



CITY OF VANCOUVER

POLICY REPORT DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING

Report Date: February 26, 2007
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Meeting Date: City Clerks Use Only

TO: Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

FROM: Director of Planning in consultation with the General Managers of
Engineering Services and Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: Oakridge Centre Policy Statement

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council approve the Oakridge Centre Policy Statement (Appendix A) as a framework for considering Oakridge Centre rezoning and development proposals.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services Recommends Approval of A above.

COUNCIL POLICY

- 1995 Oakridge Langara Policy Statement
- 2005 Riley Park South Cambie Vision
- City Plan

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

This report recommends adoption of the Oakridge Centre Policy Statement (Appendix A) to guide a ground-breaking conversion of a successful regional mall to also become a compact transit oriented mixed-use neighbourhood. Recognizing the complexity of the site and its operating requirements, the policy document provides a flexible framework for considering a variety of detailed plans at future stages.

Oakridge Centre is envisioned to become a highly walkable neighbourhood centre serving 12,000 nearby residents plus those who will move onto the site and those arriving by transit. Its strategic crossroads location also places the centre well to continue serving city serving office and retail needs. To compliment commercial services, policies recommend considering a more complete array of community services. Diversity of housing mix is encouraged.

The Policy Statement provides a framework for knitting this site into the urban fabric with very significant additions of mixed use development. Guidance on public realm improvements for all edges and public spaces accompanies land use and built form principles for achieving a mix of higher density residential forms. These policies will improve neighbourhood amenity as well as creating appealing focal points on-site. A direction of clustering residential structures, varied in height and form and linked by a high street seeks to achieve identifiable character areas on site. Community facility and park policies set directions for amenities to serve the site and surrounding population.

Collaborative dialogue, beginning at the pre-concept stage with community and development interests, has brought greater consensus about the urban future of this site than has been possible in the past. While built form questions such as the height of some structures and view retention measures remain to be resolved in greater detail at a rezoning stage, a large measure of consensus has emerged on the development concept, density, urban structure questions and level of amenity.

BACKGROUND

A 1983 subdivision and 1991 rezoning created owner obligations to the City for 2.83 acres of parkland and a 1.1 acre housing site as well as 125,000 sq. ft. of additional, as yet unrealized, retail development potential.

In 1995 Council adopted the Oakridge Langara Policy Statement (OLPS) which constitutes approved Council policy for the Oakridge and Langara neighbourhoods, including Oakridge Centre. A decision to proceed with the Canada Line was recognized by that Policy Statement to be a reason to review policy with respect to development in the vicinity.

With the OLPS as a starting point, Council in October 2004 approved a policy planning program to review policy directions for Oakridge Centre and adjacent arterial sites in anticipation of rezoning applications responding to the Canada Line project. Adjacent sites along Cambie Street and along 41st Avenue have been discussed during the public process and policy directions will be reported mid-2007. A mid-year rezoning application for Oakridge Centre is likely.

This fully cost recovered planning program started in January 2005 with information gathering meetings, followed by four sets of broadly advertised public open houses and workshops with residents from surrounding areas based on discussions with site owners regarding their development and operational objectives in the context of City objectives for transit related pedestrian oriented development.

DISCUSSION

Public Process: There are several publics affected by development on this site. These groups have varying and not necessarily convergent interests. Staff endeavoured to solicit and balance a broad array of inputs. Public Open Houses have been augmented by workshops which engage the more interested parties. Some groups have also been directly consulted. The plan has evolved considerably with the benefit of input from the public. There is wide spread support for most aspects of the proposal and guiding policies with specific concerns expressed on a few aspects as described and addressed below in this report.

Broad Policy Objectives: The OLPS embodies local, City and regional land use and transportation objectives which staff recognised as the starting point for a discussion which sought to account for and balance changes in the role of this key crossroads in the City's transit and road network resulting from development of the Canada Line. This crossroads is within the context of surrounding residential areas and to be truly transit oriented must emerge as a more complete neighbourhood centre guided by CityPlan Vision policies.

Development Objectives: Oakridge Centre Holdings Limited, owners of the centre, have regional retail expansion as their primary business objective. With 620,000 sq. ft. of leaseable floor area and 125,000 sq. ft. of approved but undeveloped space, Oakridge Centre Holdings Limited seeks an increase to 950,000 sq. ft. A range from 70,000 sq. ft. to 200,000 sq. ft. of additional office use is also contemplated. The proposed policies support consideration of a residential floor area between 1.0 and 1.2 million sq. ft. to optimize the opportunity for a transit hub and make undergrounding of parking and public amenities under discussion for this expansion financially attractive.

Operating Constraints: Site planning is constrained by phasing and Oakridge Centre Holdings Limited's commitments to retail anchors. Unlike other recycled shopping centres, Oakridge remains a thriving centre. New development is constrained by leases which limit reduction of parking ratios and the need to keep the Centre operating. Age and design of the structure also impose limitations.

Public Services and Amenities: In addition to the benefits of a more compact and sustainable land use pattern served by transit, attached policies adhere to Council approved policy on housing, parks, community services, local commercial services, and sustainable building practises which contribute to creating the 'eco-structure' needed to serve a complete community. These policies will also guide amenity negotiations at the rezoning stage.

Parking, Loading and Traffic: Due to the complex nature of adding significant residential density and additional retail density to a large operating mall, a portion of the parking for the new uses will likely need to be located under the new dedicated high street and/or under the new park spaces. It is important, however, to ensure that these public spaces remain fully functional as street and park. Section 5 outlines the policies and conditions under which this

parking will be considered. It seeks to ensure that the street can accommodate a complete range of underground utilities and large healthy trees, and that all normal street activities, maintenance and repair are unimpeded. It also seeks to ensure that residential parking is located beneath its respective residential parcels wherever possible, so that temporary disruptions to the parking under streets does not affect livability for on-site residents.

The decision to proceed with the Canada Line created a rationale to consider a higher density pedestrian oriented neighbourhood centre. To achieve a pedestrian focused transit hub, all streets and public spaces will be designed putting pedestrians first and emphasizing public routes to connect the neighbourhood with the transit station. Cycling connections will also be integrated into the public routing through the site.

Section 5.2 of the draft policy describes the need for detailed study of the parking demand for new uses on site to ensure parking ratios established at the rezoning stage reflect current city policies and objectives around seeking appropriately reduced parking standards wherever possible by employing the best practices of traffic demand management. The study will consider parking reduction due to transit orientation of the site while also considering the parking required to maintain retail viability, the need to respect pre-existing leases and the need to limit impacts on neighbourhoods.

Height and Density: Planning policies seek to better integrate the Centre with its context. Neighbours have expectations of the nature and quality of physical environment which they consider acceptable and the type of services they consider beneficial. Many residents chose Oakridge because of its low density and scale. Many welcome the services which go with increased development. However, there is reluctance about the extent of urbanity residents are able to embrace. This reduces acceptance of density and tall buildings.

Given this context, there is mixed support for the tallest of the proposed residential towers. Many residents believe heights over about 15 storeys conflict with neighbourhood character. Inclusion of taller towers reduces support for the proposed density.

The immediate context of this site includes 9 storey buildings as well as 3 to 6 storey buildings to the south and west. Langara Gardens one mile south rises to 18 storeys or 180 ft. In this context, residents have mixed reactions to increased height. Most seem comfortable with 9 or 10 storeys, many could live with 14 to 16 storeys.

Policy 6.1.8 and related policies in Section 6.1, address the question of height. In view of the context, comparisons with similar sites and public input, staff are confident that two clusters of slim towers of varied heights averaging about 16 stories, located near Cambie Street and near 41st Avenue, with one taller elements each of 200 feet (19 to 21 storeys), can meet urban design objectives for the site. This would place most people closest to transit, create an effective transition in scale and enable some retention of public and private views.

However, the developer believes 24 storeys may be needed to achieve phaseable housing forms targeting a range of housing which serves a mix of residential markets, while retaining more options for adjusting massing in response to view issues. Taller buildings also ensure financial viability required to support the infrastructure, underground parking costs and public amenity required to create a successful, vibrant mixed use development.

Given the desire to optimize use of the site, provide a better response to view retention at lower levels and achieve varied tower heights, staff recommend considering up to 24 storeys for a single tower in each of the two clusters based on careful design development and further consideration of project economics at the rezoning stage.

Retail Impact Assessment: While typical neighbourhood centre anchor stores are not expected to be detrimentally affected by proposed retail expansion, a retail impact assessment by Commercial Marketing and Development Consulting Group identified a potential impact on clothing and jewellery stores of sufficient magnitude and duration in two neighbourhood centres (Kerrisdale and South Granville) to present potential concerns. Staff will share this information with BIA representatives and report back at the rezoning stage when more complete information would provide a basis for refining implementation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the City at this stage.

PROPONENT COMMENTS

Additional comments provided by Oakridge Centre Holdings Limited are attached as Appendix B.

CONCLUSION

The Director of Planning recommends approval of the Oakridge Centre Policy Statement (see Appendix A) as the policy framework for evaluating future rezoning and development proposals for Oakridge Centre and as a reference point for considering land use questions which may arise near the Canada Line. Policies for adjacent arterial sites will follow in 2007.

Oakridge may be the first successfully operating regional mall in North America to seize the opportunity presented by a sea of parking from an era before environmental consciousness, to achieve a balanced urban community focussed on a transit hub. Retail operating requirements, related parking and phasing have complicated site planning. All parties have found common purpose in the recognized potential to advance sustainable land use practises and achieve practical responses to create a promising urban development form.

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DEPARTMENTAL APPROVAL AND REPORT CONCURRENCES

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This report has been prepared in consultation with the departments listed to the right, and they concur with its contents.

Concurring Departments:

Social PlanningEngineeringHousing

