

Vancouver city council approves vision for Jericho Lands

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A rendering of the proposed development of the Jericho lands in Vancouver. | MST Development Corp.

The development partnership of three First Nations and a federal Crown corporation is one step closer to transforming 90 acres of West Point Grey into a high-density, car-light community after Vancouver city council unanimously voted in favour of their plan on Wednesday.

The Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities officially approved the MST Development and Canada Lands Company (CLC) Jericho Lands policy statement.

The 179-page guide, developed over the past five years, describes the 25-year, four-phase project to build housing and amenities for 24,000 people on Jericho Hill and Jericho Garrison.

The city's interim director of planning, Matt Shillito, recommended approval so that staff could prepare an official development plan. Construction on the first eight-year phase — pending technical studies and rezoning applications — could begin in 2027.

Only Coun. Brian Montague (ABC Vancouver party) was absent from the meeting, where both amendments passed unanimously.

Coun. Sarah Kirby-Yung's (ABC) motion called on MST and CLC to consider the potential for attainable leasehold home ownership. Fellow ABC Coun. Lisa Dominato's motion asked the landowners to explore federal and provincial support to increase the percentage of below-market rentals, increase the use of mass timber in construction and to relocate the existing barracks for reuse or recycling.

Several area residents who had been involved in the volunteer Jericho Lands Working Group spoke against the policy statement. Their top concerns included groundwater and the proposed towers of up to 49 storeys.

"We've heard that the proposal being debated today is a framework to allow progress along with the project," said Murray Hendren, a retired engineer and director of the West Point Grey Residents Association. "But I maintain it isn't. It has the appearance only of a political statement."

Susan Fisher said the project won't be environmentally sustainable, because the cluster of towers and the proposed SkyTrain station require concrete and steel.

"Very little input from the working group was allowed to influence the proponents' plan," Fisher said. "The proposal was developed in isolation ... perhaps even in contradiction to concerns that were expressed throughout the community."

Devon Hussack, another working group member, was among the minority that spoke in support of MST and CLC's vision. Hussack said it offers hope to seniors and University of B.C. students seeking an affordable home in the city.

"I truly believe this will become the latest piece of Vancouver planning policy to win international recognition," Hussack said.

Coun. Adriane Carr (Green) dismissed the concerns about building height

"Towers are not this antithesis to community. The West End is a perfect example of how it really works," Carr said. "This project is, at heart, in my mind, a project of reconciliation, and it is, I believe, grounded in the values of the vision of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh [First Nations]."

Earlier, staff acknowledged two variables: The proposed SkyTrain extension, known as UBCx,

and groundwater.

Shillito called a Jericho Lands station along UBCx the “crucial underpinning to the to the project,” but neither the extension nor the specific route have been approved or funded.

“We have, though, out of an abundance of caution, introduced a break clause into the policy statement,” Shillito said. “Such that after the first phase of development, if UBCx is not to proceed or ... is delayed by many, many years and decades, then we would revisit the site plan for the remaining phases, and make sure that the project doesn't exceed the capacity of the site.”

Jimmy Zammar, the city's director of urban watersheds, sewers and drainage, said one of many required technical studies is a multi-season, year-long hydrogeological analysis arranged by CLC.

“That will inform this design of the future development and the rezoning,” Zammar said. “The applicant would have to take into account the findings and will have to comply with city policies, including the groundwater bulletin, around discharge of groundwater into the sewer system and around adverse impacts to the environment, within the site and downstream from the site.”

Coun. Mike Klassen (ABC), who chaired the meeting, hoped that Kirby-Yung and Dominato's amendments would help soften some of the opposition.

“With big change comes uncertainty, and I think we heard some of that uncertainty in the voices, in the comments, and certainly the hundreds of emails that we received in recent weeks,” Klassen said. “We do take all that to heart.”