

Dear Honourable Ravi Kahlon,

I am writing to express my profound disappointment with the recent decision made by the Municipality of North Cowichan (MNC) council on March 6, 2024, to deny the application to amend their Official Community Plan (OCP) for the West Vista Terrace development project. This decision is a grave mistake that directly undermines the interests of our community and the potential for progress in our region. At a time when housing is increasingly scarce for individuals from all walks of life, the rejection of a proposal that would have seen over 800 new homes constructed is deeply troubling. It is particularly disheartening considering that the project would have likely been approved approximately 1.5 years ago had it not been for changes to the Urban Containment Boundary. With such a significant number of new units on the horizon, the denial of this development is a setback we cannot afford. This decision is a grave mistake that directly undermines the interests of our community and the potential for progress in our region.

First and foremost, it is crucial to highlight the decisions made by Mayor Rob Douglas and Councillors Christopher Istace and Christopher Justice. Unfortunately, their choices did not align with the needs of our community or province and may have overlooked the importance of this vital project in favour of bureaucratic processes.

The decision to deny the OCP amendment fails to recognize the basic principles of supply and demand. While there may be ample room for new growth within the Urban Containment Boundaries, it does not guarantee that development will occur. The West Vista Terrace project represented an opportunity for responsible and timely development, addressing the pressing need for housing in our region.

It is important to note that the OCP is a relatively new document, having been established in September 2022. This project would undoubtedly have been approved prior to the implementation of the new OCP guidelines. The OCP should serve as a guideline, not as an inflexible law that hinders progress and development.

Furthermore, the West Vista Terrace site is not located kilometers away from the designated area but is directly adjacent to it. This proximity emphasizes the logical and cohesive nature of the proposed development within the broader urban planning context.

Our community was fortunate enough to secure a new hospital in the Bell McKinnon area, largely due to the award-winning Local Area Plan, not the recent OCP revisions. The West Vista Terrace project would have further complemented this development by providing essential amenities, including a much-needed hotel facility.

It is crucial to consider the financial impacts on MNC taxpayers. If approved, the West Vista Terrace development would:

- Keep North Cowichan taxes down by generating \$60 million in tax revenue over the next 25 years.
- Provide over 800 much-needed homes and commercial space, including a hotel.
- Create jobs through collaboration with Ravenstone Construction, an Indigenous company that lost out on the hospital contract due to union affiliation.
- Establish a walkable, sustainable, safe neighbourhood within a five-minute walk to the new hospital.

Even more significant financial impact would occur if the developer chooses to pursue alternative avenues due to the council's decision. Should Developer John and his wife Elain Lichtenwald opt for alternative development strategies, such as selling the land to Cowichan Tribes or Malahat Nation and start negotiating without MNC involvement, taxpayers could face significant losses in terms of missed development fees and the burden of acquiring land for extensions of roads and new services that the developer could have provided to MNC. This outcome would be detrimental to our community's financial well-being and underscore the short-sightedness of the council's decision.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge you to implore the MNC to reconsider its decision and prioritize the interests of our community by approving the West Vista Terrace development project. It is imperative that our local government demonstrates unwavering commitment to responsible and forward-thinking urban planning, economic growth, and social justice.

Sincerely,

Travis Berthiaume