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Promoting nature awareness in Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody and beyond

To: BC Housing questions@renewingriverview.com

Re: A Vision for Renewing Riverview

February 12, 2016

The following are comments submitted on behalf of the Burke Mountain Naturalists. We are a group of approximately 250 members who reside mainly in the Coquitlam, Port Moody and Port Coquitlam areas of Metro Vancouver.

1. Any notification that there was a process underway to review and submit comments on BC Housing's Vision for Renewing Riverview was essentially non-existent. People who had previously submitted comments via PlaceSpeak were the only people to receive a single email regarding the release of this document and the opportunity to submit comments. This is inexcusable. At the very least, notification of the release of the Vision document and an opportunity to submit comments should have been advertised in the Vancouver Sun, Province and community newspapers. We anticipate that, as a result, few people will submit comments. In addition, people do not like using the PlaceSpeak portal to submit comments. It seems to be a rather unprofessional method for government to obtain public input. An alternative option to submit comments should have been made very clear.
2. A summary of input previously received from the public has not been provided. To compensate for this shocking deficiency, we undertook an analysis of the public comments obtained from the web-based survey conducted by BC Housing in late 2014 to early 2015. This analysis is now posted to our website, www.bmn.bc.ca for anyone to view. The outcome of this analysis demonstrated overwhelming support for keeping all of Riverview dedicated to mental health care as well as protection of the tree collection and continuing to manage the site as a sanctuary for mental health care. A majority of people were opposed to use of the Riverview lands for residences, retail, mixed use and town-homes. Nor did the public wish to see any part of Riverview turned over to the management of Kwikwetlem First Nation for their purposes.
3. Input from other levels of government has not been accurately summarized. For example, no mention is made of the vision document produced the City of Coquitlam (i.e., the Higenbottam report) which proposes a centre of excellence for health care and, possibly, other government services.

Input received from Metro Vancouver was also reported in a misleading manner. While it is true that Metro Vancouver supports, in general, the concept of "complete communities", they were, in no manner, suggesting this is how the Riverview lands should be managed or developed. Instead, their letter spoke of support for the following concepts at Riverview: trail linkages, safe pedestrian and cycle connections to Colony Farm Regional Park, habitat connectivity and site naturalization, restoration and use of the botanical gardens and

arboretum, inclusive recreational access to interactive open spaces, outdoor recreation and fitness, connections with nature, integrated hiking and biking trails, community-focused activities, activities that support mental health and wellness, connections to water, celebration and acknowledgement of cultural and natural heritage, integrated agricultural, horticulture and farm market related activities and integration of the site's cultural and natural history. To so inaccurately summarize what Metro Vancouver actually said about the Riverview lands suggests BC Housing cannot be trusted to reliably report back to the public on input received from stakeholders.

4. We vehemently oppose BC Housing's "complete community" vision to utterly transform the Riverview site into a mish-mash of extensive retail, resident and economic zones with only a small portion set aside for mental health and extremely limited protection of a small portion of its heritage tree collection. In essence, we do not consider BC Housing's concept to be a viable vision for Riverview; rather, we view it as the worst kind of nightmare for the future of Riverview. In our view, it would take little time for such a bizarre scheme to be denounced by thoughtful urban planners.

5. The first thing that is wrong about this vision is that insufficient land is identified for use for mental health care. This insufficiency of this land base becomes immediately obvious because, to construct a new facility at Riverview, the very usable Valleyview building (opened in 1959) is proposed for destruction. Valleyview (opened in 1959 with over 300 beds) is as contemporary as many modern hospitals still in use. It was closed only 4 years ago and had up, until that time, provided much-needed beds for the assessment of dementia patients. We recommend Valleyview be re-opened as long term care facility for such patients. To destroy it would be a travesty. It simply indicates BC Housing completely undervalues the significant heritage buildings at Riverview and lacks the imagination or foresight to develop a plan for their renewal. We note that, when most the buildings at Riverview were evaluated, in terms of costs, in 2013 for possible restoration, Valleyview was conspicuously missing from the list. How long has BC Housing been planning to destroy Valleyview?

Our view for Riverview is that all the lands must be kept in the public trust and managed as a single unit. We want the main use of the site to be for mental health care but this would not preclude some other compatible uses such as other health care, research and related teaching opportunities, government offices plus facilities to offer mental wellness, art, dance, horticulture, etc., activities which could be offered to the general public as well as to patients. The tree collection should be managed properly, maintained and enhanced to ensure it will remain as a legacy into the future. The site should be managed as a sanctuary and centre for mental wellness with strong established connections to the healing power of nature.

We oppose the use of the site for any regular residential housing or retail facilities in general – although offering a coffee shop, perhaps, operated by recovering patients as part of a training program would be in keeping with our view of the site. We also oppose diverting a major portion of the site into an ill-defined economic zone – especially, as proposed, in a historical portion of the site that is graced by magnificent trees, expansive lawns, stunning vistas, and heritage buildings. We do not oppose the movie industry using Riverview as they have become good stewards of the site but we would not want the movie industry to

predominate over a focus on continuing mental health care or take buildings that could be used for mental health purposes.

6. The fate proposed for the historic orchard area is not mentioned in this Vision document (see map on page 18 of Vision document). Why? This is a serious omission. With its south-facing and well-drained slopes, this is an ideal area for an orchard. It could become the focus of an agricultural program with training opportunities for recovering patients. This is our suggestion for the use of this area at Riverview. Riverview has several streams which are not shown on the map although a single stream through the Orchard area is shown on the map on page 18. However, it is entirely deceptive to omit all the other streams at Riverview. If this one stream is shown, why omit all the others?

7. An appreciation for the historical buildings at Riverview is totally absent from this vision document. Once a tree protection plan is in place (see next point), the next logical step would be to examine the possible restoration and re-use of the heritage buildings. On June 27, 2112, the Heritage Canada Foundation released a list of their top ten endangered places in Canada. At the top of this list was the Riverview site. It was described by them as an extraordinary provincially-owned cultural landscape that is threatened by insensitive development (and yes, that a fair description of BC Housing's Vision). The provincial government undertook an assessment of the heritage buildings in the late 1990s. Where is this document and why it is not one of the significant foundational documents to support BC Housing's plans for the site? Riverview is a unique site, intentionally designed to celebrate and weave together natural surroundings with an impressive architecture which supports a healing culture. There is nothing about BC Housing's bizarre plans to suggest there is any appreciation for the far-sighted vision of the founders of Riverview.

7. We are extremely concerned with regard to the very limited areas where the trees will "be considered" or be "a priority focus" (see map on page 16 of Vision document). Furthermore, it is not clear if the trees that will be a "considered" or "priority focus" will be partially or completely protected as these terms were not defined in the Vision document. Several weeks ago, we submitted a question to the renewingriverview.com website asking for clarification of these terms but our question has not been answered. All the 1800 trees in the tree inventory, i.e., the entire tree collection, merit nothing less than full protection. The statement made by Premier Christy Clark during the recent by-election campaign that all the trees at Riverview will be protected is at variance with statements in the Vision document. Which is correct? Premier Clark, a former MLA in this area, is very familiar with Riverview site and understands the great appreciation residents have for this tree collection as well as its value as a historic provincial legacy. Did the Premier make a misleading statement?

To ensure the tree collection is not harmed by any new development, a tree management plan needs to be prepared prior to any development taking place. It is important that new buildings do not result in harm to tree roots, alterations in drainage patterns or cause shading which will impair tree growth. The tree collection has been valued in the tens of millions of dollars. As a popular and major feature of the Riverview site, it is essential this magnificent collection is fully protected and maintained. The tree collection is integrated into the entire site and is found throughout Riverview including in areas are not identified as

tree “consideration” or “focus” areas. It is essential a sound management and protection plan for all the inventoried trees at Riverview is prepared before proceeding with any alterations to the site.

8. At the beginning of this process, BC Housing made a commitment to maintain as much open space as currently exists. However, this promise has now been broken. BC Housing is now promising only to maintain as much open space “as possible”. This is far too vague and suggests the earlier commitment has been withdrawn. How can the public have confidence in what BC Housing says if this fundamental promise has now been compromised?

9. We are opposed to the concept that a portion or all the Riverview lands should form part of a settlement to be eventually reached with Kwikwetlem First Nation with regard to land claims. We are aware of the troubled history of the relationship between First Nations and senior levels of government and understand that First Nations throughout BC have lost rights and title to much of their historic lands. However, it is our view that historic value of Riverview to all the citizens of BC is extremely high and that this site is also a very important part of our tradition and history. Thus, we encourage the government to strive to reach an equitable agreement with Kwikwetlem First Nation which does not result in the loss of this significant site for all the people in BC.

10. We were totally dismayed to learn that BC Housing has gone forward with a job search for a project coordinator to manage the real estate development activities at Riverview even before this period of “public consultation” has been completed. It appears BC Housing has little interest in what the public has to say about the future of Riverview. It is never a good sign when government ignores overwhelming public input as well as statements from other levels of government such as Metro Vancouver and the City of Coquitlam in whose municipality Riverview is located.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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Burke Mountain Naturalists