

(Final)

Grandview Woodland Area Council
Britannia Community Services Centre
1661 Napier Street
Vancouver, BC V5L 4X4

Wednesday 22 September 2010

Dear Britannia Board of Management:

Re: Britannia Centre visioning process (February–September 2010)

On 12 April 2010, Grandview Woodland Area Council (GWAC) endorsed a 29 March letter written by local resident and GWAC Director, Dan Fass, expressing some concerns about the Britannia Centre visioning process, mainly about the proposal to build housing on the Britannia site, which would almost certainly require a P3 (public-private partnership). That letter was posted on the GWAC website (www.vcn.bc.ca/gwac/BritanniaCentre/BritVisionCmts=Fass=Final.pdf), along with a web page providing some background about the Britannia visioning and Master Plan process (www.vcn.bc.ca/gwac/BritanniaCentre/index.html).

The Planning and Development (P & D) Committee, a subcommittee of the Britannia Board, has been overseeing the Britannia Centre visioning and Master Plan process. Dan joined that committee on 22 April and has attended practically every meeting since.

GWAC is writing this open letter to correct some perceptions that, simply because the letter is nearly six months old and Dan has served on the committee P & D Committee for many months, that the concerns raised back in March are either no longer relevant or have been addressed. Neither is the case, hence this letter, which has been posted on the GWAC website (www.vcn.bc.ca/gwac/BritanniaCentre/BritVisionCmts2=GWAC=Final.pdf), with an update to GWAC's background page.

1 Concerns Raised in the 29 March 2010 Letter

The letter raised a series of concerns about the Britannia visioning process, especially that its SurveyMonkey survey and March 2010 Charette, which raised the issue of housing without providing background information about the impacts of putting housing on the Britannia site, notably that:

(1) Funding for the housing would almost certainly require a public-private partnership (P3) in which the City or VSB would sell its land or provide a long term (60–99 year) land lease to developers, and then the two public bodies would lease back parking, school, and amenity spaces.

(2) A developer would insist on a high ratio of market to non-market housing: A ratio of ten to one was mentioned at a 6 March 2010 charette at Britannia Centre.

(3) A developer would likely demand a large number of units, meaning a building (or buildings) with a large footprint, or considerable height, or both.

(4) A private partner — e.g., the strata representing the private owners in the housing — would have different needs and values from the existing non-profit partners (Britannia Centre, VSB, Vancouver Public Library).

The concern in the letter was not that the visioning process is raising housing as a possible use for the site. My concern, rather, is that housing is being suggested for the site without informing vision participants about the pros and the cons of the idea (e.g., the four problems listed above).

Additional concerns raised in the letter were (5) the lack of information available on the Britannia website about the Britannia visioning and Master Plan process and (6) a request to consider geothermal heating and cooling as part of its visioning process.

2 Have the Concerns in the 29 March Letter Been Addressed?

Unfortunately, GWAC's concerns have overall received not much attention.

With regard to (1), after considerable negotiation, P & D Committee member Bette Murphy was allowed an opportunity in August to speak about the implications of P3s for Britannia Centre at a P&D Committee meeting. She gave a background to P3s and raised concerns about their use to fund projects such as schools, community centres, and bridges. A number of Committee members seemed to have been influenced by Bette's arguments, but debate about P3s continues.

While there has been some discussion of housing at P & D Committee meetings, that discussion has been almost exclusively about housing would be funded, together with related discussion about the maximum building heights to be allowed on-site. There has been no discussion of concerns (2)–(4).

Concern (5) was the lack of information available on the Britannia website about the Britannia visioning and Master Plan process. As of 15 September 2010, this concern remains relevant: If you went to the Britannia centre website (www.britanniacentre.org) and tried searching for “Master Plan” or “visioning” and you got nothing meaningful as a search result. If you checked the Site Map (www.britanniacentre.org/sitemap.php) you wouldn't find a web page about the visioning and Master Plan process. The only web page you could find that had anything at all was a page called “somethingishappening@britanniacentre” (www.britanniacentre.org/2010/06/02/june-uary_is_wet.php).

A sixth concern, (6) a request to consider geothermal heating and cooling as part of its visioning process, has not been incorporated into the visioning process.

3 More Concerns about Public-Private Partnerships (P3s)

The March 2010 letter did not use the word “privatization” when discussing the issue of private housing and P3s on-site, but GWAC would like to take this opportunity to remind that to fund development with a P3 is to introduce privatization to Britannia Centre. To privatize, according to one dictionary, is defined as “to transfer from public or government control or ownership to private enterprise.” That's what a P3 would involve.

Additionally, in her presentation about P3s, Bette Murphy noted that the current policy of the provincial and federal governments is that any project over \$50 million requires funding based on a P3. She pointed out that a full-site redevelopment of the Britannia Centre site would certainly be over this limit. GWAC would therefore be opposed to a full-site redevelopment of Britannia Centre because — as seems unavoidable under current provincial and federal government policy — such a redevelopment would require funding through a P3.

4 Conclusion

GWAC wants to affirm that it strongly supports the Britannia Community Services Centre and its intent of applying for funding from the 2011 Capital Plan for upgrades and improvements to the facilities on-site.

However, GWAC would like to confirm that it still supports the issues and concerns outlined in the 29 March 2010 letter posted on its website, and would encourage the P & D Committee to address the concerns it raises. GWAC would like to draw Britannia Board's attention to its opposition to funding development of the Britannia site by way of a public-private partnership (P3).

Sincerely,

The Directors of Grandview Woodland Area Council (GWAC)

www.vcn.bc.ca/gwac

Cc: Planning and Development Committee of Britannia Community Services Centre

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