

From: Pacific Spirit Park Society and the Wreck Beach Preservation Society

THE BATTLE OVER WRECK BEACH TOWERS HEATS UP

Vancouver, BC - July 13, 2005 - It has been described as a David vs. Goliath battle. A small coalition of volunteer organizations, students and concerned citizens have taken on a massive public institution over the future of one of the world's most spectacular urban natural viewscales.

Over the next few weeks, the direction of UBC's controversial high-rise development near Wreck Beach will likely be shaped. The first tower is now being completed. The proposed Phase Two, including three more towers, has not yet received a building permit and is now the issue of the controversy. Beach and Park supporters say that the first tower has damaged what was formerly a pristine and unspoiled setting for one of the world's great beaches. The Park and Beach have been compromised.

"What remains of this beautiful viewscape must be preserved," said Judy Williams, Chair of the Wreck Beach Preservation Society (WBPS).

This plea is echoed by some 27,000 people who have signed petitions in the last 15 months calling on UBC to find another way.

"In goods and services, signatories have generated literally millions of dollars to our economy," Williams said.

In less than 54 hours this summer, over 3000 persons have signed a petition calling for comprehensive public consultation and supporting the GVRD Staff line-of-sight which would preserve the remaining panorama viewscape from Wreck Beach toward the forested cliff tops.

Of those 3000 persons, 500 have been students and 200 have been alumni from UBC. Visitors from all provinces in Canada except PEI, 45 communities within BC but outside the Lower Mainland, 30 states in the US, and 18 foreign countries in addition to thousands of Lower Mainland residents, have supported preservation of Wreck's magnificent vistas.

Beach and Park supporters have called on UBC to consider alternatives and find ways to build student housing without piercing the tree line along the edge of Point Grey.

"Vancouver needs the calming influence and inspiration Wreck Beach provides; it literally replenishes our souls," Williams said. "A recent definitive wellness study of the impact of green spaces and wilderness on the health of urban dwellers was released from Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. It documents the literal healing benefits of our natural spaces, in particular, those near water bodies," continued Williams.

Efforts to kickstart a public consultation process fizzled this spring when UBC failed to develop a program that was acceptable to the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). Now, GVRD is starting to ask some hard questions about the remaining three towers and seems poised to prevent UBC from further encroachment on the viewscape.

The issue is expected to receive lively and probably heated debate at the following two meetings:

- July 20, 2005- GVRD/UBC Joint Committee Meeting, 5-7 p.m., Room 216, Student Union Building (6138 Student Union Boulevard), UBC Campus. The public consultation process and timeline will be debated at this meeting. Public and students will be speaking.
- July 29, 2005- Full GVRD Board Meeting, 9:00 a.m., 4330 Kingsway, 2nd Floor Board Room. The full GVRD Board is expected to vote on Phase Two of the UBC Towers project. Public and students will be speaking.

Both WBPS and Pacific Spirit Park Society (PSPS) encouraged GVRD directors, in a special July 8 joint meeting of the Parks and Communities Committees, to take the initiative to support GVRD Staff recommendations to preserve Vancouver's viewscape legacy.

One GVRD director said following a tour of the Wreck Beach that "UBC's photos trivialize the impact on the beach and that when you are standing there, you realize the value of that beach."

The following GVRD motion passed unanimously at the July 8, 2005 meeting:

- " a) Advise UBC that the Board recommends that for the Marine Student Residences - Phase Two not be visible during spring/summer foliage season from Beach Zones 'A', 'B' and 'C' as illustrated in Attachment 1;
- b) Advise UBC that Board relaxation of recommendation (a) to no visibility of the Marine Student Residences - Phase Two during spring/summer foliage season from Beach Zones 'A' and 'B' (including sight lines through gullies) and a maximum height limit of 53 metres including appurtenances be considered if UBC can demonstrate that:
- i. they have explored all reasonable location and sight-design alternatives to minimize the visual impact from Beach Zone 'C';
 - ii. there is no alternative that can be achieved without unreasonable hardship on the UBC student housing program;
 - iii. the absence of any visual impact on Phase Two buildings on Beach Zones 'A' and 'B' has been proven by an independent and verifiable study using tests acceptable to GVRD Staff;
- c) Direct staff to review the GVRD-UBC Memorandum of Understanding regarding the process for institutional development that may have an impact on Pacific Spirit Regional Park. "

For more information please contact:

Judy Williams - Chair, WBPS
 Email: judyw@wreckbeach.org
 Home Phone: 604-856-9598
 Cell Phone: 604-308-6336 (cannot be reached if at home so try home number)

James Loewen - Media Relations, WBPS
 Email: james3d@shaw.ca
 Phone: 604-689-9697

Kim Siren - Director, PSPS
 Email: siren1@telus.net
 Phone: 604-738-5233

Panoramic view of Wreck Beach

http://www.alternatives.com/wbps/towers/panorama_comp.jpg

Low tide view of first tower

http://www.alternatives.com/wbps/towers/tower_low_tide.jpg

Presentation to special July 8 joint meeting of the GVRD Parks and Communities Committees

PowerPoint Slides: http://www.alternatives.com/wbps/towers/protecting_park_values.pps

Narration: http://www.alternatives.com/wbps/towers/protecting_park_values_script.html

Other photos of tower visibility from the beach, line-of-sight (viewscape) drawings, background reports and presentations available upon request.

Questions to Ask:

Does UBC have a Plan B? If not, why not?

What alternative locations and designs have UBC considered?

What is the rent for student housing at the first Marine Tower?

If UBC's goal is to provide affordable student housing, why is the cost for rental accommodation at the first tower priced at around the average for Vancouver's West Side, according to UBC Housing and Canada Mortgage and Housing figures for 2004?

How much revenue does UBC project it will generate by developing campus lands for market housing and commercial space over the next ten or twenty years? How much of that revenue will be used to pay for student housing?

Did You Know?

- Wreck Beach is a world-famous clothing-optional beach
- Many of the world's most well known guidebooks encourage tourists to visit Wreck Beach, describing it as one of the world's great beaches, very beautiful, pristine, and undeveloped (and unspoiled).
- Wreck Beach is arguably Vancouver's busiest beach, not to mention its most naturally beautiful beach
- 58% of Pacific Spirit Park users visit Wreck Beach

Recent Press on Wreck Beach:

"Wreck's Serene Theatre: plan for apartment towers threatens a time-honoured communal project," by Jack Christie, Georgia Straight, vol 39, No. 1957, June 23-30, 2005.

"The tide is high, but we're holding on: as development encroaches on Canada's urban beaches, people are realizing the restorative power of sand," by Chantal Eustace, Dose, Vancouver, July 4, 2005.

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