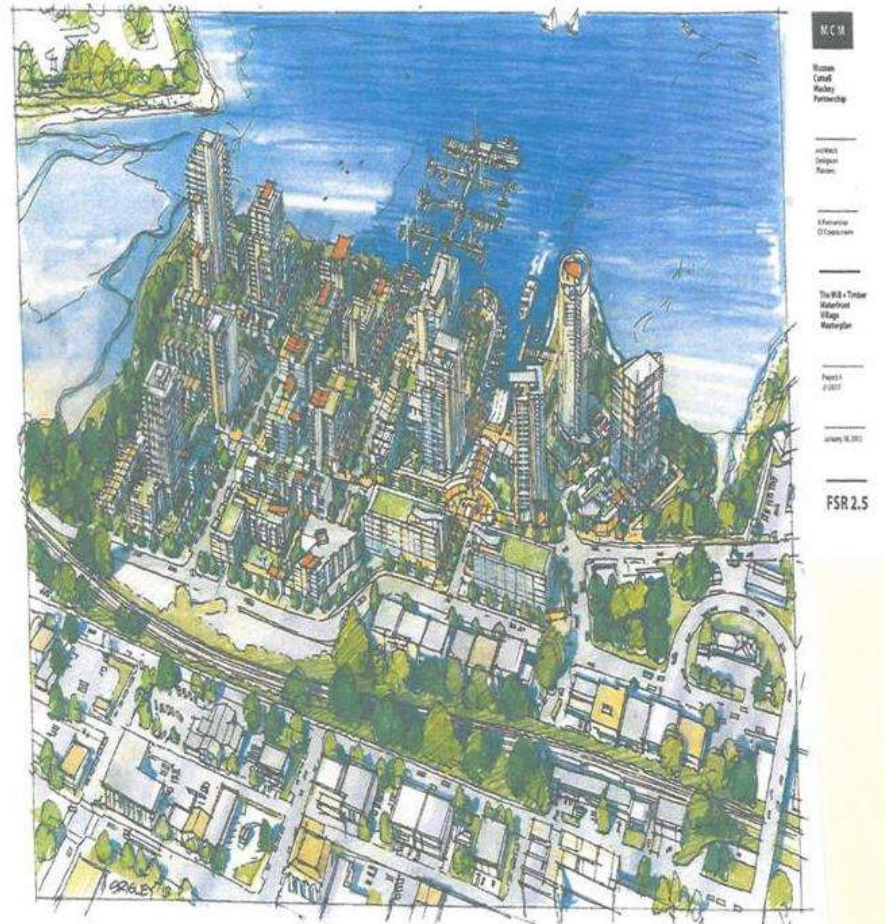


Green Scene: Still a Sardine City despite Re-packaging

by Elaine Golds

(published by the *TriCity News* – November 15, 2013)



An artist's rendition of a proposed plan for Port Moody's "Oceanfront District" adjacent to Rocky Point Park. Presented to Council, January 2013.

In response to community concerns, Port Moody Council has now approved a slightly revised draft Official Community Plan (OCP) which will be the subject of public input at a town hall meeting on Wednesday, November 27 at 7 pm at Inlet Theatre. Last spring, Port Moody residents stridently objected to plans to add more high-rise towers and hugely increase the population of the city. The latest draft of the OCP has removed some of the more controversial towers but has added new ones, some of them in unlikely places. Sensibly eliminated from the new plan are towers in Coronation Park while the ones in Moody Centre near a new skytrain station have been downsized from 20 to 12 storeys. New ones, however, are now proposed in the newly-named “Westport” area including 26 storey towers on the SW corner of Clark Road and Albert Street, the former Andres Winery site and along Vinter Street. It’s almost like a game of whack-a-mole with new towers popping up in surprising places.

Sadly unchanged is the huge increase in projected population. By 2041, the population of Port Moody is still expected to reach almost 60,000, 20% greater than the 50,000 anticipated in Metro Vancouver’s Regional Growth Strategy. Despite the addition of almost 4000 people to each of the Westport, Oceanfront and Inlet Centre Station areas plus another 6000 throughout the Moody Centre area, the OCP continues to espouse the

view that what Port Moody residents value most about their city is its “small town character”. If this OCP gets approved, it’s going to be goodbye to that small town charm and “Hello Metrotown”.

The changes proposed for the “Westport” area are dramatic. This is an area immediately adjacent to a chemical plant, a highway and a noisy rail yard. It’s hardly the typical type of area thought to be suitable for upscale high-rise towers. In addition, buildings up to 6 storeys in height are now proposed for steep hillsides along Charles Street which are clearly labeled as hazardous lands (i.e., prone to landslides) in the OCP. Threading its way through the proposed high-rise towers in “Westport” is South Schoolhouse Creek which, despite scant public attention, provides vital habitat for spawning salmon. You might think this creek would merit special protection in the OCP flowing as it does past several proposed 26 storey towers. Don’t count on it. In fact, two of the lots that the creek presently passes through before going under St. Johns Street are proposed, not to be as protected greenspace, but for 6 storey buildings which will leave no room for a creek although, I suppose, a culvert could be squeezed in.

The proposed Oceanfront area just east of Rocky Point Park looks totally inappropriate with an undetermined number of 28 storey towers next to an environmentally sensitive wildlife area. Many people feel this area should become mostly an extension of Rocky Point Park. What is strangely absent from essentially all the sites proposed for high-rise towers are any details with regard to floor to space ratios (FSR), suggested percent of site coverage or units per hectare – all which could sensibly limit the size and number of towers as well as protect greenspace. To allow such details to be omitted from this OCP will only inflame the wild expectations of developers and make it extremely difficult to achieve any sensible limits to growth or adequate environmental protection.

Also absent from this draft OCP – just like the first one – is any mention of areas where new parks would be created, where much-needed new playing fields could be constructed and where new schools could be built to serve the children of the proposed 20,000 or more new residents. Port Moody, already one of the fastest growing municipalities in Metro Vancouver, will fail to be a complete or liveable community without ensuring such amenities are created to meet the needs of future residents.

With the Newport, Suterbrook and Klahanie sites, Port Moody now has a vibrant town center. At least 3 new high-rise towers are proposed along the Barnet Highway in this area which will be within easy walking distance of the Inlet Centre skytrain station. While this is possibly a suitable area for a few more high rises, declaring “Westport” as a new area for high-rise towers seems bizarre given that it is well over a kilometer from any skytrain station. The expectation seems to be that developers will be keen to finance a third skytrain station here. If so, residents should expect more towers in this area as well as even higher building heights to cover the exorbitant cost of another skytrain station. I hesitate to contemplate the greenspace and gracious heritage areas that would be lost from such a foolhardy decision.

Sadly, I see little in this new draft OCP that will protect the environment, retain Port Moody’s small town character and provide the amenities needed by future residents. I hope that Port Moody residents will attend the town hall meeting and share their views with Council. And I hope that Council members will keep in mind that 2014 is an election year.