

Development at 1523 Davie Street, Public hearing

Good evening Mayor and council. My name is Doug Cameron, I wear many hats. I am returning officer for Elections Canada for Vancouver Centre, I am District Electoral Officer for elections BC for Vancouver West End, I am a provincially appointed marriage commissioner for Vancouver and a volunteer for the BC Entertainment Hall of fame. Although some of my comments tonight may reflect some of my concerns for the organizations I represent, I am not here in any official capacity nor may I be seen to have any political leanings. I am simply a citizen of the West End of Vancouver and have been for the better part of 50 years. In that time I have seen many changes.

The proposed development of the Gabriola Mansion at 1523 Davie Street as a 17 unit rental building with the addition of four rental townhouse units would rob the west end and it's residents of a potential public space. Currently there are three Community Centres to service the downtown core. Coal Harbour Community Centre, West End Community Centre and the Round House Community Centre. All of these service the sports needs of their communities. There is also Gordon House and the Vancouver Aquatic Centre. The latter two have very limited and specific functionality. The mansion, as it has become known, is really the last heritage building that shows any appreciable potential for another community facility due to its location, accessibility, size and green space. I believe it should be purchased by the city and converted into a multiuse public facility which would serve the English Bay residents.

We are all aware of the shortage of rental accommodation in this area, and the exorbitant rental rates that are quickly chasing many seniors, seniors, singles and families out of the West End. Currently I am aware of the number of new developments of rental units along the lower Davie Corridor. I estimate there are between 1500 and 2000 new residential units being developed over the next three to five years. Most of those will be rental, but they will also not necessarily be affordable for the average single person or the average young family. I understand that upon the sale of 1188 Cardero Street, 20% of the new space MUST be given to the city for social housing. As will 20% of the space in 1186 Nicola and 1180 Boughton/1345 Davie Streets. I imagine that requirement would be true for 1500 Pendrell as well. With that in mind would it not make more sense to use the mansion as a community centre to accommodate the needs of the social housing component and for the lower Davie area and to build in some community space at 1188 Cardero?

I'd like to draw your attention to the Performing Arts Lodge at 581 Cardero. The development there was for a Strata Tower and an eight story Social Housing building. Now in its 11th year of operation, it has won awards for providing subsidized housing for a marginalized community of mainly senior residents who have spent their lives in the performing arts and have sacrificed earning potential for providing artistic culture to not just Vancouver, but to Canada. The model proved itself to work. There are 111 units, 99 of those are 30% market rental and 70% subsidized. The remaining 12 are two bedroom partner suites. These are purchased essentially on a life lease. There are enough qualified renters and lessees to fill three or more equivalent size buildings.

I could go describing what I see as potential but I am sensitive to your time and patience. My point is that there is no advantage to the residents of the west end or the city of Vancouver to have this beautiful heritage building and its significant green space converted to a number of private luxury residences. I believe it essential in this, one of the five most livable cities in the world, that we preserve our heritage while providing facilities for non-sports related activities. This is my plea to the city to halt this development and give some blue-sky thought to important alternatives for the greater benefit of our community.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Doug Cameron



