

## 'Mixed emotions' over highrise plan

Pair of towers planned for West End would see 130 grandfathered units demolished

JOANNE LEE-YOUNG [jlee-young@postmedia.com](mailto:jlee-young@postmedia.com)



Developers have submitted a rezoning application for two luxury residential towers at 1400 Alberni St., despite a 'really clear' need for more affordable housing, says MLA Spencer Chandra Herbert.

Architects hired by the owners of a site at 1400 Alberni St. in the West End have posted a rezoning application that proposes two luxury residential towers that would showcase cutting-edge design and technology.

The plan, which includes buildings of 43 and 48 storeys, adheres to height allowances in the West End Community Plan. And the reported price of about \$160 million paid by the developer for the land in early 2016 has always suggested a project of this scale.

But opposition has developed to the project, with some questioning it in light of rising rents and their affect on low-income households. That's because the project requires demolishing a 19-storey building with almost 130 "affordable" rental units where some tenants are paying lower-than-market rates that have been grandfathered for decades.

"I have mixed emotions," says Spencer Chandra Herbert, MLA for Vancouver-West End. "The need for more affordable rental housing is really clear."

This project aims to add a daycare, which is badly needed in the area, said Chandra Herbert. "On the one side, we are adding more units and my hope had been that with more projects on Alberni Street and more supply, we would be

adding to affordability.

"But it hasn't worked out that way so far.

"The city's tenant relocation plan is supposed to help," says Chandra Herbert, adding that some tenants have also been in touch with his office seeking assistance in finding new places to rent, but they have been choosing to do so anonymously because they don't want to be seen as troublemakers in a market where it is so difficult to find a unit.

Postmedia has also spoken to several current and former tenants who say any resistance to the developers' plans is muted because many residents feel vulnerable and are focused on where they will move next.

In a statement, the developers said: "Landa Global Properties and Asia Standard Americas are both committed to replacing one-for-one the 129 purpose-built rental homes that will be demolished as part of the redevelopment. There will be no loss of rental housing stock as a result of our development.

"The development will also include 314 market condo units that some owners may choose to rent out. In addition, we will be providing a new diversity of units to the area, with 35 per cent of rental units or 44 homes, being two or more bedrooms."

They added they plan to assist "long-term tenants with relocation, we are paying to secure rental stock in the area. Our property manager is responsible for several buildings in the West End and we are continually engaging our tenants and providing them with information about available, nearby units at comparable prices.

"The proposed program has been carefully developed in conjunction with the city, and offers above average compensation and timelines to existing tenants."

Now that the rezoning application has revealed details of what the developer intends to build, "folks have been sur-

prised at how big the new buildings will be and that there is no guaranteed 'affordable' housing in the project," says Chandra Herbert.

"This does seem to be a problem given that new market rental units will not address the loss of existing rental units that are probably much lower rents than what the new market units will be renting for and without assurances of secured rental units that are fixed at below market," says Penny Gurstein, a professor at the University of B.C.'s school of community and regional planning, who specializes in socio-cultural aspects of affordable housing, especially for marginalized groups.

The developers said on Wednesday they "will be offering a 20 per cent discount to market rents for existing tenants wanting to return to our new rentals. They will have the first right of refusal for the units when they are complete."

The city did not comment by deadline.