But he has always kept a pedestrian friendly perspective at the lower level of his buildings' - together with a lot of greenery and double rows of trees. He is a very co-operative man who values the public's input. He also is a conscientious man and this reflects in the work he does.

Not everyone has the opportunity or is in a position to leave behind a legacy. Rick Ilich was raised in Richmond and has an affinity for the city where he grew up. This will be his legacy.

I know that the finished development of the " Gardens " will be an asset for Richmond.

Erika Simm, Richmond