



The WestCoast Native Health Care Society

TSAWAAYUUS • ATAAPIS • HUUPSITAS

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Neighborhood Information Meeting on Rezoning of 6123 Russell Place for a 3-storey 35-unit Affordable Seniors Housing Apartment Thursday, June 6, 2024 7:00 to 9:00pm Meeting Notes

This is a summary of the problems, needs, issues and concerns raised and addressed at the neighborhood information meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to advise nearby neighbors of The WestCoast Native Health Care Society's (the "Society") proposed development of a new 3-storey, 35 unit housing project on the undeveloped portion of the 6123 Russell Place property. And, to take notice, record and respond to their questions, concerns and support for the proposed new project.

1. Building Design and Development Issues:

Could we not reduce building height from 3 to 2 stories?

There are 3 issues here: soils conditions, surface parking requirements and urban design. The building footprint is located on that portion of the site where soils conditions provide the best support for the building. The cost of underground parking cannot be justified in this region, so surface parking is the only option. The City parking bylaw requires 1 stall for every seniors housing unit or about 11 to 12 stalls for a 35-unit building. The proposal includes 16 stalls which is 4 more stalls than the minimum required. By having a 3-storey building rather than a 2-storey building, the length of the building is reduced thereby leaving more open space along Russell Street. And, of course, providing the open space required for the surface parking lot.

Could we not reduce the number of units in the project to eliminate the 3rd storey?

In any development, market or non-market, there are economies of scale. These economies affect both the capital cost of development as well as the operating costs of the completed project. For a non-market project competing with other non-market projects in a Province-wide BC Housing RFP, a 30-unit project is the minimum size required to ensure development and operating costs are competitive. The building footprint allows for a total of 35 units; 11 units on the ground floor and 12 units on the 2nd and 3rd floors.

What is the distance between the property line and the front of the building along Russell Street?

The distance is about 7 feet or 2 meters.

Entrance to the parking lot off Russell Street could be hazardous?

The City required a third-party independent traffic engineer to assess the traffic situation generally and the location of the parking entrance specifically and she found that the time and frequency of vehicular traffic along Russell Street did not pose an issue for the location of the entrance to the parking lot.

Will the building grade be reduced to street elevation?

Our initial design had the building grade at street elevation. However, the recommendation for a raft slab foundation has required us to raise the building grade about 1 metre above street elevation. In order to partially compensate for this increase in building height above street elevation, we have reduced the height of the roofing detail facing Russell Street.

What outside amenity space is provided for the new residents?

The interior courtyard between the existing Ataapis I apartments and the proposed new Ataapis II apartments will contain outdoor walking and sitting amenities including gardens and a gazebo. There are balconies off the shared laundry rooms on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the building facing the interior courtyard. And, a new amenity room addition to be built off the care facility dining room on the 6151 Russell Place site will be available for all seniors residents. As part of this addition, an outdoor patio with seating and barbecue will be provided. This is conditional on BC Housing agreeing to include financing of the amenity room addition as part of the overall funding for the project.

What will happen to the Canada Post boxes on Russell Street?

The post boxes will be temporarily relocated during construction in consultation with Canada Post and the City.

Can we download the design drawings from the City's website?

No. It is not City practice to post design drawings involved in rezoning or permit applications on its website. However, the Society will provide a section on their website containing information about the proposed new project, including the design drawings submitted to the City as part of the rezoning process, the Transportation Impact Assessment, and these notes from the Neighborhood Information Meeting.

2. Traffic, Transportation and Pedestrian Safety issues:

Why couldn't the project be built on a site closer to retail shops and stores?

Because of the highly competitive BC Housing RFP's, would be housing providers like Rainbow Gardens must offer a site at no cost to the project. The undeveloped portion of the 6123 Russell Place property is already owned and fully paid for by Rainbow Gardens, so we are able to offer it at no cost to the project. However, Rainbow Gardens cannot afford to purchase a site closer to town at current market prices and write down the cost of the property to zero to ensure that they receive a BC Housing allocation to build the project. Also, many of these residents are indigenous, and within a kilometre of the proposed building location are the Tseshaht Administration and NTC Health care offices.

On the other hand, there are many good reasons why Rainbow Gardens should build out this undeveloped portion of the 6123 Russell Street property: (1) there is a community of seniors on the Rainbow Gardens campus which provides opportunities for social interaction and mutual self-support; (2) because Rainbow Gardens provides hospitality services, including meals to 54 seniors in long-term care and assisted living, it has the capacity as seniors in the housing projects age in place to provide hospitality services, including meals to them at affordable rates; and (3) as assisted living units and long-term care beds become vacant, Island Health has the opportunity of placing aging seniors in the housing projects into vacant assisted living units and care beds on the same campus.

More off-street parking should be provided for the proposed new 35-unit project.

There is always a need for more off-street parking for housing projects and seniors housing is no exception. For the previous 2 housing projects and the proposed new housing project, we have provided more than the parking bylaw minimum. For example, for a 35-unit seniors housing project, the minimum off-street parking requirement is 1 stall for every 3 units or a total of 12 stalls. We are providing 16 stalls or 4 stalls over the minimum. Further, if we are successful in obtaining BC Housing funding through the Indigenous Housing (IH) Program, all 35 units will be occupied by seniors with an annual gross household income equal to or less than \$45,000. Few of these seniors will be able to afford a car.

The bus stop at the end of Compton Road is too far for Rainbow Gardens residents to walk particularly those with mobility issues. There is a need for a bus stop on Russell Street. There is a need for a municipal sidewalk down the hill from Russell Place to River Road and down the Fall Street hill from Compton Road.

The Society President met with the City Transportation Advisory Committee in the Fall of last year and requested among other things that BC Transit change the transit route serving the Westporte neighborhood to come down Russell Street with a stop along side the proposed new project. However, it takes time for these requests to work their way through the multi-layered decision-making system. The Society President will be following up his recommendations to the City in due course.

Given limited bus service, what could the Society do to help its seniors residents get to appointments, shopping and outings?

There is the possibility of making the Rainbow Gardens newly acquired bus available for seniors' trips into town for appointments, shopping and outings. There is also the possibility of a formal or informal car share program on campus for seniors housing residents. Like the Uber system, seniors residents with cars could make it known that they are willing to take their fellow seniors into town and charge a modest fee for the service. This could provide the driver with a little extra income and the riders with a safe and friendly ride into town. The Housing Manager could help facilitate and coordinate these arrangements.

Several issues were raised with regards traffic safety in and around the WestPorte neighborhood: (1) there is a need for traffic calming along Russell Street; (2) heavy traffic during Summer season on River Road makes vehicular entry from Russell Street and Falls Street hazardous; and (3) there are issues with RV's parking at the River Road Coffee Shop which aggravate the traffic hazard in and around the River Road/Russell Street intersection.

While these issues are very real and demand addressing, they probably will not be made any worse by several extra trips per day by the few seniors in the proposed new housing project who can afford to own a car. The Transportation Impact Assessment recently completed by an independent third-party engineering consultant confirms this conclusion.

City Development Services staff should make these issues known to the City Engineering Department and the Provincial Ministry of Transportation as appropriate.

There is a need for secure scooter storage for Huupsitas residents.

At least two residents at the Huupsitas apartments have had damage to their scooters while stored outside in the scooter parking area. Rainbow Gardens will look into the possibility of fencing and gating the scooter storage area and providing video surveillance of the area. It was noted that scooter storage

at the proposed new Ataapis II apartments will be inside the building in a secure storage room.

3. Construction Issues:

Problems with vibrations from compactors during foundation construction. Nearby houses experienced broken window pains and drywall cracks as a result of foundation work for the RG20 Ataapis I building. What will be done to ensure this doesn't happen during construction of the new building?

Compaction of structural fill is required prior to pouring concrete foundation walls and ground floor slab. Failure to do so would compromise the long term integrity of the building structure. All that can be done is to notify the immediate neighbors when the compaction is to occur. And, to follow up afterward to determine whether any damage did in fact occur.

Problems with heavy trucks accessing the building site during construction of the Huupsitas apartments. This caused congestion at the Russell Street/Russell Place intersection and led to hazardous conditions with regards interactions with private neighborhood vehicles.

Access to the new building site will be directly off Russell Street. Traffic management will be simpler here as it does not involve an intersection. However, heavy truck access to the building site will have to be well managed in order to minimize private vehicle congestion and frustration resulting from temporary traffic delays.

Dirt and dust on roads during construction.

This of course cannot be avoided. But the general contractor is responsible for ensuring that on a daily basis construction dirt and dust on Russell Street be removed and the road surface affected watered down.

During construction, there is no clear direct line of communication between neighbours and Society board and staff.

The Society will make best efforts to ensure that a dedicated member of the board and staff are responsible for ensuring effective communication with neighbors during construction and that appropriate follow-up occur to satisfy to the greatest possible extent neighborhood concerns and complaints. The board and staff will identify a senior member of staff to be available at all times to take complaints and follow up on them in a prompt and effective manner. To this end, a neighborhood communications officer will be appointed with land line, mobile and email access identified on the Society's website. The construction manager and site superintendent will also be advised of this procedure and protocol.

4. Land and Zoning Issues:

Why was Ataapis I apartments only 1-storey and 20 units if the extent of housing needs of seniors were known at the time?

Unfortunately, only hindsight is 20/20 vision. Ataapis I was conceived in 2016 when the then Premier of the time, the Honourable Christie Clark, announced the first affordable housing program since the Liberal government took office in 2001. In response, the Society thought it should submit an application to the IHI (Investment in Housing Innovations) program for a small scale project to test the need for seniors affordable housing in the Alberni Valley. The result is history. The project was built and rapidly

rented up to moderate income seniors as the project was targeted to households which could afford Low-End-of-Market (LEM) rent. The IHI program only provided an up-front capital grant to write down the mortgage. No on-going operating subsidies were available. This factor also worked to temper Society goals for the size of the project and hence manage the financial risk to the Society.

Why did the neighborhood park/playground promised on the undeveloped portion of Lot 2 never materialize?

BC Housing funding for landscaping for the Ataapis I apartments was limited to \$50,000 and was spent primarily on sidewalks, river rock, grass turf and small plantings in and around the apartment building. No money was left over to improve the landscaping on the undeveloped portion of the 6123 Russell Place property. As time went by, Rainbow Gardens began to reassess its objectives regarding the undeveloped portion of the property. It gradually came to the realization that this was the last opportunity to add to the much needed stock of seniors affordable housing on the campus. And, simultaneously that the responsibility for providing neighbourhood parks and playgrounds was the City's and not a non-profit society whose primary mission was the provision of care and housing to Alberni Valley seniors. This outlook was further underpinned by the facts that the 6123 Russell Place property was purchased from the City for what was considered at the time fair market value. And, subsequent to its purchase, was rezoning from P-2 Parks and Recreation to P-1 Institutional use to allow housing development.

Will there be a Planning Advisory Commission meeting and a public hearing on this rezoning?

As a rezoning, these are the required next steps.

What form will the rezoning take?

This will be determined in consultation with City staff after a review of the results of the Neighborhood Information Meeting.

5. Need for more affordable seniors housing in Port Alberni:

Several neighbors without any prompting expressed the understanding that the housing we are proposing to build is needed. And, no opposing views to this general appreciation of the need for the proposed new housing project were expressed.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30pm.

Notes prepared by John Jessup, Development Consultant and reviewed by Daryoush Firouzli, Project Architect and Rainbow Gardens board and staff present at the meeting.