

# Proposed highrises threaten greenspace

BY NAOIBH O'CONNOR, VANCOUVER COURIER MAY 20, 2011



Activist Don Larson opposes a proposed development at Cambie Street on the south side of Marine Drive.

**Photograph by:** Dan Toulgoet, Vancouver Courier

Don Larson stood on a grassy, treed stretch of land at Cambie Street on the south side of Marine Drive. "This is a community amenity. That's beautiful," said the longtime community activist, pointing up to one of the trees.

But it and several dozen other trees on the property will likely come down to make way for a proposed PCI Group development called Marine Gateway, which envisions two residential highrises, a commercial building and public amenities.

Larson argues it will be too dense for the location and the green space should be turned into a linear park. "The developer is obviously thinking maximum density, maximum height. It's very simplistic thinking. It doesn't take into consideration what's already here," he said. "It looks like he's got buildings right up to the sidewalk. What a surprise... This is my community. I don't like what's happening and it's not nimbyism either. I don't think anyone's saying there should be no development here, but a 34-storey building across from two-storey residences--isn't that excessive?"

The site, alongside the Canada Line's Marine Drive station, is about 210,000-square-feet, including the transit easement, according to the city's director of planning Brent Toderian.

The proposed height of the higher residential tower is 335 feet, measured from the Marine Drive street elevation. Technically, it's higher because the grade drops off and so it's approximately 350 feet by the way the city measures, according to Toderian. The second residential tower proposal is 255 feet, measured from the Marine Drive elevation. The proposed office building is 230 feet. Marine Gateway went before the city's urban design panel May 18.

Now that council has approved the Cambie Corridor plan, the project can proceed to council once staff has finished its report. Council will consider the rezoning application and could refer it to public hearing.

Reaction to the project has been varied with continued concern about height, according to Toderian.

"And that issue was brought to council even in the context of the Cambie Corridor work, but specific decisions on height don't get made until the rezoning is considered by council," he said.

Although the proposed development makes full use of the site, the city's not surprised given its location next to the Canada Line Station, Toderian said. "There are cases where the city deems on-site vegetation to be important enough to preserve but in this case that's not the position of the city, so a perimeter development of the entire site is considered supportable," he said. "What we do require is that the developers do substantive replanting specifically around the perimeter of the site and in some cases even double rows of trees to be planted as well as trees within the high street concept that organizes the site."

A park is envisioned at Cambie and the Fraser River. "Interestingly, the public benefits from the development at Marine and Cambie will help pay for the proposed park at the Fraser River," Toderian said.

PCI Group could not be reached for comment before the Courier's deadline.

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