

Green Scene: Speak up for the Future of the Riverview Lands

by Elaine Golds

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The Crease Clinic building, in use by the movie industry, is an outstanding example of the art deco heritage style at Riverview. *Niall Williams photo.*

The *Renewing Riverview* consultation process being conducted by BC Housing is continuing with a second round of public open houses on May 24 and 28. This time, the goal will be to solicit comments from the public regarding future uses of the Riverview lands.

Feedback obtained from the first round of open houses held in late February and March was strongly in favour of continuing with mental health care services on the site. In addition, considerable support was also expressed for preserving its park-like setting, protecting the tree collection and restoring the splendid heritage buildings.

I hope people will not become fatigued with the need to continue to participate in these open houses and express their strong support for an ongoing role for mental health care at Riverview while BC Housing conducts

its lengthy consultation process. This process is expected to continue into early 2015, with a third round of public meetings to come this fall and a final one next year.

There is little doubt that we urgently need more facilities for mental health care. The Riverview site, beautifully designed with mental health in mind, remains an ideal place to offer such services. With so many homeless people living on the streets and studies indicating that more than half of them have mental health problems, there is obviously a need to provide some form of residential care, whether on a short-term or more intermediate-term basis. There is also a need for additional care facilities for the long term-care of the elderly, especially those suffering from dementia.

There are existing buildings at Riverview that could easily be adapted to fill these roles. One such building is Valleyview, which opened in 1959 with 382 beds to provide care for geriatric patients with mental illness. Such services are still needed, although, under contemporary standards, probably only about half that number of patients could now comfortably be accommodated at Valleyview. In addition to physiotherapy and occupational therapy facilities, Valleyview also would offer two enclosed gardens where dementia patients could enjoy being out of doors.

Many people also supported an expanded health care role for Riverview in other areas, such as providing a teaching hospital that could specialize in certain types of surgery or other care. The Henry Esson Young building, which opened in 1957 as a nursing school, offers auditoriums, classrooms, space for an extensive library plus 100 residential rooms. It remains ideally suited to continue to play a role in providing teaching or, possibly, conference facilities. The North Lawn building, which also dates from the 1950s, originally offered 230 beds for the care of patients suffering from tuberculosis. Again, this is a building similar in age to many buildings throughout Metro Vancouver that still host health care services.

The movie industry remains active on the Riverview site and continues to use the beautiful art deco Crease Clinic building, originally built to provide care for veterans, as well as a number of other buildings. While many people support continuing with movie industry use on site, there is little doubt the highest and best uses of buildings designed as hospitals would be to provide patient care.

A suggestion to provide some social housing at Riverview makes little sense to me. To be successful and avoid stigmatization, social housing has to be integrated with regular market housing.

But there is strong opposition to creating market housing at Riverview. After all, in the 1980s, more than 80 hectares of Riverview was sold to create the Riverview Heights subdivision just uphill from the hospital grounds. Enough of the Riverview site has already been sacrificed for market housing.

A review of the building condition assessment report prepared by BC Housing surprisingly revealed many buildings at Riverview remain in active use, albeit on a short-term basis. Some buildings are currently used for

outpatient care while others have been leased by non-profit groups such as Coast Mental Health for use by patients as halfway homes for those preparing to reintegrate into society.

Although the provincial government has failed to undertake some much needed repairs, several buildings are currently used as residences by patients seeking rehabilitation. In fact, given the number of patients living on site, it's a shame Pennington Hall, a recreation facility opened in the 1950s for patient use, cannot be repaired and reopened for the use of these on-site patients.

Given the need for additional mental health care facilities and all that Riverview has to offer, it's not difficult to envision a future for Riverview that would be not too dissimilar from its past. Add in a little horticultural instruction (to take advantage of the magnificent grounds and trees, which do need some care and attention), bring in a few arts groups to add to cultural services to the mix and we could have an outstanding centre of excellence for mental wellness at Riverview.