

March 17, 2017

Burnaby Mayor and Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
4949 Canada Way
Burnaby, BC V5G 1M2

SECTION 2 COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE (2017.03.23)
Planning and Development Committee (2017.03.28)
City Manager
Deputy City Manager
Dir. Planning

Dear Mayor Corrigan and Council:

As the University of British Columbia's Planning Student Association, representing a group of seventy early-career planners, we urge you to rescind the proposed Metrotown Plan Update.

As municipal councils like yours are well aware, Canada is faced with a national housing crisis. The Lower Mainland region is struggling with particularly dire and complex housing issues including rising rents, mounting housing precarity, an overall loss of affordable rental units,¹ extremely low vacancy rates at 0.8% in 2015,² and escalating incidences of homelessness.³ Stemming from chronic underfunding from the provincial and federal level governments, this tragic situation has been decades in the making.

You are also aware that municipalities in the region face mounting pressures to address such gaps in services for their residents, while holding inadequate resources to do so effectively. Despite these limitations, municipalities play a key role towards solving the national housing crisis. Municipalities control community planning practices such as zoning and development policies that can protect and enhance affordable rental housing stock in the region. Over the past 25 years, there has been a dearth of purpose-built rental housing construction in the region. At the same time, existing purpose-built market rental housing, most often near transit, is being demolished and redeveloped.⁴ It is expected that approximately 125,000 new people will be moving into Burnaby by 2041.⁵ The majority of this demand will be driven by low income households.⁶ In this way, preserving and enhancing the rental housing supply is an important policy issue for each municipality in the region, and is a key direction of Metro Vancouver's 2016 Regional Affordable Housing Strategy and the regional growth strategy, Metro 2040.

The current Maywood planning area accounts for approximately 3,000 affordable purpose-built rental units and is one of the most accessible, affordable and densely populated areas in the entire Lower Mainland. Currently, the Maywood area's population is composed of low-income individuals and families, single-parent households, immigrants, seniors and people with disabilities.⁷ In Burnaby, 39% of renter households hold an income below \$30,000 per year.⁸

¹ Metro Vancouver. May 2016. Regional Growth Strategy Implementation Guideline #6. What Works: Municipal Measures for Sustaining and Expanding the Supply of Purpose-Built Rental Housing

² Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. 2015. Rental Housing Market Report

³ Stephen Gaetz, Tanya Gulliver, & Tim Richter. 2014. The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press

⁴ Metro Vancouver. May 2016. Regional Growth Strategy Implementation Guideline #6. What Works: Municipal Measures for Sustaining and Expanding the Supply of Purpose-Built Rental Housing

⁵ City of Burnaby. November 2016. Metrotown Draft Plan

⁶ Metro Vancouver. June 2016. Regional Affordable Housing Strategy

⁷ Maywood Neighbourhood Profile, 2006 Census

Renters in Burnaby, and in the Maywood area in particular, make up a vulnerable population who are at severe risk of homelessness should the Metrotown Plan Update go ahead in its current state. The Metrotown Plan places residents at risk of losing access to their affordable and accessible housing units without hope of finding similar accommodation nearby or at all. What is more, they are at risk of losing their connection to networks of resources and social capital that they share to make ends meet. These networks include friends and neighbours that share caregiving, child-care services and other social supports that are well established in Maywood and would take years to rebuild.

The plan to demolish the Maywood area's affordable purpose-built rental housing stock without any provisions or policies that ensure the lost units will be replaced is both unjustifiable and irresponsible. Zoning is a powerful civic tool that continues to build on a long history of displacement of the most vulnerable populations in cities around the world. Planners have learned this lesson in almost every major city across North America over the last century. Zoning as a tool for displacement was emphasized in the urban renewal practices of the 1940s and 50s, when low income and racialized urban neighbourhoods were demolished to make way for large infrastructure and new housing projects.⁹ These policies lead to worsening conditions, decreased economic and social capacity of the evicted tenants, and overcrowding in surrounding areas, much of which is still felt today. In response, a rise of grassroots organizations' recognition of the importance of social capital, the effects of social displacement, and the value of small-scale neighbourhood communities within mainstream planning practice were intensified.

In the Metrotown Plan's executive summary, Jane Jacobs is quoted, "...the real value of cities lies in their diversity, architectural variety, teeming street life and human scale. It is only when we appreciate such fundamental realities that we can hope to create cities that are safe, interesting and economically viable, as well as places that people want to live." Jacob's assertion was inspired by a grassroots movement to resist processes of small scale, low-income neighbourhood redevelopment and displacement, that are similar to the processes currently underway in the Maywood area.

The valuable lessons described above have resulted in a shift in planning practices towards investment and incentivizing the upgrade of communities, rather than demolishing and displacing existing communities. Municipalities throughout the Lower Mainland are enacting numerous creative policy strategies to protect their dwindling affordable housing stock and vulnerable population groups. One of most effective and common strategies used by municipalities in the region are policies that limit the conditions in which rental buildings can be redeveloped or converted to strata ownership.¹⁰ Strategies include not approving the rezoning of rental housing areas to higher densities, the imposition of levies, as well as one-to-one replacement and amenity contribution requirements. The pace of development can also be managed through setting a maximum number of demolitions per year, as seen in City of

⁸ Metro Vancouver Vancouver Housing Data Bank. December 2016

⁹ Zuk et al. 2015. Gentrification, Displacement and the Role of Public Investment: A Literature Review. University of California, Berkeley & University of California, Los Angeles

¹⁰ Coriolis Consulting Corp. for Metro Vancouver. 8 May 2012. Metro Vancouver Purpose-Built Market Rental Housing: Inventory and Risk Analysis.

Vancouver policies or imposing a moratorium on rental to strata conversions as seen in New Westminster.¹¹ These strategies do not stop development, growth or change in communities. Rather, they seek to promote responsible development that prevents displacement and does not deepen the current housing crisis.

The preservation and enhancement of affordable housing stock is not only equitable and just planning, but is cost effective in that they create healthy, happy and contributing individuals and communities. The cost of homelessness well exceeds the investments needed to address the crisis as it was predicted that homelessness costs the Canadian economy at least \$7.04 billion dollars a year.¹² The vision of the Metrotown Plan is to create an exciting, inclusive and sustainable downtown - something the UBC Planning Student Association supports wholeheartedly. However, the plans for the Maywood area do not fit with this vision, and perpetuate a future that is exclusionary, unsustainable and costly. Please consider strategies for encouraging growth in your communities that do not displace the people who need your protection the most. As Council, you have the opportunity to leave a legacy of protecting affordable housing amidst a housing crisis and to be a leader in creating truly inclusive, exciting and sustainable communities, while making a smart investment in your most vulnerable citizens.

We would be interested in furthering our participation and dialogue in these plans if you would be amenable to such an arrangement.

Sincerely,

Planning Student Association

School of Community and Regional Planning

University of British Columbia

¹¹ City of New Westminster. 9 January 2017. Secured Market Rental Housing Policy.

¹² Gaetz, S. 2012. The Real Cost of Homelessness. Can we save money by doing the right thing? Canadian Homelessness Research Network. Paper series #2



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26 February 2017

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Dear Mayor Corrigan and Council:

I am writing in support of the efforts of the SCARP Planning Student Association to address the housing crisis affecting Metro Vancouver. Their letter lays out in careful detail the nature of the crisis, its impact on communities and ways in which affordable housing delivery, especially purpose-built rental housing, can be addressed in your community. I urge you to carefully consider the thoughtful comments of these emerging planning practitioners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Penny Gurstein".

Dr. Penny Gurstein, MCIP RPP
Professor and Director
School of Community and Regional Planning