

'Rental housing is disappearing. What's next?'

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North Shore News

Friday, October 24, 2008

It's been 15 years since Ruth-Ann Meadows first moved into the apartment complex at 210 West 13th Street.

Since then, she's seen tenants come and go, new developments pop up around her rental apartment, and the state of her own building decline dramatically.

She, like many other residents of the Chesterton, a three-story walk-up apartment building slated for redevelopment, are waiting to hear the final decisions of the City of North Vancouver Council and the developer, The Hulbert Group, about what is going to happen to their home.

The property may soon be transformed into an ultramodern, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified, mixed market and non-market housing complex.

After the construction is completed, many former residents may well get first dibs on the five-to-eight affordable housing suites to be located on the basement level of the development.

But others will by then have settled into their new lives, uninterested in moving twice within a two-to-three-year period.

Until the final decision is made, Meadows and her fellow tenants look anxiously ahead at the prospects of finding new homes in the increasingly unaffordable North Vancouver rental market.

"There's a couple with three young children below me," Meadows said. "What are they going to do? And they are not the only kids in the building."



CREDIT: NEWS photo Terry Peters
RUTH-Ann Meadows stands in front of her apartment home of 15 years at 210 West 13th St. in North Vancouver. Amid the changing face of the City of North Vancouver, she wonders where she and other tenants will find affordable accommodation for two or three years assuming her building gets levelled after council approval of a new development that will include not-for-profit rental units.

At almost the same age as the 50-year-old building she lives in, the single-income earner is unsure about the prospects of moving to a place nearby.

"It's been my home for so long and I don't have a vehicle, so the area's perfect for me."

With single apartments starting at \$1,000, there are few, if any, options to consider. "There's just nothing out there," she said.

The Chesterton, sold for approximately \$4.25-million in June of last year, is now being considered for redevelopment as a market housing complex with five to eight non-market rental units. The development received substantial public support Monday during a City of North Vancouver public hearing for the rezoning of the property from a medium density designation to a comprehensive development.

Council passed the zoning's second and third reading unanimously. The bylaw now only need to pass one more council vote.

"It's going to happen," Meadows says with a sigh. Still, she doesn't know what she and the many other low-income residents living in the apartment building will do once they're forced to leave.

It all comes as a mixed blessing. Meadows said she's aware that the apartment building is in need of serious repair. Still, it's been her home for so long that the prospect of leaving seems more daunting than accepting things for what they are.

"It's the waiting and not knowing that's the tough part," she said, "It's just been such a long time."

Coun. Craig Keating said the state of affordable housing in North Vancouver is a growing concern. During Monday's public hearing he decried the dramatic decline in affordable rental units over the past several years. "That crisis would continue, the Ruth-Ann Meadows crisis," he said, unless council takes advantage of opportunities to provide affordable housing.

The five designated non-market units in the new development project are a start, but one that comes too late for current residents of the building, like Meadows.

"It's an unfortunate situation, the way rental housing is disappearing," Meadows said. "You know, Vista Place is on the site of a couple of small rental buildings that the city owned, and they're gone. Now this one is gone. What's next?"

Still, there's a glimmer of hope that with the recent market slump, the Chesterton may live to see a few more years, maybe even more, she says.

But, this is only a small comfort for Meadows. She will still be living in a building in desperate need of repairs and one destined for the wrecking ball.

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