

MEDIA RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**UBC Towers Violate GVRD Resolution
Proposed Next Phase of Towers More Visible from Beach**

VANCOUVER, B.C. -- October 6, 2005 -- UBC held public meetings yesterday, to inform the public of its plans to build yet more high rises adjacent to Pacific Spirit Regional Park. At the Open House meeting, UBC released images showing the impact of these new towers on the view from Wreck Beach. The images show that the proposed towers will be even more visible from the Beach than the existing tower. Worse yet, the proposed towers will violate a GVRD Board resolution of July 29, 2005, which dictated that any new towers not be more visible than the first tower.

The GVRD, which has authority over planning on campus, resolved that UBC will only be allowed to build more towers visible from the beach if UBC meets certain conditions. First, UBC must prove that it has explored all reasonable alternative designs and alternative locations for student housing. Second, UBC must prove that any other alternative design or location would cause unreasonable financial hardship on its student housing program. And no matter what, the GVRD resolution prohibits UBC from building any tower that would impact the view from that part of the beach which is currently unscathed by the existing tower.

"The two towers will loom over much more of the beach than we feared," said James Loewen, vice-chair of the Wreck Beach Preservation Society. "They will ruin the natural back drop of Wreck Beach. UBC promised not to expose any more of the beach to views of towers, but clearly if these towers are built as proposed it's a broken promise. Shame on UBC," continued Loewen.

The public meetings were a 4 pm Open House that was immediately followed by a Town Hall meeting at 7 pm where UBC presented its Phase Two plans to build two more 18 storey towers, in addition to the Phase One 18 storey tower already built.

At the Town Hall meeting, members of the public, including students, alumni, faculty, and members of the Wreck Beach Preservation Society and Pacific Spirit Park Society, almost unanimously opposed UBC's new development plan. Speaker after speaker urged UBC not to build the new high-rises, charging that they will further impact the beautiful views enjoyed by beach visitors. Despite this near-universal opposition, UBC Properties Trust intends to submit its plans to the UBC Advisory Urban Design Panel today, October 6, without amending them in any way to reflect public concern.

"We are extremely skeptical about UBC's willingness to actually incorporate public feedback and input into its design," said Judy Williams, chair of the Wreck Beach Preservation Society. "The public comment period extends to October 31, 2005. Yet UBC is pushing to have its building design approved immediately, before the public has had a full opportunity to comment," Williams' continued.

At the Town Hall meeting, UBC was unable to demonstrate that it had truly considered alternative locations and site designs. WBPS has presented alternative locations, and alternative building designs, to both the GVRD and UBC; however UBC appears not to have considered these alternatives. WBPS has provided an alternative architectural design, demonstrating how UBC could easily lower the proposed 18 story towers, while maintaining virtually the same number of student beds in the original design.

Many at the Town Hall meeting said there is much underutilized space at UBC that could be used for student housing, making up any shortfall that would result if the towers were lowered.

Wreck Beach is part of Pacific Spirit Regional Park, which is protected from development impacts by its Regional Park Management Plan and by the Official Community Plan (OCP), a bylaw of the GVRD. Any towers built higher than the GVRD line-of-sight analysis are not in compliance with the OCP. The OCP requires all new development by UBC to protect and preserve Park values.

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Questions

1. What does GVRD plan to do now that UBC's latest Phase Two plan does not follow GVRD's July 29 resolution?
2. Will UBC incorporate public feedback and input into its design?

Backgrounder

In February 2004, UBC announced plans to build towers on the bluffs above Pacific Spirit Park's Wreck Beach.

On April 10, 2004, WBPS retained a professional firm to help conduct a visual impact study by raising a blimp to the exact height of the towers closest and farthest from the cliff, at the towers' exact location. Only those two towers were measured because of the expense and the Society's limited budget. The height of the blimp is clearly shown in the top right hand corner of the photo that was later used to illustrate the view of the towers from Wreck Beach. On May 3, 2004, WBPS released an illustration produced by an architectural grad student who took UBC's own plans and measurements and superimposed the closest and farthest towers onto a photograph taken April 10, 2004. The illustration accurately portrayed UBC's original plan of the tower now built (Phase One) and towers yet to be built (Phase Two).

On or before May 17, 2004, Dennis Pavlich, VP of External and Legal Affairs for UBC, said that the tower farthest from the cliff edge (the Phase One tower now built) would not be visible from Wreck Beach and UBC would proceed to build the towers despite widespread community opposition and no public hearing.

On November 22, 2004, UBC announced plans to drop the height of the Phase One tower. UBC was forced to lower that rear tower to 18 storeys when it was discovered that their original plan did not comply with the Official Community Plan for Electoral Area A, a bylaw of the GVRD adopted on July 25, 1997. UBC is part of Electoral District A, which is administered by the GVRD. The GVRD has the authority to regulate building guidelines on the UBC site in relation to their impact on the adjacent park and beach.

Petitions were launched by the WBPS where, to date, over 40,000 people have signed calling on UBC to find another way. 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. 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.

On July 6, 2005, Tourism Vancouver issued a letter asking the GVRD to preserve the viewsapes near the tip of Point Grey, at Wreck Beach, and including portions of Pacific Spirit Park. Many international and local guidebooks refer visitors and tourists to Wreck Beach, as do six Tourism Vancouver information centres, describing Wreck as "one of the worlds' great beaches", "very beautiful", "undeveloped (and unspoiled)", and "pristine".

The GVRD has echoed the concerns of the public about the impact on the pristine, natural views of the cliffs from the beach, on the privacy of beach visitors, and on cliff stability and erosion. On October 29, 2004, the GVRD passed three resolutions regarding the development. The first expressed opposition to any development that compromises the historical viewscape and the privacy of Wreck Beach from all areas of exposed beach at low tide. The second advocated that UBC release its background reports to the public, and the third requiring UBC to conduct a full public review, including consultation with the Musqueam, regarding the impact of the development on Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

Unfortunately, UBC still wasn't listening -- prompting the GVRD, at its full Board meeting on July 29, 2005, to pass a motion directing UBC to improve its public consultation process and not build towers visible during the spring/summer foliage season from the beach -- or demonstrate that UBC has explored all reasonable locations and site design alternatives, and prove that there is no alternative that can be achieved without unreasonable hardship to UBC's student housing program. The full resolution passed July 29 is:

" That the GVRD Board:

- a) Advise UBC that the Board recommends that 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 [of the report dated July 8, 2005, titled 'Pacific Spirit Regional Park and UBC's Marine Drive Student Residences-Phase Two'];
- b) Advise UBC that the Board recommends 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' and a maximum height limit of 53 meters including appurtenances be considered if UBC can demonstrate that:
 - i) they have explored all reasonable locations and site 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 a verifiable study acceptable to GVRD and UBC staff; and
 - iv) if any issues cannot be resolved by GVRD and UBC staff, that the matter be referred to the GVRD-UBC Joint Committee co-Chairs;
- 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; and
- d) Reconfirm UBC develop consultation guidelines that includes broad consultation, sufficient advance notice, and a process for incorporating suggestions into any final outcome. "

Option (b) means the GVRD has the final say where UBC has to come back to the GVRD Board if they can't adhere to (a) or (c).

At the July 29 GVRD meeting, the WBPS presented alternate locations for student housing, as well as alternative building designs for the Phase Two towers site. A full range of locations and design alternatives now exist, including a redesign of the Phase Two site where WBPS's architectural consultant demonstrated how UBC could lower the towers significantly, while maintaining virtually the same number of student beds as originally intended at the Phase Two site. The WBPS's design lowers the tower's height and adds floors to the lower connective building.

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