



Report to Council

From the Office of Councillor Hunter Madsen

Date: March 21, 2021

Subject: Shaping the Next Port Moody – 7 Development Pitfalls and 7 Guidelines for Prudent Growth

Purpose

To highlight seven issues of concern in how Port Moody may be densifying its city centre, and to recommend a new framework of seven guidelines for prudent growth management in consideration of current and future community needs.

Recommendation

THAT Council generally support the framework for refining Port Moody's growth priorities and evaluating development opportunities as recommended in the report and attached white paper dated March 21, 2021 from Councillor Hunter Madsen regarding Shaping the Next Port Moody – 7 Development Pitfalls and 7 Guidelines for Prudent Growth;

AND THAT Council direct staff to determine, by reliable measurement, the extent of community support for elements of the framework proposed in this report, as part of the community input process toward updating the City's Official Community Plan;

AND THAT any confirmation of strong community support for elements of this framework be reflected accordingly in the community vision of the updated OCP.

Background

In 2019 Council and staff initiated an ongoing process of semi-annual Development Horizon Updates and Growth Management Reviews, through which the City's leadership has begun more closely to monitor and assess long-term, citywide, and cumulative trends related to emerging development pressures and opportunities facing Port Moody. The present report builds off that process to discuss key emerging development issues and possible strategic responses to them. This report is offered to encourage discussion both at the Council table and among the wider public, as our community conducts its current review and update of Port Moody's Official Community Plan.

Discussion

In the next 30 years, the community of Port Moody seems destined to undergo a profound evolution propelled by climate impacts, technology impacts, and above all, potential population impacts.

Port Moody today is, hands down, a wonderful place to live. The *TriCity News* recently reported that, over the last year, homes for sale in Port Moody have been among Canada's top five most popular property searches on Google. No wonder builders have been lining up to capitalize on the city's appeal. With so many development proposals moving through the City's approval pipeline, Port Moody's coming residential building spree is already on track to exceed the OCP's approved growth targets for both population and dwelling units.

If the City proceeds to greenlight redevelopment of its Coronation Park, Moody Centre TOD, and Oceanfront neighbourhoods on anything close to the scale being envisioned by proponents, then the results could end up doubling the city's total population within just the next 25 years. In that scenario, Port Moody's density (residents per square mile) would come to exceed that of today's Burnaby, a prospect that raises sobering questions as to the long-term character, livability, and financial viability of our municipality.

If this report's assessment of risks from overbuilding has merit, then perhaps a prime responsibility facing Council, at this juncture, is to reach some hard choices about which of the major redevelopment visions before us still make sense and can go forward, and which probably do not and may require a fundamental rethink.

Potential Development Pitfalls

Among the possible pitfalls and concerns arising from the torrid growth being proposed by developers, this report highlights the following:

- ✓ **Towers.** We're looking at an extraordinary potential buildout of condominium high-rises, from the 10 towers we have downtown today to as many as 50 towers spread across our city centre, ranging from 20 to 40 storeys in height, whose construction could alter dramatically both our cityscape and our community culture in ways that give pause.
- ✓ **Traffic.** With such rapid densification would come increasingly unmanageable local roadway congestion along the crossroads of Port Moody's city centre, and this would be the case even if we were successful at achieving high rates of public transit use.
- ✓ **Disruption.** Giant, simultaneously executed, multi-year building projects of the sort being proposed across our downtown would entail almost nonstop construction upheaval at the heart of our city, spanning not just years but decades. This could disrupt the daily livability of Port Moody and diminish residents' quality of life in many ways.

- ✓ **Strained city services, rising budgets, tax burdens.** Rapid growth may portend a coming fiscal crisis for the City, with big new taxpayer burdens, on the one hand, and the fall-off of per-capita civic service delivery and amenity enjoyment, on the other. This is the case because keeping services and amenities on par with burgeoning population growth will require substantial up-front expenditures to expand civic facilities, parks, and more. If our population grows from 35,000 to 50,000 in 2041, new capital projects alone could total +\$140M; and they could rise still further to \$250M, if we need to serve 70,000. Unfortunately, the development projects triggering these expenses would not begin to cover them through development fees, which leaves closing the gap mostly up to our cash-strapped city government and increasingly burdened taxpayers.
- ✓ **Rocky Point at risk.** We face a growing danger that Rocky Point Park, probably Port Moody's most iconic and treasured community asset, could become overwhelmed and ultimately degraded from wear-out caused by an influx of 20-30,000 new users living at nearby residential developments, who, lacking sufficient green space of their own, may come to rely instead on the Park as their daily backyard.
- ✓ **Unaffordability.** There are signs that, despite so much proposed growth, our city will still be failing to make sufficient headway toward local housing affordability for lower- and middle-income residents. Evidently as a portion of all new units built, we are bringing on new affordable rentals *at less than half* the share that our community needs. At the same time, developers may be tempted to exploit the rationale of "adding affordability" as a pretext to pile on excess density that exceeds what our community can handle.
- ✓ **No room left for jobs.** The land-use decisions agreed to by City Hall today will heavily limit how our municipality can adapt tomorrow to emerging challenges and opportunities. By agreeing to fill up Port Moody's downtown redevelopment areas with mostly residential density, we may very well leave too little space to rebuild jobs density and and revitalize Port Moody's failing work economy. This would be a fateful mistake for our city, since economic revitalization is central to Port Moody's long-term requirements for a healthy community, a fiscally robust municipality, and more moderate tax rates for our homeowners. Taken together, the major downtown neighbourhood proposals heading our way are offering *only about one-third* as much business floor space as Port Moody's economy is likely to need over the next 30 years. If we don't fix this now, our city may not get another chance.

Seven Suggested Growth Guidelines

In response to these concerns, the report recommends, for Council consideration, a new framework of steps and guidelines for evaluating development opportunities. These include:

- 1) **Grow according to our community-approved Plan.** Manage Port Moody's pace of growth to stay in line with community-approved population targets, not to exceed 50,000 in 2041 as per Council resolution, and 60,000 in 2051. Council should affirm these or other growth targets through direct, projectable community consultation during our OCP Review process.

- 2) ***Prioritize the rebuilding of Port Moody's economy.*** Prioritize city centre redevelopment that focuses first and foremost on business revitalization and job creation, secondarily on residential densification.
 - Restore our business tax base and aim to create at least 42 good local jobs for every 100 residents in Port Moody. Re-envision the Moody Centre TOD neighbourhood first and foremost to become the heart of Port Moody's restored business district, focused on job density in growing, sustainable sectors. Create the Moody Innovation Centre.
 - Also seek business development opportunities in other suitable city centre neighbourhoods, and explore potential community support for re-envisioning the Murray/Clarke corridor as the city's arts & entertainment zone.
- 3) ***An innovative cityscape less focused on towers.*** Rethink downtown built forms to encourage and enable more exciting and innovative low- and mid-rise structures instead of relying predominately on rows of cookie-cutter apartment towers. How can downtown evolve at a more human scale with architectural distinction that embodies our City of the Arts?
- 4) ***No extra density without extra community value.*** Refuse all further variances that request extraordinary density unless these projects would also deliver singular and *extraordinary* value toward other key community needs and goals, in arenas such as housing affordability, next-generation job creation, and expanding our civic facilities. Above all, find more effective ways to ensure that developers cover the related community costs of the growth they bring, instead of leaving these costs for our taxpayers to pick up.
- 5) ***Local livability takes precedence.*** Prioritize and protect quality of life for our residents when contemplating big builds: this may mean saying no to developments that would impose burdensome traffic impacts or noise issues for long periods of time; and saying yes to more intensive measures by city staff to manage the nuisance of simultaneous construction projects in our downtown hub.
- 6) ***No ruining Rocky Point Park.*** Either sufficiently mitigate, or else simply say no to, city centre densification that seems likely to overwhelm and degrade Rocky Point Park or other crucial community assets. Actively explore options for park expansion.
- 7) ***Don't buy into lasting community problems for short-sighted gains.*** Emphasize long-term strategic urban planning over pursuit of shorter-term benefits and development incentives. Resist committing too readily to problematic proposals, remembering that poor land-use decisions today persist for decades and pre-empt better land-use possibilities down the road.

For a full exploration of these issues and ideas to help address them, please see the attached analysis, *Shaping the Next Port Moody*.

Other Option(s)

- That the report be received for information.
- That the report be referred for discussion at any upcoming meeting of Council.

Financial Implications

Although not specifically estimated here, pursuit of the recommendations in this report could indeed have significant financial implications for the welfare of the City of Port Moody, as well as for its taxpayers and businesses.

Council Strategic Plan Objectives

These recommendations advance all five major priorities in Council's approved strategic plan, 2018-2022, including:

- 1) **Exceptional Service:** Ensure our customers are highly satisfied with the quality of our service.
- 2) **Environmental Leadership:** Expand and make the most of our parks and green spaces and design them to create positive and diverse experiences throughout the community.
- 3) **Healthy City:** Create a safe, friendly, and inclusive community that encourages healthy active living for people of all ages and abilities... Plan for a variety of housing types to meet community needs.
- 4) **Economic Prosperity:** Foster an environment where businesses can thrive and good local jobs abound, and insure Port Moody's economy and the City's financial position are sustainable.
- 5) **Community Evolution:** Plan and develop, for future generations, a vibrant, connected, and livable city, with distinctive places and spaces, *where growth is managed in strategic balance with quality of life.*

Attachment

- Hunter Madsen, *Shaping the Next Port Moody – 7 Growth Pitfalls, 7 Development Guidelines* (21 March 2021, pp.55)