



Shaping the Next Port Moody

7 Growth Pitfalls ♦ **7 Development Guidelines**

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Why Today's Port Moody is History

If Port Moody stays on track with the 30-year growth vision of its current community plan, the small suburban community that we love today is certain to undergo radical change, evolving into a more bustling, crowded city that will inevitably feel and perform differently than the one we know. Whether we may like this prospect or not, it looks as though Port Moody's vaunted "*small-town feel*" and more relaxed pace are on their way out.

Looking forward, the question is: will we choose to replace this with another vision for our city that we like even better, one that strengthens our sense of community and maintains or improves upon the standard for amenities (services, parks, safety, nature...) that form Port Moody's amazing quality of life? Or will our choices take us somewhere less livable?

Indeed, the next few decades may very well bring the most turbulent transformation of any period since the city's incorporation in 1913, as life in our quiet borough becomes more complicated, fast-paced, and intense. The turbulence will be hitting us from several different directions at once, some of it beyond our control. Environmental crisis, information technology, and population growth will be altering much about the way we live.

Environmental Impacts. On the downside, as our climate continues to heat up and our local ecological systems come under intense pressure, Port Moody will face a rising risk of catastrophic wildfire along the city's wraparound forest-urban interface. At the same time, our shoreline areas are predicted to experience moderate or severe coastal flood damage where prevention and mitigation may entail significant capital outlays and a rethink of downtown land-uses.

Like other cities in B.C. and around the world, the City of Port Moody has formally declared a Climate Emergency, and consequently has adopted a series of rigorous steps to reach net-zero carbon emissions in the municipality by 2050 or sooner. Among other things, these initiatives will mean substantive changes to where and how new buildings are constructed in Port Moody, to how they are heated and cooled, to how we landscape and plant and water our public and private green spaces, to a heightened concern for ESA's (environmentally sensitive areas) across our city, and to much else in how our community lives.

As if all this were not already enough, cross-planetary warming may also bring the wider world's social woes to our doorstep: by the time 2050 arrives, millions of desperate climate migrants might very well be seeking refuge in temperate southwest Canada, whereupon little Port Moody could be called upon to open its humanitarian doors in ways that enlarge our hearts, test our generosity, and reconstitute our community.

Technology Impacts. Twenty to thirty years out, our city is likely to have become a comprehensively integrated "smart city" within an expanding regional 5G+ grid built on ever-deepening fibre connectivity and, perhaps, guided by a fixed satellite network. Among other transformations, this should herald the general end of private car ownership and the rise of driverless vehicles and widely available ride-hailing systems. These tech and economic revolutions could, in turn, presage a sweeping re-optimization of our local roadways and the re-design of Port Moody's public parking zones. This era could also usher in entirely new modes for monitoring, regulating, and reducing commuter congestion during Port Moody's rush hours. Yes, on the whole, these advances sound like good news.

Population Impacts. Such emerging factors could, by themselves, forcibly change the face of our city in profound ways, even if much else in this place were to stay the same. But don't count on much else standing still, because Port Moody will also be grappling with a third, preeminent change agent. Although Port Moody's growth has, by some measures, been relatively flat in recent years, looking ahead it seems plain that our populace will be greatly expanding its waistline – many more residents, much bigger buildings – within the same old pair of pants, our municipality's unyielding, fixed perimeter comprising 10 square miles. Depending on which path we choose, Port Moody's resident population could be increasing by 43%, by 75%, or even with a complete doubling in size between now and 2051. Whatever else may come, adding so many people to this relatively small municipality is going to change quite a bit about life in this special place.

Municipal growth can be exciting, enriching, and bring wonderful benefits to our community, so long as that growth is managed well, kept in balance, and sensibly sequenced; and also provided that the service and infrastructure improvements driven by growth are well funded.

Pulling this off is hardly a no-brainer, and we know already our city faces hurdles. This report walks through seven possible pitfalls of growth that could hurt the Port Moody we love, then

follows up with seven possible guidelines that could help us move forward with development that makes PoMo better.

None of us has a crystal ball about what's to come, nor a lock on which steps would work out best down the road. Yet our view is already clearing as to which directions are not so promising and are to be avoided if possible. I drafted this outline in the hope not only that my Council colleagues might be able embrace some or all of the suggested guidelines, but also that they would bring their own insights to refining and improving upon them as needed. It is also my hope that we can vet the elements of this framework with our ultimate bosses, the Port Moody public, through the OCP update process.

Enough preamble – let's get started.



Growth Pitfall 1 – Heading for a Port Moody More Crowded Than Burnaby

The beautiful, easygoing quality of life that we enjoy today in Port Moody is cherished by locals, is admired by others across our region, and has become a powerful magnet for builders, who have lined up to cash in on the city’s leafy, suburban, seaside appeal by building large numbers of new residential units for sale here. And no wonder: over the last year, homes in little Port Moody ranked among Canada’s top five most popular property searches on Google.

Even so, our constituents have good cause to worry that Port Moody's delicate livability balance might be upended as more and more construction excavators start rumbling into town.

Approved Population & Housing Targets for Port Moody (2014 Official Community Plan)				
	<u>2016 Census</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2031</u>	<u>2041</u>
Population	33,551	39,660	44,820	50,000
Dwelling Units	13,318	14,896	16,994	19,170

Will Today’s 35,000 become Tomorrow’s 50,000? 60,000? 70,000...?

The official community plan for Port Moody that citizens endorsed in 2014 set a bold target for population growth: a +43% jump in the city's density between then and 2041. We have roughly 35,000 residents today, and this would raise our population to 50,000. Over the same period, the OCP’s Regional Growth Statement says that Port Moody should be adding nearly +6,000 new housing units to its existing stock, bringing the city’s total number of homes to slightly more than 19,000 in 2041.

Although these targets were embraced by our community just six years ago, the OCP’s ambitious 50K/+6000 future looks now like an improbable, best-case scenario for prudently moderated growth. Taken together, all the real estate development proposals already in the pipeline would accelerate the influx considerably faster than that, and the city’s total population

could easily exceed 60,000 within the next two decades. At 60K, our inlet borough would be more populous than today's Port Coquitlam.

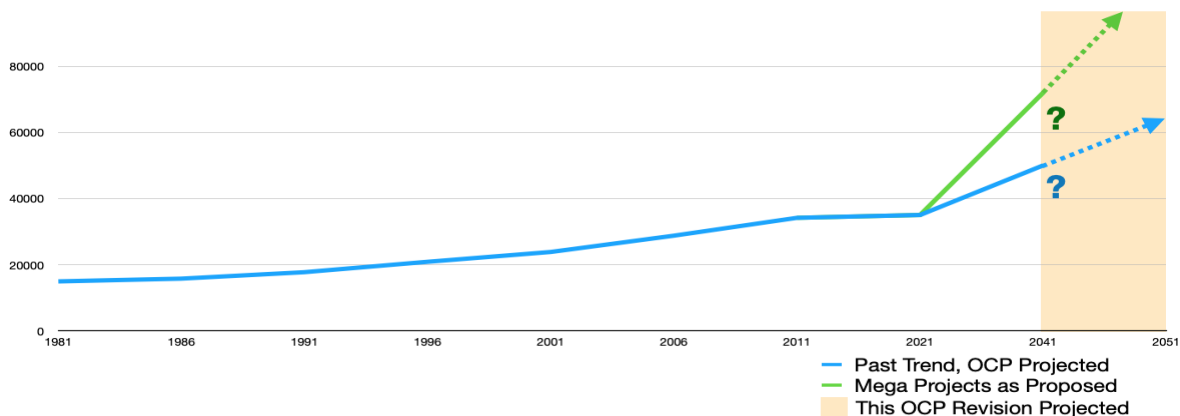
But it doesn't stop there. Our city already has so many other building applications – some three dozen projects in all – either approved, in progress, or in serious pre-application stages that Port Moody could achieve its community-approved population target of 50,000 without going forward with *any* of the three big downtown-neighbourhood redevelopment visions currently contemplated. Might not this be a sensible juncture to hit the pause button on further mega-projects and wait to see first how a +43% density hike is actually impacting community life in Port Moody before we barrel ahead to pile on even more?

Doubling Down on Density

No such luck, because the numerous “smaller scale” projects in our development pipeline – entailing many thousands of additional units – are small fry in comparison to our tempting opportunities downtown. If each of the redevelopment visions for our city's centre – for Coronation Park, Moody Center TOD, and the Flavelle/Oceanfront district – were to go forward on anything close to the ultra-densified scales that their proponents have been seeking, Port Moody's population would probably end up doubling to as many as 72,000 inhabitants within the next 25 years.

And rather than building just another 6,000 housing units, this densification binge could end up building out an estimated 16,271 new homes. Such a number would, likewise, more than double the total number of residences in Port Moody.

Adding so many new residences on such limited turf makes one, at first, wonder where so many structures could fit. Already today, the City of Port Moody is a relatively built-up place: there's not much open, unoccupied land sitting around and waiting to be built out. So, the prospect of doubling the population and plunking down a second Port Moody right on top of the current one would mean quite an earthquake for our community. To give you a sense: *72,000 would amount to fully half the population of today's Coquitlam, crammed into just one-fifth of that city's land space.*



Even more worrisome, we should recognize that, between now and 2041, Port Moody's population could shoot to a total much higher than 72,000. The 72K figure reflects only the requested building projects *known* to our City at this moment in time, whereas, in reality, more and more blueprints for residential densification will, of course, be surfacing with each passing year. So long as those projects adhere to the city's zoning and bylaws (infill development), there will be little that any council, present or future, could do to stop them from adding still more headcount to the city's population bloat.

What That Much Density Feels Like – Some Comparables

Imagine just how crowded Port Moody may come to feel to its residents over coming years. Suppose that our Council were to allow all redevelopment to go forward with, perhaps, Council-mandated cutbacks here and there for maybe 5-10% fewer new folks than proponents have aimed for, but still basically letting the mega-projects proceed within the magnitude and scale that applicants have in mind. Any way that you'd care to imagine this, our city centre – including its sidewalks, stores, restaurants, rec centre, library and parks – would feel like an intensely crowded place, utterly different in vibe from today's Port Moody.

As a point of reference, consider that, at 2016 census data, Port Moody's density already exceeds that of its neighbour Coquitlam, which packs in nearly 3,000 persons per square mile. But if we went ahead and let developers proceed with their visions more or less intact, Port Moody's density could easily hit a whopping 7,200 residents per square mile, a social condition of considerable clutter and crowding that would handily top today's City of Burnaby (6,653/sq. mile km). So much crowding would place Port Moody's density third in line behind the province's current frontrunners, the cities of Vancouver and North Vancouver.

And, again, this is before we even add in the thousands more new residents who will likely be arriving through the numerous additional building projects that won't be surfacing at City Hall as formal proposals for another five or ten more years.



Did Someone Say Metrotown-ification?

Unless our city leaders sought to spread out all this incoming density into our hillside neighbourhoods, the extra masses would mostly converge on the narrow footprint of Port Moody's city centre and its so-called "transit oriented" areas, packed into closely spaced condo towers of unprecedented height. It is striking now to recall how warnings of "Metrotown-ification" elicited scoffs of dismissal only a few years back.

In the abstract there is nothing particularly wrong, of course, with the lively city of Burnaby nor with its intensely urbanized “density islands” in Metrotown and Brentwood, if that is the sort of living environment one loves and has chosen for oneself. The feel and vibe of today’s Port Moody is, however, strikingly different from that, offering more room to spread out, a lovelier, less hectic pace, a more intimate daily engagement with wild Nature, a certain quietly aesthetic sensibility, and other exceptional qualities of life that many of our residents would be heartbroken to give up in exchange for getting twice as many neighbours.

While Burnaby’s more conventional urban vibe certainly has some good things to offer, these shouldn’t be foisted onto Port Moody’s community as an involuntary lifestyle change without first consulting our residents thoroughly to confirm whether there exists a clear and unquestionable mandate for change in this direction – the sort of unmistakable go-ahead one may obtain, for example, by vetting the option of intense densification through an election referendum question, and perhaps we should consider that.

Hard Stop: Doesn’t PoMo’s Road Configuration Impose Inherent Limits to City Growth?

Inevitably, a crowd of 60- or 70,000 PoMo residents would be spilling out onto Port Moody’s roadways, further compounding the rush-hour congestion that residents already rate (on a par with over-development) as the city’s #1 quality-of-life concern.

According to the City of Port Moody’s general manager of engineering, “the St. Johns and Moody/Clarke corridors’ combined theoretical capacity is about 3,900 vehicles/hour in the peak hour flow-direction... These roads are, in their current configuration, already likely operating at capacity during the peak hour (pre-COVID).” Unfortunately, roadway demand that exceeds maximum corridor capacity can translate directly into slowdowns, traffic jams, and increased travel times – not to mention flaring road rage – for our commuting residents, who have little alternative but to endure our city’s central gridlock on their ways home each night.

By contrast, so-called thru-commuters – i.e., those commuting by car through Port Moody on their way to other city destinations, who currently make up about half of our daily rush hour congestion – will always have the option of taking a different route that avoids Port Moody altogether, when things here get just too darned awful. And awful is exactly how things *will* get, once new Port Moody drivers are added to the stream and have no alternative but to slog their way through our downtown congestion two or more times per day.



The Panacea That Isn't

When thru-commuters start avoiding Port Moody in droves in order, their diverted traffic may actually open up some slack that our local drivers will immediately fill up. Technically speaking, this process increases our city's capacity to take on more local drivers with no net increase in overall drive time. This eventuality might, at first, sound like a kind of salvation or panacea for our deteriorating commute times in and out of the city. Indeed, we are already seeing developers rushing to seize upon this supposed dynamic as a pretext to claim that their proposed influx of thousands of new residents would have, at worst, a neutral impact on local traffic conditions.

Alas, any such felicitous traffic-substitution effect would keep the net rush-hour congestion in town from worsening *only* up to the point where our local redevelopment projects have expanded our population of commuters so much that all the new locals end up overwhelming the corridors' traffic maximums yet again. Presumably, anything more than about 2,000 additional vehicles per hour coming from the city's combined growth would exceed the current through-commuter replacement rate, which would end up further aggravating Port Gridlock's traffic woes.

What kinds of aggravation, you ask? As our engineering chief has put it, "The peak hour volume may never get higher, but the peak will instead spread out over a longer time period." In other words, from that point on, average commute times into/through town would worsen even more, and the total number of hours per day when Port Moody's roadways were gridlocked with crawling traffic would increase. So much for the panacea.

Developers need only concern themselves with the likely traffic contributions of their own projects, compared in splendid isolation with the situation as it exists *pre-build* "today", on the day of their proposal being considered for approval. It is the duty of Council and City staff, on the other hand, to take stock of *cumulative* city impacts arising from multiple projects.

Could Our Rush Hours Be Getting 40% Worse...Times 400%?

Back in 2017, when Mill & Timber's owners convinced the previous Council administration to endorse their Oceanfront vision to install some 7,000+ new residents on the old Flavelle Mill site, the developer's own traffic-impact study suggested, optimistically, that their new community would probably add no more than 40% to local road congestion at peak hours – a big deal on its own, yet not necessarily fatal for Port Moody's downtown overall. One can only imagine, however, what such analytics therefore portend for a city centre being asked by multiple development groups to somehow absorb, altogether, *four or five times more* local-resident commuters than that, most of them being recent arrivals housed in several mega-projects located just blocks away from one another downtown.

Even if walking, biking, and transit-oriented development near the Skytrain stations did manage to siphon off some hefty share – best case, probably no more than 50-60% – of all the daily trips that locals would be making in coming years, there is simply no getting around the fact that adding another 20,000 or 30,000 new residents who would be mostly concentrated within our

central neighbourhoods would end up overwhelming Port Moody's crucial transportation chokepoints. This includes both our roadways and our public transit nodes.

Then, Mix in Coquitlam's Coronation Park Tower Crowd, and Stir

While we're contemplating the coming crunch downtown, let's bear in mind, as well, that Coquitlam has announced its own tower-building scheme to amass thousands of additional residents along Port Moody's eastern border near Coronation Park, so that these crowds, too, can swarm into Inlet Centre on their car- or Skytrain commutes each morning, then add to the line-up at our shopping venues each evening on their ways back home.

Taken altogether, this doesn't sound at all like the easygoing Port Moody we used to know. What the next Port Moody sounds more like is a swarming, unpleasant, horn-honking mess.

Of course, there's nothing certain or inevitable about such an unpleasant destiny, if our City and community act decisively, at this juncture, to change course. It is encouraging to see how our Council has begun to push back, here and there, regarding some of the more glaringly excessive development proposals. Yet the sheer magnitude of what we're facing should tell us that requesting only modest reductions to the several largest neighbourhood proposals will plainly not be sufficient to protect Port Moody's future. What our community urgently needs, I believe, is a fundamental rethink of what it wants to become over the next 30 years. Our current OCP update process is the perfect occasion for clarifying and scaling back our downtown neighbourhood visions.



Source: Massing diagram from developer consortium's Moody Centre TOD proposal, January 2021

Growth Pitfall 2 – City of the Arts... or City of the Condo Towers?

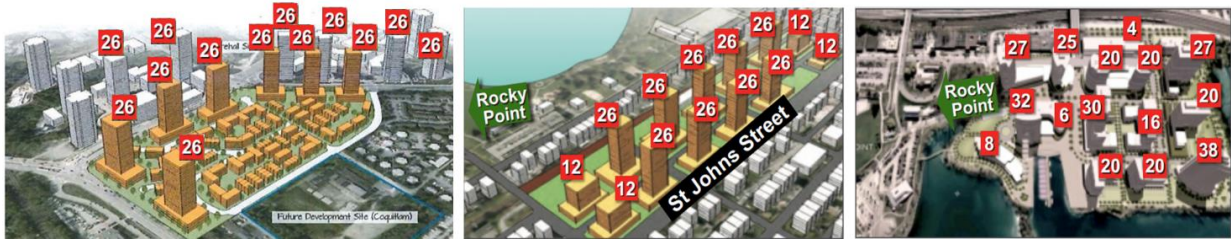
Port Moody seems headed for a spree of over-building, or so it will surely feel to many residents. With runaway population density would come a compulsory makeover in the built density of our downtown, especially within the walkable radius surrounding our Moody Centre and Inlet Skytrain stations. Across our city centre as a whole, within just a couple more decades, we could see as many as 50 apartment towers zooming skyward to unprecedented heights, instead of the 10 towers that stand in Inlet Centre today.

Our Looming Problem

The prospects are indeed daunting. The Consortium's proposal for Moody Centre TOD would build 13 towers atop podiums. The City-endorsed Flavelle Oceanfront District blueprint envisions another 12 towers more. The plans we've seen so far for Coronation Park seem headed toward the building of between 5 and 7 towers all told for the full neighbourhood, which could be squeezed, cheek by jowl, between coming mega-towers along the Coquitlam border, on one side, and the Suter Brook neighbourhood on the other, where 2 new towers are being constructed by Onni at this very minute; and where a 3rd tower at the Inlet Station intersection, the Appia from Bosa, is also to be expected sometime down the road.

On our downtown west side is the Westport Village site, whose vision would include 2 tall apartment towers, and currently sits at third reading. Then there are the mid-rise hillside structures proposed for the Woodlands projects (thankfully, no longer high-rises). On top of all this, the City itself is considering the possible addition of residential towers on some of its own city lands. And there may additional tower proposals coming from other applicants, as well.

The City itself bears much responsibility for encouraging the development community's tower-mania in Port Moody. Direction from the previous Council administration resulted in initial neighbourhood visualizations for updating Coronation Park/Inlet Station, the Moody Centre TOD blocks, and the Flavelle Oceanfront district (see below) which were phantasmagories of towers, towers, and more towers.



The City's own neighbourhood visions depicted densification through banks of high-rise towers. (Counts added.)

Of course, this predisposition came, in part, from some forceful nudging. For example, after our wider community had settled upon a vision for low- and mid-rise redevelopment of Moody Centre, the City invited local landowners and prospective development firms in for a couple breakfast roundtables about Port Moody's future. The guests opined that mid-rise structures could not be profitably built and therefore high-rise towers were the right way to go; whereupon Moody Centre's mid-rise vision was scuttled obligingly and an OCP amendment was introduced to instead make room for a barricade of towers up to 26-storeys.

Let Me Take You Higher

Predictably, the most ambitious would-be builders of our downtown neighbourhoods have been shrugging off even those height limits. They come at us instead with demands for towers as high as 35 and 40-storeys, which would soar above our skyline in league with Coquitlam's and Burnaby's tallest. The visual impact of all this sparkling new glass and concrete may remind visitors of Burnaby's chic Brentwood district more than anything else, albeit fitted onto a tighter footprint.

This is a tale of two cities, the old-styled Port Moody versus something new and rather alien. Such a colossal grove of monoliths amassed along Port Moody's east-west axis would change the leafy, low-slung suburban feel of Port Moody for all time. A rampart of looming towers would create a cityscape quite different from what most local residents have said they'd prefer, whenever City Hall has consulted their views by surveys, elections, community-input sessions, and other reliably indicative means. Because public alarm is rising over what's afoot, the next municipal election, much like the last one, is bound to revolve around whose vision for Port Moody's density shall prevail.

Triple the Build or Else Developers Cannot See a Profit?

As previously noted, if we added together all the units proposed or envisioned by dev projects currently before the City, these would sum to about +16,300 additional residences in Port Moody. This potential aggregation of new homes is 2.7 times higher than the +6,000 new units anticipated by our community in the 2014 OCP. There are hundreds of millions, if not billions, of development dollars at stake.

On what grounds should our community relent and embrace such excess? In almost every case, developers argue that, because they have paid so much for Port Moody land, they should be permitted to overrun our community's established targets for moderately dense growth and limited tower heights, or else, we are warned, they simply won't be able to ensure enough profit

to secure bank funding and warrant building. Believing them and wishing for city growth, we feel ourselves, as a Council and a City, being pressured into saying yes to oversized residential building schemes that are out of all proportion to what our community plan ever envisioned or what our community life (and, for that matter, our local roadways) could reasonably be expected to absorb well over the next few decades.



Cookie-Cutter Towers – Still the Right Form for Healthy Cities?

We have weighty choices to make in choosing built forms, if we want the next Port Moody to be a socially healthy city and seek to simulate a social experience that is akin to what our community has warmly provided up to now.

Before we get into their problems, let us affirm up front that apartment towers as such can, of course, be fine places to live, well suited to the lifestyles, temperaments, and pocketbooks of those who choose to make their lives in them. What is more, there's no doubting that many or most of the residents living in Port Moody's existing towers would appear to be perfectly well integrated into our community as a whole and, in many cases – including, perhaps most notably, many of the retirees who came here to become part of a vibrant daytime social scene – they have proven to be exceptionally engaged in the broader civic and cultural life of our community. What this track record suggests is that adding yet more towers to town would not automatically and necessarily lead to a declining sense of community, and that, inevitably, the issue is more nuanced than that.

Even so, adding *a lot* more towers – so many, in fact, that tower life becomes more the rule than the exception in Port Moody – is what can change social norms and the tenor of life in our city for the worse, considering that heretofore we have been principally a community of single-family homes.

For one thing, apartment towers are increasingly recognized as spaces that can present serious social and health concerns, so the question is whether we wish, as a community, to lean more heavily into these problem areas:

- Studies of the relationship between urban vitality and social cohesion have found that, when a community's density goes up, its social cohesiveness weakens.
- Sociological research has also shown that living in soaring condo high-rises tends to increase social isolation, impede connectedness, and aggravate resident melancholy and depression. In part, this is because tower layouts are not very conducive to the

establishment of warm and fun social spaces where neighbours regularly get together, with their families, in the way that suburban neighbours can easily call block parties and that sort of thing.

- The closed and pressurized air circulation systems in high-rises threaten to elevate infection risks for airborne diseases, whether the pathogen is Legionnaire's Disease, Covid-19, or whatever else will be hitting our species next.
- And while nobody enjoys the long waits for elevators in high towers, reportedly the unpleasantness is worse for those who make the mistake of having a heart attack or some other physical emergency in homes located on the 12th floor or higher of apartment towers, where survival rates have been shown to drop substantially because it takes victims longer to receive urgent medical aid.

Where Do the Children Play?

There are other concerns, too. Tower living leaves children without enough easy access to green space where they can play safely. Long gone, it seems, are backyard play spaces where kids get to be kids together without the relentless hover of anxious, monitoring parents, such as one sees everywhere among families today who have no choice but to depend on the funky vicissitudes of public park crowds to provide their kids with a daily outdoor experience. At least townhome building formats tend to carve out their own self-contained little patches of outdoor green, a hidden blessing for those raising children. Most tower families get, at best, a tiny, windy cement balcony to call their own, where they can stick a couple chairs and a plant or two.

Since When Do Cement-Based High-Rises and Climate Emergencies Mix?

There is no need to belabor the point here: our Council has already recognized, in its Climate Emergency Action Plan, that high-rises built with high amounts of steel and cement tend to consume considerably more energy per square foot than low- and mid-rise structures made of wood or other materials. They also tend to emit considerably more GHG's, which are destroying our planet's fundamental life systems and our children's future. Our City has committed itself to engineering a radically severe reduction of greenhouse gas emissions between now and 2050. Building step-code advances can take us only so far: how our community could hope to get to net zero while shifting much of its expanded population into the most polluting, environmentally problematic multi-family building structures around is difficult to conceive.

The Chosen Landscape of Our Lives

Ultimately, Port Moody's coming conversion into a place where a shadowing thicket of closely spaced steel towers defines the city centre experience raises a broader question about what kind of urban landscape suits our residents best, temperamentally. This question is not merely one of sheer crowdedness but also one of the community's living style and sensibility.

In the hasty resort to tossing up clusters of drably conventional towers, it is easy to forget that there do exist other models for contemporary urban density in low- and middle-rise conformations that somehow look and feel both more interesting and more welcoming to live

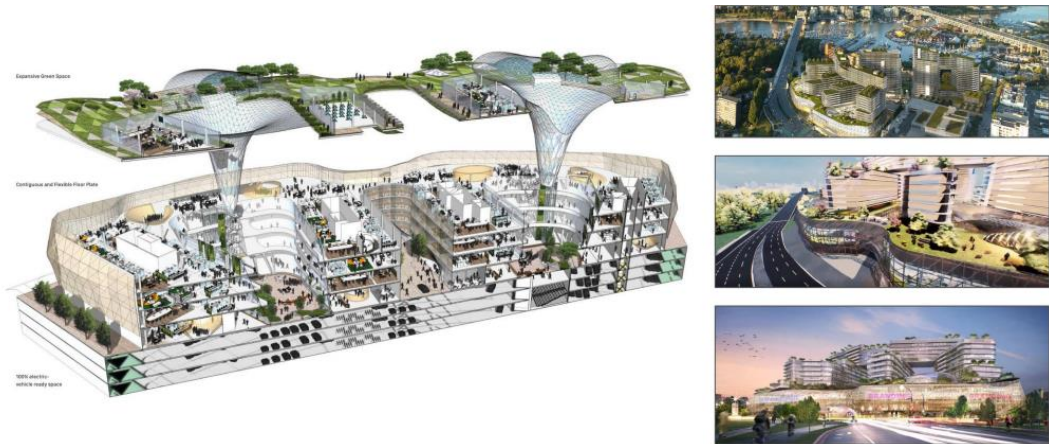
and work in. Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris and many other major modern cities across Europe are undergoing urban rebuilds that offer residential density designed on a more pleasingly human scale, almost completely devoid of looming condo towers. (Any skyscrapers to be found in these cities are typically located together in planned business-centre islands that house mainly office space and entertainment.)



Such a low-profile urban-residential feel is what most of our community told us, quite pointedly, that they wanted to see for Port Moody's future downtown, back when the 2014 OCP was debated by our public. And this should come as no surprise: while almost everyone enjoys a pretty view, when offered a choice of built forms, most urban denizens typically say they enjoy more human-scaled massing at low- or mid-rise heights, and a leafier low-profile cityscape. In other words, they prefer something that feels more like, well, today's Port Moody.

As for *tomorrow's* Port Moody, its emerging built landscape need not look humdrum and uncontemporary, need not be just an arts-and-crafts throwback nor another assembly of west coast-styled cedar sheds.

My hunch is that most residents in our city of the arts would readily embrace an exciting cityscape of daring beauty and architectural distinction that somehow connects better to the outdoors-oriented sensibility of our intensely aesthetic location. Our region is producing some inspiring counterexamples to the conventional cement tower (such as, to pick just one recent example, Vancouver's coming Molson brewery redevelopment), and we could likewise be thinking more imaginatively about the shape of future density.



Yet this is not where the City of Port Moody seems headed these days. The more we allow developers to set aside building height limits, ignore the City's own neighbourhood visions, and help themselves to sky's-the-limit FARs through our weirdly unbounded density-bonusing allowances, the less likely it is that our community will end up with a downtown core that feels anything like today's easygoing Port Moody nor, for that matter, that evolves toward a truly amazing future city of the arts. Perhaps folks can warm up to a mini-Yaletown.



Source: From City's map of possible future construction sites along primary downtown transit routes, Jan. 2021

Growth Pitfall 3 – Construction Upheaval for a Generation?

Mañana, mañana

When Port Moody locals worry aloud about the disruptive impact that adding as many as 37,000 more residents to a city of 35,000 might have on PoMo life in coming years, developers and their boosters tend to shrug. *Not to worry*, they reassure us, because such massive city reconstruction and population growth would not be happening overnight, nor indeed anytime soon. If spades hit dirt within the next few years on any of the big projects contemplated for our city centre, we are reminded, it could easily be another fifteen to twenty years, or more, before full build-out would be completed and the new throngs would be moving into town.

Probably true, yet the prospect offers cold comfort to current residents, since there's not much to relish in seeing the city's downtown become a sprawling, nonstop construction site *for the next two-to-three decades of their lives*. Rather than today's basically quiet and pleasant green views across our city, we would have to adjust to an eerie invasion of industrial cranes haunting our skyline for many long years before these creatures morphed into concrete towers. We already witness, on the scale of just a couple blocks at the Onni Parcel D project site in Suter Brook, the kinds of disruption that our downtown could be experiencing across the expanse of the map above.

Dying to Modernize

If one or more of our giant downtown neighbourhood rebuilds gets underway, oldsters like me, who moved to lovely Port Moody to spend their golden years in the peace and quiet of Nature's splendor, will mostly be dead and gone by the time the last jackhammers, pile-drivers, and back-hoe beepers finally fall silent. For a great many residents, I fear, Port Moody may come to mean intensive, ubiquitous, unrelenting downtown construction upheaval; a chopped-up patchwork of ginormous building demolitions, torn-up streets, muddy construction digs, and all the rest. And with most of the build sites running directly adjacent to Port Moody's primary movement routes (see above), we could expect years and years of roadway delays and re-routings. The opposite of fun.

Certainly, in any growing town, a little construction noise and nuisance is to be expected and tolerated from time to time. But building so very many new homes within such a condensed

downtown zone – which is also the city’s transportation nexus and hub of communal life – on roughly overlapping timelines will mean an unprecedented, compounded increase in noise, chaos, roadway snarls, and general inconvenience to everyone living in Port Moody.



Once Big Construction Moves In, Is Anyone Else Really in Charge?

To allow so many big digs to go forward in an orderly manner would surely necessitate, from our city’s supervisors, cross-project planning that was masterful, meticulous, and, where required, effectively draconian. In a sense, what a municipal government that is contemplating large, multiple, simultaneous digs across its city centre really needs in hand is *a master plan of master plans*, pulling together all the different builders’ respective project Gant charts, along with the overarching authority to adjust each player’s construction timelines to mitigate the miserable pile-up of inconveniences to the broader public.

Alas, city authorities seldom wield such command where big builds are concerned. Although there are permits to be granted, conditions agreed to, the best of intentions all around, and ongoing touchpoints, we know that once sprawling, expensive, multi-year construction projects really get going, and once armies of subcontractors and construction workers flood in behind the giant ring of security fences, these operations tend to unfold as mobilized cities in their own right, operating mostly on their own terms according to their own meticulous plans; and this process goes on for years. Such projects are notorious for imposing, from time to time, profound community suffering — over things like unbearable noise or particulate dust pollution — with a visitor’s indifferent shrug.

I Tried Complaining to the City About It, But They Just Said...

Our city authorities possess no master plan of master plans, and one must doubt that our otherwise adept planning and engineering teams have ever, at any time in their careers, tackled oversight of an urban transformation on any scale that is remotely comparable to what’s being contemplated for Port Moody’s downtown neighbourhoods. (Of late, I’ve watched the City scramble simply to get control of construction-related parking headaches in the neighbourhoods adjacent to our current handful of smaller construction digs.) It boggles the mind how so much proposed upheaval could take place for many years on end, across the 100+ acres of Port Moody’s downtown crossroads, without rebranding the essential experience of our erstwhile quiet community as a dirty, noisy, chaotic, unsettled, and often inconvenient place to live.



Growth Pitfall 4 – Exhaust City Finances... or Lower Everyone’s Quality of Life?

If urban densification were always the same thing as progress, which some like to think, then population hot spots such as Lagos, Mumbai, Karachi, and Mexico City would be among the nicest places in the world to live. But it isn’t the same thing, and, sadly, they are not. The single biggest reason for this is because, in such rapidly densifying cities, modern municipal services and amenities have proved unable to keep up with population growth, resulting in lower quality of life for everyone. On a less dramatic scale, the same dynamic applies to every city, large or small, including our little hamlet of Port Moody.

Our Civic Services Today Are Already Pushing Their Capacity Limits

Port Moody’s celebrated quality of life depends, to a considerable extent, upon how well our City’s departments and public amenities are satisfying the wishes of residents. At the moment, City services continue to reward public expectations across most arenas, and that is exactly how our residents want things to stay. Citizen satisfaction surveys have affirmed that, despite Port Moody’s relatively high taxes, most would actually prefer to raise taxes even more, if that’s what it would take to maintain the current quality of municipal services, public parks, and other amenities, rather than allow local quality of life to deteriorate.

This picture is both uplifting and ominous. Unfortunately, the precarious equilibrium of capacity versus demand that supports Port Moody’s esteemed quality of life today seems headed for a fall. Excessive population growth will be the trigger. This section will explain why.

Over the next ten or fifteen years, the arrival of thousands of new residents will compel our City to undertake its own civic-building spree, along with an attempted expansion of public amenities on an unprecedented scale. These initiatives will not be adequately paid for by development itself. Yet, if the City fails to complete these civic upgrades on time and to a level that matches per capita experience for our current residents, then quality of life for all Port Moody citizens is bound to experience a striking and bumpy decline.

Managing this impending service & fiscal crisis will be an overwhelming challenge for all sitting councils, present and future.



To serve a city of 50,000, Port Moody's popular and sometimes over-run city library will need to double in size, says master plan.

Port Moody's Long List of City Facilities Awaiting Upgrade

Many residents already recognize that our beloved **Port Moody Public Library** and our popular **Rec Centre** are both approaching their capacity limits, having been originally designed to handle demand levels arising from a smaller local population. Leaking roofs in both structures, along with the rest of City Hall, have required a major upgrade that cost taxpayers many millions of dollars, just to keep those facilities operating at current capacity levels.

Yet even as refurbished, the Rec Centre and its outlying fields are falling short of our city's growing recreational needs. As everyone knows, our primitive and muddy **soccer field** has been awaiting an expensive upgrade – estimated now to cost some \$8 million – for years. Both established and emerging sports (e.g., the wildly popular new game of pickleball) are gaining an active user base in Port Moody, and yet have limited options for places to play. More importantly, the emerging post-pandemic reality may call for facilities that enable more physical distance per user than had previously been allotted and designed for in our facilities, in order to achieve a comparable level of program access. The point is, rebuilding and expanding the city's massively expensive recreational infrastructure is going to become more unavoidable with each passing year.

Our small-sized **City Hall** offers only cramped office space at this point, and its one theatre and two other principal meeting rooms there are frequently overbooked. (Our self-styled City of the Arts has, in actuality, almost no indoor performance spaces of any size.) The City's **Public Works Yard** and its elementary cinder-block structures are likewise packed to the gills and in need of expansion.

Then there is **Kyle Centre**, our secondary recreational space for arts and seniors-oriented programming. Kyle's structure is increasingly dilapidated, leaky, and due for a complete rebuild that could cost taxpayers more than \$20M+ just to maintain current usage capacities. Yet Kyle's demolition and replacement could easily come to much more than that, if this facility will be sensibly expanded to accommodate, over coming decades, a 40-100% jump in the size of the community it must serve.

Our "new" **Firehall** downtown still seems posh and ample for now. Alas, its capacity requirements were planned for an on-duty team size of seven or eight firefighters, better suited

to handle fires and other emergencies *at low- and mid-rise buildings*. The best practice standards for containing emergencies in high-rise towers call for much a larger-sized team to keep on duty around the clock, so that they can get to the tower base within just a few minutes (which is far faster than requested back-up from Coquitlam or Burnaby fire teams could ordinarily be expected to arrive). The more that residential skyscrapers will come to predominate the City of Port Moody, the more need there is to augment our standing capacities. This will mean significant step-ups in buildings, equipment, and staffing budgets – which are among the most expensive line items in the City budget.



In addition, we must also plan to upgrade our limited secondary firehalls such as the outpost in **Glenayre**, the facility that would be located closest to the enormous, proposed Woodlands development.

And one could cite still other city operations and civic facilities that are pressing capacity limits today, but you get the picture.

Approaching our Tipping Point

Now, imagine the impact of poorly planned growth upon today's precarious balance of city service capacities versus public demand. Suppose that Port Moody's leadership has consented to adding dense new residential developments across the city: just hypothetically, let's say, we've greenlit the addition of 5,000 new residents to neighbourhood A, plus another 4,000 new residents to neighbourhood B nearby, plus an additional 3,000 extra residents in a mega-project C, just up the hill, and all of this to be constructed within the next 10-20 years. Once these thousands start moving in across our municipality, the City's currently balanced capacities to meet community needs could start tilting into the yellow striped zone on many fronts.



Wait, Doesn't New Development Pay for City Upgrades? There is No Santa Claus

When population growth jumps upward in giant leaps and bounds this way, local government can take either a passive or active stance. As a passive strategy, local leaders could simply

advise their restive constituents to brace for a coming decline in per-capita delivery of selected services and amenities, as there will be more residents in town to share a fixed pie.

Alternatively, a more proactive, forward-looking municipality, such as Port Moody, will usually prefer to swing into action early, to get ahead of this surging demand by jumpstarting – years ahead – the community’s investment in new facilities that can not only match the next wave of incoming demand but also handily exceed it, building enough surplus headroom into new facilities and amenities such that capacities need not be rebuilt again for a long time to come.

The persons on the hook to pay for much of this anticipatory expansion – both through immediate tax increases and long-term debt burden – are Port Moody’s current taxpayers. Their burden is only partially relieved by fees from land-use developers and, eventually, by taxation of incoming residents.

As Port Moody’s head of finance has advised our Council many times, although developers’ bonus-density assessments, DCC’s, CAC’s (community-amenity contributions), and the eventual tax revenues of incoming residents all help to cover civic expansion costs, they certainly do not cover all, nor even most, of the ticket. Often these new sources of revenue do not flow into city coffers soon enough, nor do they cover enough of the full costs required to keep civic services and amenities on par with the big uptick in local demand and surplus capacity-building that new residential developments trigger.

In effect, without admitting as much, developers count on a city’s current taxpayers to subsidize the full, long-term incremental costs of the population growth they bring to town. And this analysis of capital costs for new infrastructure does not cover the costs of ongoing servicing of new units – water, sewer, waste pickup, etc. – costs which rise with every new year, and every new unit added.

Three Desperate Remedies to Make Development Cover More of the Costs It Triggers

Having said all this, our City could try tapping developer resources in three other ways to cover rising civic costs. These are perhaps worth investigating, but none will be sufficient to solve our deepening financial dilemmas:

- ***Get More Cash Up Front by Piling on Even More Density?*** First, if we agree to greenlight a huge amount of density that exceeds FAR 2.5 and thereby triggers our density-bonus fees, our City could rake in a short-term cash bounty. We may well be tempted over the short run to try funding the construction of new city facilities by loading up on extra population density; but in the longer run, of course, this maneuver further aggravates the gaps in services and amenities propelled by overpopulation. For this reason, attempting to density-bonus our way into robust financial solvency for the City is fundamentally misguided: this strategy amounts to putting out the fire with gasoline.
- ***Sell City Lands?*** Second, our City could always opt to sell off some of its remaining city land to developers, for a near-term cash infusion that lets us rebuild some facilities.

Ultimately, however, this stratagem is every bit as self-defeating as the density-bonus scheme. Today Port Moody retains only a handful of significant community parcels offering the room our City will need for expanded civic facilities and amenities as the city grows. Through the 2018 municipal election, our public has clearly signaled its opposition to selling off these lands, and for good reason. How sad would it be, to pawn them off anyway and then watch the City forced, at some point down the road, to buy comparable land back at a premium when it needs to make room for additional infrastructure necessitated by all the new residents moving in on – doh – the very parcels our City had sold for quick cash. Selling off our city lands forever in order to feel flush for a few years is the epitome of shortsighted.

- ***Negotiate Bigger Civic Add-Ons.*** Third, our City and Council could bargain extremely hard to require that each major neighbourhood-development project coming for approval must include the construction of one or more City-designated civic expansions, expecting the developer to bake the construction expense cost-effectively into increased home costs and trimmed developer margins. By this approach, for example, we might ask one mega-project to include construction of a new public library or senior centre, whereas we ask a second mega-project to rebuild Kyle.

This strategy can work, to some extent, but in cases where it does, recognize that we can't have it all: developers will generally force our City to choose, for example, between co-building civic facilities and delivering a higher percentage of affordable housing units. (See Growth Pitfall 6.) During our first reading of Wesgroup's Coronation Park proposal, our Council recognized this, and ended up retreating on its demand for subsidized housing in hopes of opening a fresh discussion about co-building needed civic facilities, and affordable housing through other means, such as rent-to-own.

While developers can probably be convinced to provide more community value along such lines, we should have no illusions that cutting sharper deals with them will end up covering the full community costs of population growth. No, our taxpayers are still stuck heavily subsidizing growth projects, which is why sticking to a moderate, managed rate of population expansion matters so much.



Port Moody Taxpayers, Are You Sitting Down?

In PoMo’s case, the coming expense of upgrading civic capacities to service our growing population will probably blow taxpayers’ minds. Whether our growth matches the OCP’s population target of 50,000 by 2041, or instead hits 60,000, or even weighs in at 70,000+, the increased demand on Port Moody’s civic infrastructure, services, and amenities will be profound, and we’ll have no choice but to rebuild much of these offerings bigger and better, or else watch livability in Port Moody go downhill.

In a preliminary assessment, our Planning Department has estimated the following incremental capital costs that our City would need to take on over the next 20-30 years to keep capacity – for facilities such as our library, rec centres, performance spaces, municipal offices, police, and fire & rescue, etc. – on par with expanding population. The totals balloon outward, depending on just how large Port Moody’s total population grows. (To simplify, these figures are rounded.)

If we can stick to the purportedly “moderate” yet ambitious rate of growth envisioned by our 2014 OCP, which would add +43% to our population by 2041, then Port Moody’s taxpayers will be looking at capital expansion projects costing around \$140 million over the next two decades, which is already a daunting number. If, on the other hand, Port Moody’s leaders give the green light to all of the big building projects currently on the table, and we manage to *double* the city’s population in that span of time, then City planners warn us that necessary capital expansion could very well balloon, in turn, to as much as a *quarter of a billion dollars*.

Growth will require Port Moody to build greatly expanded civic capacities by 2041		
<i>Total Pop. reaches..</i>	<i>Increased demand</i>	<i>City capital projects</i>
50,000	+15,000	+ \$140 million
60,000	+25,000	+ \$200 million
70,000	+35,000	+ \$250 million

And, of course, these capital figures do not even begin to account for **the increased operational expenses related to these expanded facilities**. We will need more librarians and recreational program directors. We will need more police on the street and more back office workers at the station; and more fire department staffing – with police and firehall being our city's two costliest line items. And so forth.

The point is that, if these rough planning projections are even half right, then population growth will be driving Port Moody's municipal finances into big trouble.

If City capacities can't keep up with growth, then Port Moody's quality of life will decline. When one stands back from the approaching tidal wave of growth-triggered expenses, from new libraries and rec centres and police forces to new parklands, it seems apparent that insufficient funding may force us to let service-and-amenity upgrades in multiple sectors of Port Moody life fall behind the population growth that triggers them.

The shortfall would then be felt by residents as a relative *decline in quality of life*, as more and more residents vied for their share of limited community resources. This downward slide may start showing up in variety of ways.

As Port Moody's population bloats, for example, residents may discover, to their disappointment, that their family can no longer find a picnic space at Rocky Pt. Park; that they need an extra 15 minutes each day to get home due to the evening rush hour, and they arrive more grumpy than they used to; that parking for Suter Brook grocery shopping has become flat-out impossible at key times, so now they have to drive to Coquitlam stores; that parents can no longer get their kids into the programs they want at the Rec Centre; that it may take a few minutes longer than before for the PMPD or Fire & Rescue to reach the accident scene; and that there's no quiet corner in our beloved Library anymore to browse a book.

Suddenly, living in Port Moody presents noticeably more frustrations than it used to, and overall community satisfaction deteriorates. At some point, life in Port Moody isn't so amazing after all.



Rocky Point Park is a municipal park with a large grassy lawn, pier, outdoor swimming pool, band shelter and giant kids play area in the town of [Port Moody](#).

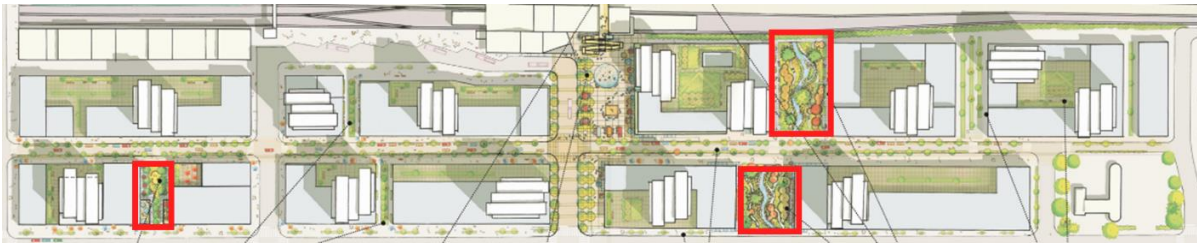
Growth Pitfall 5 – Excessive Densification Downtown Will Overwhelm Our Shared Community Amenities

How Would Our Beloved Rocky Point Park Weather 20,000+ Next-Door Neighbours?

The substantial capital and operational outlays anticipated under Growth Pitfall 4 do not begin to address the accelerating wear and tear that dense population growth will impose on Port Moody's core enjoyments and social spaces, such as the city's celebrated network of parks. With the price of further parkland acquisition having become astronomic, it is hard to imagine how our cash-strapped municipal government will be able to maintain current levels of park benefit, if and when an unprecedented number of next-door neighbours move in.

Among the public amenities most endangered by the coming spree in downtown over-development is Rocky Point Park. Rocky Point is Port Moody's signature gem, a favorite scenic getaway spot that draws users from across the region. The Park is frequently rated among greater Vancouver's "best places" to visit. Indeed, as one resident recently put it, "Rocky Point Park is our community's front living room — we're at our best there." RPP is so popular, in fact, that it already strains to accommodate throngs whenever the weather is nice, which is often.

Now the Park's fate seems headed for a, well, rocky point. In the name of encouraging transit-oriented development, Port Moody's councils have mandated that most of the city's growth hereafter should be concentrated within about 400 meters of its two Skytrain stations downtown. These two radiuses just happen to fall within easy walking distance to Rocky Point Park or its eastward Shoreline Park extension, a geographic coincidence that seems destined to end up spoiling this key community asset for everyone.



Proposal for Moody Centre TOD seeks to house ~8,000 residents in 13 towers. Offers a mandated riparian strip and a pocket park

Developments Are Proposing to Add Very Little Meaningful Green Space Downtown

Every development proposal or preliminary vision for Port Moody’s downtown neighbourhoods includes at least a modicum of dedicated ground or rooftop space intended to satisfy the need of prospective residents for outdoor recreational and green natural spaces.

- For the 6,300 residents who would take up residence in Wesgroup’s assembly, the applicant has offered to increase its terraced greenways from an initial proposal of only 1 acre (which is all the City’s own fuzzy vision called for) up to a luxuriant 1.5 acres.
- The roughly 7,500 residents who would occupy the envisioned mixed-use compound on the former Flavelle Mill site could enjoy a number of green/outdoor patches and common spaces, plus a multi-use promenade along the site’s inlet shoreline, which the general public could also use, linking to the conveniently adjacent Rocky Point Park.
- Up to 8,000+ new residents who would be housed by the Consortium’s dense towers in the Moody Centre TOD have been promised the on-site amenity of a narrow riparian strip of daylight creek that crosses 2 short blocks, plus access to an undersized but doubtless inviting pocket park.
- The 1,126 new residents of the Onni Parcel D complex, which squeezes two new towers and a mid-rise structure into a Suter Brook space originally intended for one tower, will be bestowed a small kid’s playpark and some green patches around the base of the buildings.
- The 800 incoming residents of the Panatch build at 50 Electronic are getting some outdoor activity areas located to the rear of the compound, running beside the rail corridor and atop the parking lot.

And so on. However skimpy such park-ish accommodations may seem, let us remember, in fairness, that all developments are also required to make ample DCC payments to the City of Port Moody, earmarked for the purchase of additional parkland.

As most realize, the reason why such payments don’t materialize into much additional, actual park space in downtown Port Moody is two-fold. First, given that land prices have been bid up so much by the developers themselves, the going per-acre cost of most downtown parcels is so outlandish that the development community’s incoming DCC fees don’t actually buy much.

Second, unless our municipality starts ripping down existing structures and spending big bucks to remediate brown sites, there is next to no available space left in our city anyway that would be suitable for adding park space.

So here we are. Given how little additional green space builders are actually providing on their own lots, why do you suppose that their marketing materials are nonetheless so aglow about the superb outdoor lifestyles that their new digs in Port Moody will afford condo buyers?

Rocky Point Park Becomes the Personal Backyard for All Downtown Condo Towers

From the look of what downtown developers are thinking, Rocky Point is supposed to serve as the daily, go-to happy place for as many as 30,000 incoming residents (not to mention untold thousands more, who might eventually be strolling in from Coquitlam’s Coronation Park precinct). Mind you, at only 9.4 acres, Rocky Point Park is *less than half the footprint size* of any one of the several proposed mega-projects that would flank it. Even so, builders advancing over-the-top density visions for the adjacent Coronation Park, Moody Centre TOD, and Flavelle Oceanfront areas – along with the numerous smaller densified projects nearby – are perfectly happy to advertise and exploit the project’s delightful adjacency to “wonderful, livable Rocky Point Park, just steps away!”



Extreme daily usage pressures would gang up on Rocky Point Park from current and pending downtown redevelopments

The Consortium proposal for the Moody Centre TOD neighbourhood has gone so far as to insist that a planned gangway connecting Rocky Point to the heart of its development should be hailed as a generous amenity gift to our wider community; in actuality, the bridge’s primary, apparent ambition would be to channel the complex’s 8,000+ inhabitants by shortest possible route into Rocky Point Park whenever they’ve got the urge to get outdoors. You know, just in case the pocket park is over-booked.



Don't Know What We've Got 'til It's Gone? Picturing Crowded Rocky Point in 2045

It is entirely too easy to imagine the scene, should Port Moody's major downtown redevelopment projects proceed as proponents hope. Suppose you are witnessing a late afternoon on a classic Rocky Point Park day: the skies are clear, the coastal air is fresh, and the golden sunset hour has arrived. Families have come from everywhere across Port Moody and the other Tri Cities to enjoy this special place, as they've done for decades in the past.

Except that the year is now 2045. More than two dozen looming towers, plus quite a few mid-rise structures, now encircle the park on its southern and western flanks, casting their lengthening shadows across the park grounds for much of every afternoon. More than 25,000 downtown residents, who live in the small condo spaces that fill those nearby residential towers, as well as many more walking over from the towers around Inlet Station, are just getting home from their Skytrain and car-hailed commutes, returning from long workdays in other cities.

Many others have labored all day from home desks in their Port Moody condos and apartments. Without cars of their own, most prefer to walk or bike to convenient green spaces nearby, and Rocky Point Park is still the nearest and the most happening place to get out for a little fresh air. On such a nice day, a thick river of eager park goers snakes its way across the multiple walkways into Rocky Point Park for an end-of-day break. This is now a regular thing for them to do after work, chased by a beer or two on our famous brewery row.

As usual, the park today is hosting between one and several thousands of visitors, fanning out wall to wall across that 9.4 acres. Groups are roaming the grounds in search of an available green spot – really, any available space at all – to put out a picnic blanket and some folding chairs, so that they can sit and unwind to enjoy the sunset light. Many hundreds are moving in clusters along the principal shoreline trails, which are so packed that people have to walk along, more or less cooperatively, in lockstep, and jumping ahead is not appreciated. At most times of day now, the Park is clamorous and energized; it feels more like an amusement park than a serene forest park.

Most park users remain well-behaved, strive to stay polite, and try to keep things looking nice, but with so many unfamiliar adults and kids and pets on leashes jostling one another on the walkways and vying to find a spot, some tensions are palpable, some words get exchanged, there's a certain sense of competitiveness in the air. The park's monitors referee numerous complaints and squabbles, having to deal all day with "Rocky Point snark."



The park grounds look quite worn down at this point; the plantings are inevitably trampled in many places. With so many milling their ways into every available inch of the shoreline park, food wrappings and bits of litter are visible on the grass and in the foliage pretty much everywhere you look. The refuse bins are always overstuffed. Nightly cleanup has become a significant municipal expense, along with beefed up police presence.

Even when the weather is so-so, Rocky Point Park Edition 2045 can count on crowds from the neighbourhood each and every day – strolling, jogging, exercising, snacking, meditating, nannying, playing sports, drinking and cavorting, romancing, and just hanging out. Plus there are visitors from elsewhere. The Park experience has long since become more about its people scene than about Nature as such. Rocky Point's insanely overcrowded dog park has become, for the animals, a deeply stressful experience, and there is a lot of snapping and snarling: pet-owners must sign up for pre-scheduled visiting hours.

Old-timers who don't like what Rocky Point Park has become have stopped visiting. Some blame "the tower crowd" for having ruined everything, but of course it's not really the latter's fault: where else should they be expected to go, just to get outside and touch base with the Nature that they remember moving to Port Moody to immerse themselves in?

Meanwhile, most of the wildlife that had used to feel at home at Rocky Point – the bald eagles, deer, coyote, beavers, herons, minks, lurking black bears, and much else – vacated the area altogether more than a decade earlier, once the nonstop construction din got started nearby.

Locals shake their heads over what's happened to their beloved Rocky Point over the last decade, yet nobody knows how to "fix the Park." It just "is what it is," people say, and a far cry from its fabled past, when the region celebrated RPP as one of Vancouver's Best Places. "Who on earth made these decisions all those years ago?"

Three Ways to Address Skyrocketing Demand for PoMo Park Space. To preserve some semblance of Rocky Point as an attractive and well-functioning park asset of the wider Port Moody community while downtown growth proceeds, our Council and City would appear to have only two and a half levers at their disposal:

- 1) **Limit growth nearby.** Radically limit the total amount of population expansion permitted to land developers within a 1000-meter radius of the Park. But up to what total? Could the Park handle 10,000 new next-door users and still remain intact? Or would it have to be some density even lower than that?

- 2) **Expand parkland.** Notwithstanding the daunting expense of land, negotiate with landowners adjacent to Rocky Point to augment the Park's perimeter as much as possible. Presumably the most suitable opportunity to accomplish this would be to extend the Shoreline Park system westward along the closed mill site land by making it a requirement of the Flavelle redevelopment, or perhaps as a voluntary "legacy contribution" of the mill site's owners. This could most likely be accomplished along the coastal zone that would be subject anyway, by then, to severe periodic flooding, as well as rising sea levels.

- .5) **Make other park resources more popular.** We could attempt to significantly enhance and upgrade the usability and attractiveness of PoMo's other, smaller city parks within walking distance of the coming downtown developments. Joking aside about pocket parks, our City should also be insisting that developers build out significantly more green rooftops and other green-space innovations within the new residential and office projects themselves.

The bottom line of Growth Pitfall 5 is this: the current visions for downtown residential densification present a fundamental, existential threat to the viability of the city's most beloved amenity, Rocky Point Park. The community's options to save the Park are sadly few.



Growth Pitfall 6 – How Housing Affordability Becomes Another Excuse to Overbuild

A Housing Demand Bubble, or a Housing Bubble-on-Demand?

We all know that homes across the housing continuum in Port Moody, as elsewhere in the Lower Mainland, have become increasingly unaffordable to residents with middle- and lower incomes. There are, no doubt, differing narratives about how this misfortune came to pass, but one of the more credible and less flattering stories traces our housing paradox back to a bizarre home pricing bubble that overseas land speculators and money launderers, rapacious landowners, profiting banks, pliant provincial legislators, and an only-too-eager real estate industry helped rev up to a fever pitch over the last decade.

The bubble, which artificially disconnects average home pricing from what ordinary local workers would normally be expected to pay for suitable shelter, is unique to this region and has become notorious worldwide as a cautionary tale of dubious urban policy.

Nonetheless, “that darned bubble” has served nicely as a powerful spur to accelerate development and market acceptance of small, pricey condo units squeezed tightly into multi-family apartment towers across Metro Vancouver. Evidently, this is what the much-diminished local edition of the Good Life now has in store for young families coming up. The standard patter that accompanies all this tower-packing celebrates “making homes more affordable,” “filling in the missing middle of the housing continuum,” and achieving smartly modern “urban densification near public transit.”

Viewed more candidly, the housing affordability “crisis” is, to a large extent, an invented problem that, in the end, can be resolved only at the level of provincial or federal policy, through mechanisms such as a vigorous land-value capture tax. Even so, the bubble’s hardships for Port Moody residents are entirely too real and increasingly tragic; and as city leaders, we must do what we can to mitigate them by municipal means.

Pushing for More Local Affordability in New Housing.

With this in mind, our municipal government is, for example, exploring the possible lease of municipally-owned lands to non-profit housing partnerships that can help to hold down costs to homebuyers and/or renters. Regarding private for-profit proposals, our Council has been pressing developers hard to improve *relative* home affordability for selected subsets of buyers

and renters. When we review private multi-unit real estate projects at the Council table, many of us reflexively ask for concessions from the usual pro-affordability tool kit:

Port Moody's Pro-Affordability Checklist

- ✓ More market-priced rental units
- ✓ Some handful of below-market-priced rental units (“affordable rentals,” HILS formula)
- ✓ More economical, family-oriented 2- & 3-bedroom units
- ✓ Rent-to-own incentives for at least some of the units
- ✓ Locals first policies
- ✓ Long-term housing agreements to tie these terms down for decades

How Much Built-In Affordability Is Enough?

Unfortunately, when it comes to asking for items on the checklist, our Council is, in a sense, flying blind as to *how much would be enough* to warrant our go-ahead on any given project. Our community’s actual long-term needs for expanded housing in various shapes and sizes remain frustratingly fuzzy and un-quantified. Until just recently, our City has not been managing developer negotiations toward any firm and specific affordability targets. Instead, our elastic rule of thumb has amounted to an entreaty: *Please just give us as much from our affordability checklist as your project can reasonably manage; and remember that, when it comes to affordability, more is always better!*

Our Council has been waiting for quite some time (since 2019, in fact) for staff to provide an updated assessment of Port Moody’s housing demand between now and 2051, broken out by type of housing unit. Meanwhile, all that we have had to go on is the old Metro Van report, *Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping Our Future*, whose projections were last revised in 2015. That was shortly before bubble pricing distortions had hit their peak and the demand for more affordable rental units had devolved into a full-blown crisis. Even so, for the years 2016-2026, that report had forecast strong demand in Port Moody to build another 2,000 housing units, of which 500 units (25% of the total) would be needed in the form of *rentals*.

The report further concluded that half of all rentals (or 13% of all new units) should be made available at below-market rates. Last year, with this in mind, our Council adopted an “interim” guideline that larger building projects in Port Moody should aim to deliver 15% “affordable rental” units.



Is Our Affordable Housing Growth on Track? Only If 6% Spells Success

Unfortunately, it has been unclear, ever since, whether we expect developers to treat this affordability deliverable as an absolute must-have, or merely as a wishful plea. Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that by 2026 our city will indeed have added more than 2,000 new units, just as the Metro Van report projected, and yes, if I’ve counted right, it looks as though some 500 of those units will be rentals – which is a solid accomplishment – but unfortunately the number of designated affordable, sub-market rental units to be included in these building projects will fall quite short of 15% overall. Across all PoMo development projects, we are probably averaging less than *half* that rate for affordable units.

In fact, looking back at just the developments that won Council approval in 2018, 2019, and 2020, a quick (and possibly incomplete) review spotted 17 projects bringing more than 2,000 units to market. Alas, fewer than half of these projects contained any affordable-related units at all.

Among the 8 developments that did include an affordability component, our community was offered a total of 136 below-market units and 30 full-priced units marketed as rent-to-own. Only one project, the St. Andrews Church redevelopment, was dedicated to 100% affordable housing, and if you set that not-for-profit venture to one side, then among for-profit projects that offered any affordability component, the average share of affordable units fell to below 7%.

Port Moody Developments approved with Affordable Units		
2018	Affordable	Total Units
<i>St. Andrews (2318 St. Johns) – Non-Profit</i>	55 below market	55 units
The Grande Onni	50 below market	512 units
Marcon George/Kinsight	6 below market	252 units
Panatch 50 Electronic	30 rent-to-own	358 units
2019		
PC Urban 3370 Dewdney Trunk Road	5 below market	229 units
2020		
Aultrust, 3000 Henry Street	2 below market	173 units
Porte - 202 – 3227-3239 St. Johns	2 below market	117 units
Forte - 3105-3113 St. Johns	4 below market (tiered)	70 units
	159 units	1,666

How should we feel, as a Council, about this so-so track record, which may have come about in part from how laxly we have set our affordability standards? Should we shrug and say this is simply the harsh reality of construction financials that we all must face these days, here in the region’s distorted bubble-world, where a grant of 6% affordable units should be graciously accepted as a veritable godsend of developer largesse?

Or should we try *requiring* the 15% affordable units that Port Moody desperately needs in order to remain a healthy and viable community, and be willing to just say no to any large-scale development proposals that refuse this requirement? Speaking for myself, I do not dare to propose such an ultimatum, in part because I cringe to imagine the reflexive demand for still more residential density in Port Moody that it would elicit.

Letting Developers Turn Affordability into a Bargaining Chip for Inappropriate Density

My central point here is this: when our Council can't seem to get serious about the minimum share of affordable units it will accept from a big project, on the one hand, while it simultaneously fails to set any firm project density caps (such as sticking to tower heights or setting FAR maximums) on the other, then our body is enabling the developer to come back and win approval by announcing whatever number of affordable units it may see fit to offer (almost always, many fewer than warranted); then we let the developer hold any additional affordability concessions as a kind of hostage amenity, to be granted in exchange for green-lighting still more units and even higher towers.

Unfortunately, in a city already poised for so much excess population growth that its community costs will soon be tilting out of control, this gambit maneuvers our city into an impossible choice.

At the same time, trading a handful of additional affordable-units for an even bigger swath of non-affordable units is a Pyrrhic victory for the City, since such deals will tend to end up *worsening* the overall ratio of affordable-versus high-priced units in town.



An artist's rendering of a new development that will transform Port Moody's Coronation Park neighbourhood. | WESGROUP

When More Is Less

We have already witnessed, across several cases, what happens when the City demands more affordable units: "If you insist, then we're gonna need a lot more density to pay for that." And even then, development proposals somehow still manage not to deliver our must-have-15%.

Take the worrisome evolution of Wesgroup's Coronation Park proposition. Once members of Council had alerted Wesgroup to our City's interim housing guideline, the developer responded by proposing the allocation of 175 below-market affordable rentals, to placate us. While the raw number may sound substantial, this unfortunately amounted to a mere 6% affordable share of all units to be built by Wesgroup. In exchange for granting us that concession, Wesgroup completely jettisoned its prior plan to offer 450 market rental units – something our community also could have used – so that it could put up more condos for sale. And the developer demanded even more soaring tower height to accommodate its staggering plan to build out 2,900 units – which works out to nearly two times more population growth and density per acre than the City and community ever envisioned in their approved 2017 OCP revision to Coronation Park's neighbourhood plan.

Looking at this dubious trade-off, Councillor Lahti spoke for the rest of us in concluding, *"Maybe this is a place where we're not going to get what we want in terms of affordable housing. The price we'd have to pay is too high."* Hard to argue with that.

Yet this is basically the same deal, and the same conversation, that we are going to be encountering across all major redevelopment proposals: inside the Vancouver real-estate world's wildly distended bubble, there exists no feasible way – short of massive, widespread wealth transfers -- to make affordability dynamics work out for the less-advantaged members of society. But hey, developers are still willing to give it the old college try for us, but only if we are willing to support even more profitable ultra-densification that will ultimately lead to gross overcrowding and a reduced quality of life for everyone.

To be clear, this unaffordable-housing predicament is not necessarily the fault of individual developers such as Wesgroup or others: at this point, they and their bankers, too, are trapped by the impossible financial dynamics of over-valued land and stratospherically priced construction services. This is a collective dilemma for everyone involved.

But unless and until the day comes when the bubble's impossibilities become somehow ameliorated from on high and home pricing becomes sane again, we should recognize that it makes little sense for our city to keep building out a lot more density – with its huge attendant community costs – in order to obtain just a few more affordable units to benefit a mere handful among our many needy citizens. That is what folks used to call a mug's game.



Artist's conceptual sketch of possible mixed-use business/jobs district in Moody Centre that includes but lessens residential density.

Growth Pitfall 7 – The More We Fill Up Our Downtown with Housing, the Less Room Is Left to Build A Working Economy

The current parade of big, residentially focused development proposals tempts us to heavily overbuild our downtown neighbourhoods and fill them up primarily with structures that house yet more residents instead of structures built expressly to prioritize expansive new businesses, shops, and well-paid jobs.

Perfect for People Who Need People... but Who Don't Need Stores or Jobs

Again, take Wesgroup's proposed land assembly comprising 60% of our Coronation Park neighbourhood, located at the city's primary downtown crossroad. At first reading, the applicant's spectacularly dense plan proposed to cram in no fewer than *400 new residents per acre* within their assembled area; and yet Wesgroup brought no corresponding vision for adding stores and offices where the assembly's 6300+ new residents (and, if eventually built out to the same density, the full neighbourhoods 8,000+ new residents) might be expected to shop, let alone work.

The developer defended this omission, along with its bare-minimum allotment of green space on site, explaining that land in Port Moody was so costly that only sky-high condo towers would be feasible and financeable. If only the land were cheaper, it seems, then more kinds of community needs could be addressed.

No healthy city could responsibly grow in such a lop-sided fashion. I think back to my years living in Manhattan, which is the central borough of New York City, another "vibrant seaside community" that happens to be legendary for its soaring skyline and urban density.

Learning from Gotham City

True, Manhattan is much bigger than Port Moody – at 23 square miles, Manhattan is more than twice PoMo's land size (which, strangely enough, still makes the Big Apple only about half as big as Coquitlam) – but the point to note here is that NYC's development as a full-fledged city has not hinged on cheap land at any time since the entire island was purchased for 60 Dutch guilders back in 1626. Yet somehow, unlike Wesgroup's seam-splitting, population-packed

Coronation Park vision, the density of Manhattan today averages a mere 108 residents per acre.



How could this be? Why isn't New York City packing in 400 residents per acre, too, when it could probably do so? The reason is that, across four centuries, those sensible Manhattanites have also carved out ample space to work & study & shop & play & innovate & create without having to leave the island. New York City's built environment has had to make room for all of these precincts of daily life and endeavor, apportioned in a healthy balance. In 1857 – two years before the town of Port Moody was born – a visionary architect named Frederick Olmsted even convinced New York's city council to set aside land for Manhattan's majestic Central Park, which is vaster than all of Port Moody's lovely city parks combined.

So, it turns out that NYC and Port Moody share the same well-rounded vision for a community that can live + work + play together, all within a walkable, colourful city of the arts that offers lots of green outdoor space. But perhaps unlike Port Moody, New York has learned not to fill up its vibrant midtown business zones with nothing but Trump Towers for luxury condo dwellers.

Businesses and Jobs, Not Condos, Should Come First

To be clear, nobody is suggesting that Port Moody should aspire to Manhattan's overwhelming density, of course: avoiding that lifestyle is – for me, at least – a principal joy of living in this beautiful hideaway. Nor need we insist that the next edition of Coronation Park should become a self-contained business microcosm, with its own Wall Street and theatre district out here in the boonies, much as one might love this.

Rather, our takeaway from Manhattan's vitality is that, if Port Moody's leaders *are* going to allow the housing of 400 new residents per acre across one of its key downtown neighbourhoods, then they should also be rigorously setting aside dedicated space for a corresponding density of offices, stores, light industrial shops, college classrooms and excellent jobs in other, nearby parts of our downtown, to keep the City of Port Moody whole as it evolves.

It's all about growing in balance within the city's inherent limits. As we all know, Port Moody's small footprint is mostly made up of steep residential hillsides overlooking a hemmed-in downtown, so there is only so much development space to go around. It becomes folly, then, for us to carve out a little more room for jobs by permitting developers to step in and occupy *a lot more* room for residents.

Prudent urban planning should Just Say No to poor space-allocation trade-offs, such as converting the city's traditional business & industrial districts into dense nests of high-rise condo apartments that, at best, might include some shopping at ground level and a few thousand desk jobs on 2nd-floor podiums.



Business Density Helps a City to Finance Expanded City Services for New Residents

As discussed under Growth Pitfall 4 above, Port Moody is facing a nearly insurmountable fiscal challenge. At this point, our City must rely disproportionately on increased taxation of its current homeowners to finance a coming expansion of services and amenities for incoming residents.

Yet in cities that have healthier local economies and thriving industry, revenues from business taxation can help to *subsidize* service capacity to meet growing demand. Successful businesses typically contribute more to their city in tax revenues than they extract in services.

In Vancouver, for example, Loco BC has estimated that businesses consume about 23% of services yet constitute about 45% of the municipal tax base. In effect, this creates a net revenue gain that Vancouver can put toward expanding its services and amenities for others. But to attain that happy fiscal rebalancing requires first, of course, that a city's business sector be humming with profitable productivity and rising wealth that can be shared to benefit the wider community. And humming businesses need room to operate and grow, which brings us to the impending, deadly space crunch in Port Moody's downtown neighbourhoods.

Rebuilding its Jobs District is the Linchpin to Most Good Things in PoMo's Future

All of Port Moody's biggest-ever redevelopment projects will be coming before Council within this term or next, so the time is now or never to set a smarter course. If residence-dominant neighbourhood plans manage to squeak by with only an insufficient smattering of workspace, then the City of Port Moody's unhappy fate as a bedroom community will likely be sealed for the next 100 years. Giving in to this temptation would be a pivotal mistake, since it is mostly job-focused redevelopment that holds the key to...

- ✓ revitalizing Port Moody's languishing daytime economy,
- ✓ rebalancing the city's tax burdens away from homeowners,
- ✓ attaining our climate action priorities,
- ✓ realizing our MTP targets for fewer car trips, more walking & cycling,
- ✓ reducing the city's rush-hour gridlock,
- ✓ funding expanded citywide amenities and services, and above all,
- ✓ achieving a complete and healthy community where our residents are enabled to live, work, shop, and play at walkable distances within their own beautiful town.



Individuals' ready access to good nearby jobs explains their relative positions across the housing continuum

Even Port Moody's Housing Affordability Begins with Better Local Jobs

But wait: don't we also need a lot of new construction to support housing affordability in upscale Port Moody? Yes, although in Pitfall 6 we explored the frustrations and circular reasoning that come with building more density in hopes of enhancing affordability. That said, nobody here is arguing that Port Moody should not build *any* more housing: we have committed to housing 15,000 additional residents by 2041, and affordable/rental must be a substantial component of the buildout.

For many residents, however, the essential issue in housing affordability is the disconnect between what local rents and mortgages may cost and what their job earns, minus the big expense (and productivity loss) of their daily commute between cities to work. Any economist could explain why providing abundant, well-paid jobs in Port Moody can end up lowering the cost of living *and* improving the general affordability of living here for a great many residents.

Conversely, not having a good job these days can too easily turn into having *no secure housing of any kind*, and the ever-mounting risks of dire homelessness. We already know that many classes of job will be disappearing altogether over the next few decades, so Port Moody needs urgently to get ahead of that problem by creating a dynamic business district for emerging and sustainable industries that still pay a livable wage and keep a roof over one's head. We do live in trying times.

How Much Job Density Does Port Moody Need? Aim for 42 Jobs Per 100 Residents

With 9 out of every 10 of our working residents commuting to other cities each day to find employment, for years now Port Moody has settled for the very *worst* jobs-to-population ratio target of any incorporated municipality in the Lower Mainland. Here is a snapshot of Port Moody's work life from the 2016 Census, versus the norm across Metro Vancouver:

Port Moody, City of Commuters

	Port Moody	Metro Van
No. of residents with jobs	18,385	1,276,900
Population aged 15+ (labour force status)	27,400	2,064,615
% of population with jobs (employment rate)	67.1%	61.8%
Not in labour force	8,000	709,090
Unemployed	1,010	78,620
Unemployment rate	5.2%	5.8%
Working in jurisdiction	1,660	436,405
% working in jurisdiction	11.6%	44.1%
% commuting outside the jurisdiction	88.3%	55.9%

Source: J. Kumagai, Stats Canada 2016 Census

And there's reason to worry that the local jobs scene has gotten worse, not better, since 2016. Over just the last decade, hundreds of positions in Port Moody's traditional, heavy industries have melted away, and not been replaced in emerging sectors. At this point, our local economy has dug quite a deep hole for itself, but now's the time to go dig it out.

The City's Economic Development Office and its Economic Development Committee have already wrapped their heads around this task, advising that Port Moody should seek to match the .42 jobs-to-population target that other TriCity municipalities have adopted. Last fall, our Council voted unanimously to prioritize this development goal.

How Much Jobs Space to Build Downtown? .42 Ratio Calls for 2.75M square feet by 2051

How much additional built space might be needed, such that, all told, the municipality of Port Moody can offer 42 jobs for every 100 residents by the year 2051? Working out an answer starts, of course, with deciding exactly how much we intend for our population to grow by then.

The following model supposes that we will keep our city's growth on track with the OCP target of 50,000 population in 2041, and that we will then support a further increase to 60,000 by 2051.

To build a working economy around 60,000 residents, our city would need to offer:

- 25,200 jobs (at a 0.42 jobs-to-population ratio)
- 8,316 home-based jobs (we're assuming this will be 33% of all jobs), which leaves...
- 16,884 jobs based outside homes, mostly in our business districts

The Canadian Census reported that, in 2016, Port Moody offered 7,125 (non-home) jobs, a total that may have increased slightly since then, according to our EDO. Since the redevelopment vision for key downtown zones, such as the Moody Ctr TOD, entails tearing down existing job

spaces before replacing them with new spaces, the task of building new jobs spaces must replace those lost spaces, *plus* create new spaces to house some 9,700+ additional jobs.

In round figures, let us say that our downtown redevelopments would need to create space for about 10,000 jobs, in the following breakout of job types and space allocations:

ADDITIONAL BIZ-DISTRICT SPACE NEEDED TO ENABLE JOBS FOR POMO POPULATION OF 60,000				
Class	Sq Ft/Job	Job Mix	Jobs	Cum. Sq Ft
Office	200	60%	6,000	1,200,000
Retail	300	25%	2,500	750,000
Academic	400	5%	500	200,000
Lt. Industrial	600	10%	1,000	600,000
			TOTALS	2,750,000

By this rough analysis, then, between now and 2051 Port Moody’s primary business district areas will need a net increase of job space totaling 2,750,000 square feet.

This Job Space Would Occupy a Big Footprint of Total Downtown Development

One way to get some sense of the task at hand is to compare the proposed 2.75M figure for dedicated jobs space to the overall square footage being contemplated for downtown redevelopments.

- **Coronation Park Assembly:** Wesgroup’s current land-assembly proposal comprises about 60% of the Coronation Park neighbourhood. With an FAR (floor-area ratio) of 4.5, the project would build out 2.43M square feet, almost entirely residential; although Council has since invited the proponent to reduce the project density and do more to bring in jobs and shopping.
- **Oceanfront District:** Mill & Timber’s initial, high-level blueprint for this dense, mixed-used neighbourhood has yet to yield a formal proposal submission to the City, but in 2017 the proponent envisioned space for nearly 3,400 residential units housing and almost 7,500 residents, plus 455K square feet of jobs space (mainly grocery, hotel, and some light industrial). According to our Planning Department, the maximum permitted density on that site for all uses combined would total 3.84M square feet.
- **Moody Centre TOD:** Perhaps surprisingly, the Consortium’s draft master plan has not yet provided to the City any floor-area estimates for the proposed redevelopment, which would include space to house as many as 8,100 residents within up to 4,135 new units. In addition, the proposal as submitted would also set aside space to enable 2,000 jobs

(70% Office, 30% Retail). Working from the Economic Development Office’s modeling assumptions, the jobs commitment in this proposal would call for 460K square feet of dedicated space, which would put it basically on par with its Oceanfront counterpart.

So How Much Job Space is in our Pipeline? *Less Than One-Third of What’s Needed*

Our Planning Department recently identified a total of 18 local development projects either already approved or else in active discussion that would include some job space, including the Coronation Park, Moody Ctr TOD, and Oceanfront projects described above. *If all of these projects went forward to build-out as the applicant has envisioned, then Port Moody’s population would balloon unmanageably to more than 70,000 residents, yet these projects would deliver less than one third of the jobs space minimally required to serve a city of 60,000 residents.* Clearly, the fundamentals of this proposed growth are badly out of whack.

Here is what’s on offer from developers at this point, and clearly it won’t suffice to enable an economically healthy and balanced City of Port Moody over the long run:

JOB SPACE ENVISIONED FOR 18 APPROVED OR POTENTIAL PROJECTS IN POMO PIPELINE				
Class	Sq Ft/Job	Space Allocation	Cum. Sq Ft	Jobs
Office	200	28%	340,900	
Retail	300	44%	532,185	
Lt. Industrial	600	28%	340,764	
TOTALS			1,213,900	5,780

Not Enough Space, Not Enough Jobs, Not the Right Mix

While it is encouraging to see so much space being anticipated for Light Industrial uses, the job space overall would skew too heavily toward ground-floor retail storefronts, rather than toward what is needed even more: flexible, multi-use office space suitable to both conventional businesses and innovation sector companies.

The proposed retail-heavy job mix is problematic for two reasons.

First, we do not understand clearly enough, at this point, what kind of shopping streetscape is going to be effective and successful in Port Moody five or ten years down the road. Accelerated by pandemic-adjusted lifestyles, modern shopping is evolving toward less walk-in activity and more online ordering and custom delivery across a great many shopping categories. It remains unclear what this portends for the viability of retail storefront shops, but unfortunately across the Lower Mainland we already observe more and more storefronts standing empty.

Second, even where jobs in the retail storefront sector survive into the future, they will tend to be lower paid and relatively less secure than other job types. While our city definitely needs and

can benefit from a healthy mix of retail alongside other employment, the awkward reality is that retail positions may not much advance Port Moody's vision for an all-local live/work/play community as much as other job sectors will be able to do.

Many retail workers will struggle to afford the high cost of residing and living in mostly upper-middle-class Port Moody. Except in those limited cases where subsidized affordable housing will be available to tip the scale, it looks as though Port Moody's home economics and lifestyle will be generally more suitable to highly skilled workers in better-paid professional and brainworker industries. To provide just one quick comparison:

Retail Worker

Avg. Salary \$24,826

[Source: Metro Vancouver salaries,

Sr. Software Engineer

Avg. Salary \$93,734

PayScale, 2019]



Making Job Creation in Port Moody our Job #1

It would obviously make life easier, in the short run, for our Council to simply greenlight the residential-heavy construction proposals lined up before us, then gather in all that cash from density-bonusing. By contrast, it is a prudent yet lofty ambition indeed for our Council to shift gears from where Port Moody's economy sits today, by creating 2.75M square feet of new job space within a small city footprint whose population should not be allowed to exceed 60,000 before the year 2051. The heart skips to contemplate just how difficult this sea-change in vision may be for us, for the affected landowners, and for our community.

The only possible way that Port Moody is going to “find” millions of square feet in new job space is for its leaders to get moving and accomplish three things brilliantly:

1) Rethink the Next Port Moody. Rethink and then re-designate large parts of our downtown for intensive jobs redevelopment. Use the OCP update process to confirm community support for this.

2) Set Course for a New Local Economy, And Stick to It. Our leaders must stand united and absolutely firm – not just through one election cycle but through half a dozen elective terms yet to come – in prioritizing the City's goals for revitalization of Port Moody's business districts,

favoring job creation in sustainable and growing sectors that may include the sciences, technology, innovation, and the digital arts.

3) Get It Done Through Partnerships. Expect to pour years of pluck, imagination, and elbow grease – among both Council and staff – into making this big vision a successful collaboration that ensures profitable success for the area’s landowners and developers, even if they might, at first, be reluctant to go along.

Does our City Hall have the vision to lead an urban revival of such scale? Does it have the fortitude to say no to private development proposals that might seem attractive in some particulars, but that ultimately fall out of fit with Port Moody’s longer-term vision and needs?



7 Guidelines to Growth that Makes More Sense for Port Moody

No matter what else may befall our city over the next 30 years, once a tsunami of 20,000 or more new residents reaches the shores of our quiet community of 35,000, Port Moody will cease to be the relaxed, easygoing, and lavishly serviced community that so many of us have come to cherish.

Our Insurmountable Opportunity

As Pogo the possum, Walt Kelly's celebrated mid-century cartoon character, once put it, "*The problem we face is an insurmountable opportunity.*" The key question is not whether Port Moody is about to change. The question is whether the *next* Port Moody will be one that, on the whole, we like even better despite some trade-offs, or whether our city will devolve, instead, into an over-urbanized, gridlocked mess that functions less well, is supported by less industry and even fewer local jobs, that provides reduced per-capita access to shared services and amenities, and that lowers our quality of life in ways we cannot tolerate.

At this juncture, one worries that our city is blundering down the latter path. Yet it is not too late to set a new course. Port Moody's current Council pilots the helm at a crucial inflection point, where a big course-correction in our city's future is still possible. Much depends on whether our City Hall will act decisively now to shape the arc of the next three decades, or will instead prove too timid, or too passive, or too shortsighted in how it guides the many residential development plans lining up for their go-aheads.

But what would decisive action entail? How do we master our insurmountable opportunity for urban evolution? How should we modify our approach to evaluating developer's proposals so that our city grows as it should, while minimizing the bad outcomes and pitfalls cited earlier in this report?

Our predicament affords no simple solutions nor categorical snap decisions regarding the development proposals headed our way. Even so for my own part, going forward, I will be

applying the following general perspective and 7-point framework to my evaluation of Port Moody land-use opportunities.

I am sharing my approach up front with other Council members, staff, developers and our wider community for discussion, and also for possible strategic embrace by our Council as a whole. And I encourage my colleagues, City staff, and our community to help improve and build out this framework further.



A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

GUIDELINE 1

Manage Port Moody's overall pace of growth to match community-approved growth targets.

1a) Residential population should not exceed 50,000 as of 2041. This is an OCP target pointedly reaffirmed by Council resolution, so it is our duty to deliver on this. Cautiously consider cumulative citywide growth impacts when reviewing proposals that would deviate from existing OCP and zoning bylaws. Manage all coming land-use decisions regarding larger projects with an eye toward hitting, but not exceeding, the community's approved pace to grow population by roughly +43% between now and the year 2041, as specified in the 2014 OCP and its Regional Growth Statement.

- Note: certain other factors may become valid gating items that further limit acceptable population growth to levels that fall below the 50K target. These factors include unacceptably adverse impacts to local traffic congestion, to parks and other key social amenities, or to municipal financial stability.

1b) Set a provisional population target to not exceed 60,000 as of 2051. Unless and until a verified majority of our community shall, during the OCP update process, affirm a specified population growth target for 2051, our City should work toward achieving a provisional interim target not to exceed 60,000. The intended purpose of this provisional goal would be to taper down Port Moody's growth rate in the decade following 2041 in order to forestall a full doubling of the city's total population for at least a few years longer.

1c) Port Moody's future evolution should be guided, above all, by residents' preferences for the pace and direction of community change: rigorously verify what our citizens actually want *before* our leaders move ahead. Before Council finalizes any further major land-use decisions related to densification and downtown rebuilding, first complete our

community-input process and update our OCP as needed to move its growth plans into alignment with what most of our community would prefer. This community engagement process *must* level with the public, in no uncertain terms, about the fiscal unsustainability of expanding population so fast that city services and amenities cannot afford to keep up without steep tax increases.

GUIDELINE 2

As our first priority, pursue city centre development that revitalizes Port Moody's daytime business district, growth industries, and general economy. Embrace moderate residential densification as a valid but secondary priority.

2a) Foster good jobs in promising & innovative industries. Pending affirmation of community support through the OCP update process, seek projects that will help us to build a coherent and vibrant downtown business district offering good jobs in growing and sustainable industries.

- Also, pursue opportunities to bring university campus presence that can complement the city's emerging knowledge-driven industrial ecosystem.

2b) Focus the Moody Centre TOD neighbourhood redevelopment primarily towards the creation of jobs density first, and residential density second. Located at the heart of Port Moody's traditional business district going back many decades, the TOD area is the most suitable precinct to locate Port Moody's reborn, next-generation business hub. The TOD area is already home to hundreds of local jobs. The area offers a convenient rail-and-Skytrain station through which commuters could actually be commuting into Port Moody for work each day, instead of always just outbound to work elsewhere. The addition of condos should be part of the downtown mix, no doubt, but we would be best served by the revitalization of a coherent business district. This district would be centered around the concept already embraced by our Council, to create the *Moody Innovation Centre*, a science-tech-digital-arts-and-innovation hub that could jumpstart a local business ecosystem in emerging and sustainable job sectors. The Moody Centre TOD area is our prime locational fit to accomplish this.

2c) Consider business-building initiatives across all suitable city centre areas. As we rebuild the city's business economy, consider related development opportunities for all major city-centre areas, including not only Moody Centre, but also Inlet Centre/Coronation Park, Westport Village, and a potential-future Flavelle Oceanfront District.

2d) Develop a future vision, in collaboration with landowners, for utilization and possible evolution of the city's remaining old-industrial lands and structures. These might include the loco Lands, the Thermal plant, the Flavelle mill site, and other industrial-zoned parcels.

2e) For the Murray/Clarke corridor, pursue development of a lively arts & entertainment zone. This beautifully located neighbourhood is in transition today as a light-industrial business district that mixes car collision garages, other no-fuss businesses of various kinds, charming historic structures, and a popular brewer's row right across the street from Rocky Point Park. The OCP's current vision seems both vague and uninspiring when, by contrast, our community could be re-envisioning the corridor as a reinvigorated promenade that draws locals and tourists to our craft breweries, eateries, shops, and art/performance spaces. We should explore our community's interest in this concept during the OCP update process.

GUIDELINE 3

Rethink our downtown built forms to de-emphasize apartment and office high-rise towers in preference for innovative low- and mid-rise structures that advance healthy-city principles and community connection.

3a) Rethink our overall cityscape and built forms before we commit further to rebuilds. While the OCP envisions some additional apartment towers downtown, and their inclusion may be necessary to make other city priorities possible, shift thinking and neighbourhood visions to encourage and prioritize more innovative low- and mid-rise built forms that promote community social spaces, active transportation, community safety, and healthy-city principles. Requests to exceed established tower heights and density maximums should face high hurdles.

3b) Establish maximum density standards, either citywide or by neighbourhood. As other cities in our region have already done, pursue establishment of a citywide FAR maximum (such as 3.5 or 4.0). Consider leveraging any such FAR cap to incentivize affordable development; for example, by allowing an additional 1 or 2 FAR over cap allotted for affordable-only density.

3c) Prioritize land-use changes that meet the City's specific housing needs. Finalize no more major land-use decisions until we have in hand an updated Port Moody housing assessment to quantify future residential needs between 2026 and 2051 by housing form and format. Based on this assessment, set targets for inclusion of affordable rental and affordability incentives that also recognize community preferences for moderate growth.

- Also pursue not-for-profit housing partnerships that increase affordable ownership options for lower- and middle-income residents.

GUIDELINE 4

Since projects already moving through our pipeline put PoMo on track to exceed its 2041 and 2051 growth targets, refuse further requests to grant variances for excessive density except in special cases where the proposal also delivers exceptional value in advancing other community goals.

4a) No thanks to un-strategic growth. Our City has so many approved and pending projects already in the development pipeline that we are basically on track to reach our 2041 growth goals without greenlighting any additional giant projects. So in fact we do not *need* and should not *want* to pack on un-strategic density unless other exceptional considerations warrant it.

4b) Earned Exceptions. Classes of exceptional value would include, but would not be limited to, the following areas:

- **Local job creation:** typically, mixed use projects should meet or exceed Council's approved target to bring at least 42+ new jobs per 100 new residents.
- **Industry/business development** in promising and sustainable industry sectors per Port Moody's Economic Development Master Plan. Could also include business ecosystem components such as academic campus facility space, etc.
- **Housing affordability:** should meet/exceed 15% units below-market rental (HILS) and/or home price/square foot that beats local market comparables. Should include family-friendly and accessible units.
- **Local shopping & services:** larger projects should support expanded local shopping & services in key areas (grocery, drugstores, daycares, fitness, etc.) within walking distance and/or with delivery that supplement existing stores to meet increased demand.
- **Civic infrastructure:** project developer may collaborate in construction of expanded civic facilities that help City meet growth-driven demand (e.g., new library, performance halls, recreational facilities, senior center) and/or city technological infrastructure (5G/smart city network, next-generation transportation infrastructure, advanced community energy systems, etc.)
- **Public amenities:** project developer may offer to significantly enhance or augment a needed public amenity (e.g., donation of parkland).
- **Architectural Distinction:** on rare occasion, a project's proposed design may bring to life a world-class architectural landmark, which could come to stand for and embody Port Moody as an exciting City of the Arts and/or make a strikingly original contribution to our cityscape and cultural life.

4c) Pursue Pay-as-You-Go Civic Financing from Developers. Let growth truly pay for growth. As discussed, real estate developers today stick Port Moody's current taxpayers with bankrolling all sorts of civic capacity and amenity upgrades to service the new residents that their intensely profitable projects bring to town. In effect, our taxpayers are underwriting the feasibility of ill-advised growth without even realizing it.

Recognizing this set-up, one astute resident has suggested the following approach to full recovery from developers of the incurred growth costs that they usually leave to the rest of us. I would recommend that we look seriously into pursuing this approach:

“Task city staff with examining the OCP’s growth visions for each neighbourhood, and gaming out from these plans the maximum capital and operating costs of city infrastructure expansion that Port Moody would incur if each growth vision were built out to the max. Then work backwards from that in order to estimate – including amortization with interest plus a contingency – the level of funds that we would need from new developments in those respective neighbourhoods in order to cover fully those expected growth costs. Incorporate coverage of those costs into the City’s negotiated prerequisites for granting density. Obviously, one could conduct a similar analysis in terms of City costs arising to mitigate harmful traffic/roadway impacts of developers’ projects, as well.”

Some developers may well understand the fairness of this approach, and these are the developers who will make fine partners for our city. Other builders will instantly howl, of course, that their projects become “uneconomic” if *they* are required to pay their full fair share of the hidden, long-term expenses that their money-making ventures would otherwise impose on local taxpayers. Like raising a child, it seems, when it comes to helping some real estate capitalists make a fortune, it takes a village. And for some it might be perfectly fine to push that village to the brink of insolvency down the road, if doing so is a help to them. But this is *not* fine for Port Moody, and we obviously need to get control of our coming fiscal crisis by this means or others.

GUIDELINE 5

To protect Port Moody’s livability and overall quality of life for residents shall take precedence when deciding whether or not to support specific requests for land-use changes.

5a) Low tolerance for big traffic impacts. Require all large projects to conduct a preliminary, third-party traffic engineering analysis in time for their proposal’s first reading by Council. These assessments will work with data and assumptions provided by the City to assess near- and long-term traffic impacts within the wider context of cumulative, citywide auto traffic pressures.

- **Staff will build City cumulative traffic impact models and set cumulative traffic density targets.** that shall be consistently applied to assess expected traffic impacts of every major land-use request. Projected traffic impacts will include, as a metric, how much overall commuter travel time in and out of Port Moody might increase at peak hours, and average decreases in km/hour commuter speeds at peak morning and evening rush hours along the city’s main MRN corridors.

5b) Low tolerance for lasting construction-nuisance impacts. Before Council approves any further major downtown neighbourhood redevelopment plans, staff should take two steps to address growing construction-management concerns:

- **Staff should establish a *Downtown Construction-Management Strategy*.** Staff should be directed to draft, for Council review and approval, a planning document that outlines what specific steps the City will take to optimally manage cross-construction issues and minimize resident inconvenience between now and 2041 as our downtown densifies.
- **Require developers to submit *Construction Impact Plans*** that commit them to acceptable timelines and identify major adverse community impacts. Failure to adhere to contractually binding Impact Plans should trigger stiffer penalties than builders might be accustomed to elsewhere, since the risks and community costs of allowing simultaneous downtown mega-projects to proceed warrant more rigorous compliance.

GUIDELINE 6

No ruining Rocky Point Park.

Hold off on supporting any large downtown residential-densification projects unless and until Council has received and approved several deliverables from staff, as follows.

6a) Staff should prepare a *Downtown Park Capacity Assessment*. This report will estimate the maximum capacity of daily activity and number of visitors that could be absorbed by Rocky Point Park and other downtown public park assets, assuming various levels of civic investment for maintenance and upgrades. This assessment should include a model that projects the maximum cumulative increase in the number of residents living within our city centre neighbourhoods (as well as in the Coquitlam Coronation Park projects) that these parks could safely handle before serious park degradation and decline in park enjoyment per capita begins.

6b) Staff should prepare a *Downtown Park Protection Plan*. This would be an approved plan outlining and actioning steps to protect, enhance, revive, and/or insulate Rocky Point Park and other downtown park resources from the damaging over-use that we can expect from various levels of nearby residential densification.

6c) Set maximum targets for residential growth within reasonable walking distance from Rocky Point Park (e.g., within 1,000 meters) in light of the capacity limits of Rocky Point Park and other key amenities, and proceed to approve or disapprove development proposals – first come, first served – in light of those targeted maximums.

6d) In order to maximize the carrying capacity of Rocky Point Park, pursue discussions and determine options to expand the Park. Consider consulting the public for its thoughts on the variance expansion options via referendum question in the 2022 municipal election.

GUIDELINE 7

Be choosy, and when in doubt, hold off: land-use mistakes commit our city to problems that last decades. Saying no today to a project that's not quite right leaves room for a smarter idea or better bargain down the road.



**Our community stands at the crossroads of evolution and change.
Yet we have a big say in this transformation.**

Port Moody remains one of the genuine gems of Metro Vancouver, and its future looks amazing – full of productive growth, success, innovation, and yes, plenty more of the natural beauty we came here to cherish, if we set a wise course.

The next Port Moody will be quite different from today's, we all realize, yet the extent and impact of the coming changes are, to a very considerable extent, within the purview and control of the City's council and its administrative leadership, as guided by the broader will of our community.

Of course, as I have said from the outset, nobody possesses a crystal ball or knows exactly which way forward will prove optimal, and even the best-laid plans have a knack for going sideways: we humans are such geniuses at getting in our own way. As Pogo famously observed when he contemplated the fast-growing mess of our modern world: *"We have met the enemy, and he is us."*

Even so, we can still look ahead and avoid the more obvious pitfalls and near-term temptations – paths that would likely take us to destinations that feel like a step down from the remarkable life we enjoy in Port Moody today. Let us not toss away too readily what has been carefully created and nurtured here, for a lack of sufficient vision, commitment, and discipline in directing how our city shall grow. Much depends now on true Council leadership. And this is our moment.

Henri Madsen