

West Vancouver enlarges waterfront park access

By Sarah Ripplinger, Canwest News Service April 19, 2010



Rain storm caused huge pools of water on walkway at Ambleside Park in West Vancouver, November 18, 2009.

Photograph by: Bill Keay, Vancouver Sun

METRO VANCOUVER - The District of West Vancouver's Ambleside waterfront is slated for an overhaul that will see the removal of the floral clock and the decommissioning of the boat ramp.

A massive project that covers several city blocks, it also involves demolishing homes to expand public parks and walkways.

"We're at a very exciting place in the future of the Ambleside waterfront," director of planning, lands and permits Bob Sokol told council at the regular meeting on Monday. "I think we're prepared now and on the cusp of seeing some significant changes to the Ambleside waterfront that will build upon the dreams and visions of the West Vancouver community."

The bulk of the changes are aimed at the waterfront area between 13th and 18th streets, beachfront property that was largely occupied by private residences in the 1980s. Now only five homes are outside of district control, Sokol said, down from 32 private homes along the shoreline in 1988.

Two publicly-owned homes at 1488 and 1528 Argyle Avenue will be removed to make way for a significantly larger 15th Street Park, at the corner of 15th Street and Argyle Avenue, which the district plans to connect to John Lawson Park.

The expanded park "Will create a wonderful large, really significant park in this area," said director of parks and community services Anne Mooi.

Part of this yet-to-be-finalized process would involve removing the floral clock -- a large clock made out of flowers, dirt and granite -- from Millennium Park and reducing the height of the hill it once occupied to about waist level, Mooi said. The clock commemorates Marie Moscovitch -- the 2001 West Vancouver citizen of the year. Parts of the dismantled clock will be used to create a seating area, and a plaque will be erected in the park to honour Moscovitch's memory, according to Mooi.

Another change will be the decommissioning of the boat ramp, which sits next to the Hollyburn Sailing Club in the 1300-block of Argyle Avenue. In its stead, Sokol said the district is proposing to install a temporary seafood stand and bollards marking the area for kayak, row boats and other marine vessels that aren't motorized and don't require a boat trailer.

The move was prompted, Sokol said, by the number of pedestrians and cars along Argyle Avenue, combined with the narrowness of the approach to the ramp and number of boat trailers pulling in and out of the spot, which created a dangerous situation -- and the thousands in capital funds required to keep the ramp functional.

The boat ramp is tentatively scheduled to be decommissioned in conjunction with the planned construction of an artificial turf field at nearby Ambleside Park later this spring, which will also result in the removal of boat ramp parking.

The seafood stand at the boat ramp, to be located at 1366 Argyle Avenue, would be allowed to operate for five to six years, Sokol said, at the end of which the district would decide its fate and the future of that location.

Another commercial development is being earmarked for 1756 Argyle Avenue, the area adjacent to Lawson Creek and John Lawson Park and on the lot of a home owned by the district. Here, Sokol said, the district would like to see a food and beverage establishment open for business -- the district is requesting expressions of interest right now.

An extended Spirit Trail shoreline path along the waterfront in Ambleside, touching the water in some places, said Mooi, is part of the plan to create more access points for pedestrians and cyclists in the district.

Plus, there are plans to encourage commercial activities, such as bike and kayak rentals, along the waterfront to provide services to the greater number of people making use of the heightened shoreline access.

Green space at John Lawson Park -- at the foot of 15th Street -- will be expanded, Sokol said. This includes extending the Seawalk from Dundarave, through John Lawson Park to 15th Street Park, Mooi said.

The district plans on enhancing the shoreline environment both esthetically and environmentally, including tidal protection.

The "sailing club functions" should be retained, Sokol said, although "maybe not in the same location."

West Vancouver resident Don Vonn told council: "What I see (of the Ambleside development at the council meeting) today is quite exciting and quite an improvement."

Elaine Fonseca applauded the closure of the boat ramp to "motorized water vehicles" and the removal of the floral clock: "I think this space should be open for all the public. I think this is an exciting opportunity for all the community."

Coun. Trish Panz said the plan is a coalescence of heritage, arts and culture, the environment, public access and public space.

"This is the public's space, and I think it speaks very well to that."

Council unanimously supported the project.

A public hearing surrounding the decommissioning of the boat ramp and rezoning of this area for a seafood stand is scheduled for Monday May 3, 2010 at 7 p.m. in municipal council chambers.

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