

# Green Scene: Riverview at a Crossroads

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**The Crease Clinic, an excellent example of the Art Deco period, now has a new roof and has been used by the film industry for many years. Despite this, its condition is assessed as "critical". Photo Credit: Niall Williams.**

With land use planning for the future of Riverview now hastily convened, the fate of this spectacular site has finally reached a crossroads. The first Open House was held Thursday evening while a second Open House will take place on Saturday from 10 am – 2 pm at the Centennial Pavilion, 620 Poirier Street in Coquitlam. Riverview Hospital, which served the province as a much-needed mental health care facility for almost a century (1913-2012), has much to offer on its 100 hectare grounds with its heritage buildings, gracious landscapes and world-class collection of trees. However, with planning for its future uses now under the guidance of BC Housing, many people in the community are feeling anxious about its prospects.

After all, it is not as if there is no longer a need for innovative mental health care services in our community. Sadly, far too many of our mentally ill are living lives of quiet desperation on our streets and in

our ravines. While modern drugs offer some hope for mental health treatment, not all such problems can be fixed by taking a pill. People suffering from severe mental illnesses are unable to take prescribed drugs of their own volition. These people need stable, longer term care in a facility such as Riverview - not overnight confinement in jail. A study in Surrey showed police spent more than \$600,000 over 5 years to respond to 1500 calls to deal with just 8 people who, in a more humane world, would have received treatment within the mental health care system. Would it not be more effective and caring to provide health care in a proper facility? Why have we allowed mental health care to become a police problem?

As our society ages, we will also be facing increased demands for residential care for the elderly as they deal with declining health. Once again, Riverview, with its park-like setting would be an ideal place to offer such services. Not too long ago, the modern Valleyview facility at Riverview provided assessment services for dementia patients. Despite the urgent need for such facilities, Valleyview, with space for at least 150 beds, was closed in late 2011. While I was pleased to learn the Fraser Health Authority plans to open a new 237 complex care bed facility in Port Coquitlam, I have to wonder why the more tranquil (and already government-owned) setting of Riverview was not considered to be a more appropriate site? Riverview would certainly be a more convenient location for the 76 people who will be forced to move from the Burquitlam Lions Care Centre in Coquitlam to the new site in Port Coquitlam.

People who attend the Open House will be asked for their ideas for the future development of Riverview which was listed as the Heritage Canada Foundation's most endangered heritage site in 2012. While asking for public input seems like a sensible idea, I worry the province has already constrained the planning process by requiring that all costs associated with future use, such as infrastructure upgrades, must come from revenue generated by the property. Since when have we expected hospitals, long-term care facilities and other amenities that provide so much benefit to society pay their own costs?

These two Open Houses will be the first of four meetings planned over the coming year. I am concerned people may be overwhelmed with information at these first Open Houses. Offering a formal presentation would probably be a more effective way to present some of the extensive background material (some of which is posted on a website, [www.renewingriverview.com](http://www.renewingriverview.com)). People will apparently have only one week after the Open Houses to submit their ideas through this website. Again, I am concerned this is far too short a time period to generate substantive ideas. If, as many in the community fear, developers have been waiting in the wings with well-formulated proposals of their own, it will be all too easy for such plans to take precedence.

Apparently, all the buildings at Riverview have been assessed with regard to their condition and costs to repair; these are listed on the website. Nonetheless, a number of significant buildings, such as Valleyview, do not appear on this list. Some results of this assessment baffle me. For example, the Henry Esson Young building, a modern building with pleasant classrooms and auditoriums which was in regular use up to 2012, has been assessed as being in "poor" condition which is, apparently, the same state as West Lawn, the first building constructed at Riverview in 1913 and abandoned since 1983. Could this be a ploy to convince us that demolition is the only solution? For all those who care passionately about Riverview and its future, now is most definitely the time to speak up.