

GREEN SCENE

Saving Riverview

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At Riverview's upcoming TreeFest, enjoy trees such as this Camperdown Elm and heritage buildings.
Bruce Brandhorst photo.

The arrival of September always comes as a bit of shock as the more relaxed pace of summer suits me better. One of the sure signs of autumn is the upcoming TreeFest celebration on the Riverview Hospital grounds.

This year, TreeFest will be held on Saturday, Sept. 19 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Once again, this event will offer hourly tree tours conducted by knowledgeable arborists and a heritage building tour (outside only) by well-known heritage architect Don Luxton. A number of community groups will also be present with their displays and activities along with *BC Housing*.

The extreme drought of this summer — which now, thankfully, seems to be over — has posed challenges for the fabulous tree collection at Riverview. The recent windstorm has been reported to have taken down

at least three significant trees: an oak, a maple and a European linden. This summer, a beautiful scarlet oak, native to eastern Canada, snapped without warning and fell to the ground.

It's a shame Riverview's unique tree collection could not have been watered by *BC Housing* during the unusual summer drought. A few volunteers from the Burke Mountain Naturalists mounted a valiant effort to water some of the trees with barrels brought in by truck. While the well-drained, rich soil on the south-east facing Riverview site is typically praised by arborists as being an ideal site for an arboretum, the lengthy dry spell this spring and summer created harsh conditions for many of the trees.

The provincial government has turned over management of the Riverview site to *BC Housing* and tasked it with developing a plan for the site's renewal. But at a panel discussion hosted by *BC Housing* in June, scant attention was paid to the value of its tree collection or the need to ensure new development would not harm their health or alter the water table on which they depend.

In fact, one of the panelists seemed to take it as given that a renewed Riverview must be "densified." How this could happen without imperilling this collection of 165 mature species and 113 varieties baffles me.

Some arborists have indicated Riverview's outstanding tree collection has a value of more than \$50 million.

Based on input received from the public, *BC Housing* is now developing a draft plan for the site that is expected to be brought back to the public for review sometime this fall. *BC Housing* already solicited feedback from the public last winter that suggested a number of uses for the Riverview site and asked people to indicate whether they approved of the suggest uses.

It bothers me that, to date, *BC Housing* has not released the results from this public survey. Instead, it has provided a brief summary to only a few selected questions.

For example, I am curious to learn how the public responded to the suggestion of highrise office towers on the site. I am guessing support for this concept was very low but, at this point, only *BC Housing* knows the answer.

If *BC Housing* wants to consult the public in good faith, then, surely, we should be allowed to fully review the feedback it receives.

Another issue *BC Housing* seems to be ignoring is the heritage significance of Riverview's buildings. In the 1990s, consultants were hired by the provincial government to examine such heritage aspects. These consultants identified a number of highly significant heritage buildings.

The city of Coquitlam has tried to have these buildings officially recognized but, to date, the provincial government as the owner of the site, has failed to endorse such actions. Again, I think it would be remiss for *BC Housing* to proceed with redevelopment plans for Riverview without identifying the significant heritage buildings and offering a plan under which they could be restored.

Many people appear to believe that Riverview, with its heritage buildings, gracious lawns and mature trees, is an ideally designed campus to continue to provide a wide range of mental health care facilities. I also think it would be perfect site to offer other health care services such assisted living for the elderly, especially those suffering from dementia.

It is well known that trees promote good health. Studies have shown that hospital patients heal faster when they have a view of trees from their beds. A walk through trees instead of city streets has been shown to promote a feeling of wellness, improve cognitive ability and ameliorate depression.

Let's hope we can convince *BC Housing* of the worth of those remarkable trees at Riverview. Representatives will also be present at TreeFest, so I encourage people who attend on Sept. 19 to engage with them in an informative dialogue on the future of Riverview.