

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

South Granville Hospice Fights Proposed Townhouse Development

The well-tended grounds of Vancouver Hospice are a peaceful oasis for the over 150 Vancouver residents who go there each year to die. The view from the north windows - of tranquil trees and open sky - comprise a handful of the precious final moments patients will experience at the end of their lives. The transport of bodies from the back lane currently provides ample privacy for loved ones who have gathered to say their final, heart-wrenching goodbyes. Family members are able to easily access the parking spots at the back of the hospice, and other visitors can readily find free parking on nearby Connaught Drive. Service vehicles, including ambulances and funeral hearses, are able to come and go as required.

This could all be severely impacted if the City of Vancouver approves a rezoning application for a 21-unit townhouse development proposed for 4575 Granville St; the property directly adjacent to the hospice. The proposal has been submitted to the City of Vancouver under *the Interim Rezoning Policy for Affordable Housing Choices*. The policy is a pilot project which provides for the rezoning of 20 single residential properties to develop high-density market rental developments throughout the city. If approved, the development will not only affect patient privacy, access, parking and noise; but will completely obstruct the view from the entire north side of the hospice.

“This development will radically affect the private and peaceful environment we have so carefully created at the hospice,” says Vancouver Hospice Society (VHS) Executive Director Simin Tabrizi. “An environment that is absolutely essential to the quality end-of-life and bereavement care we provide.”

The units in the proposed development will be offered at market rates, which are well above what the average family or individual in Vancouver can afford. “While we support the City of Vancouver’s initiative to provide affordable housing, this proposal undermines everything we have done to integrate into the neighbourhood,” says VHS Board Chair Stephen Roberts. “The homeowner, who is also the developer, stands to profit by taking advantage of a policy that is intended to create more affordable rental housing. This is not an appropriate location for what is essentially a progressive experiment.”

The proposal calls for a rezoning of the 17,502 sq. ft. property sandwiched between the hospice and a single family home on the southeast corner of Connaught Drive. If rezoned, the 2-storey house will increase to 3.5 storeys, and a single family home will become 21 units; 63% of which will be 3 bedrooms. The proposed 32-spot underground parking lot will require laneway access, causing a dramatic increase in traffic along the narrow one-car lane; the only vehicle access to the hospice.

The construction phase of the new development, with an anticipated two-year duration, will not only severely disrupt patients and families, but could lead to a complete closure of the hospice. This would force patients to rely on emergency services and acute care admissions at local hospitals, and dedicated staff to seek employment elsewhere.

“I am seriously concerned about the immediate impact of the construction on our ability to provide hospice care to our patients and loved ones,” says VHS Medical Director Dr. Catriona Aparicio. “We have a very high occupancy rate, and if we are forced to close, this will significantly impact the provision of hospice care in Vancouver.”

The hospice provides a much-needed service for Vancouver residents seeking end-of-life and bereavement care. With only 36 hospice beds in Vancouver, any closure (even temporarily) of the 8 beds provided by VHS would dramatically reduce that supply. At a cost per hospice bed of approx. \$500 per day versus approx. \$2000 per day for a hospital bed, it makes economic sense to ensure access to the specialized palliative care patients receive in a hospice setting.

Barry Johnson's wife, Nancy, died at the hospice in April, 2015. Nancy was a long-time volunteer who helped raise money to build the hospice. After receiving a devastating cancer diagnosis, she spent her final weeks as a patient at the hospice; the very home she helped create. "We all knew it was our last spring together," says Johnson. "Our family would sit with her on the garden patio enjoying the peaceful environment." He adds: "My family asks that the city not allow the rezoning of this property. The prolonged construction noise and disruption would be unbearable for patients and family members, and vehicle access to the site would be chaotic and congested."

VHS has a long history of community involvement and grassroots support in Vancouver. The organization was formed by a group of volunteers, nurses and physicians from within the palliative care community. Their goal was to build freestanding hospices where individuals with life-limiting conditions could live with dignity during their final days, and where families and friends could feel supported. A large group of dedicated volunteers worked tirelessly to raise funds over a period of 10 years to purchase and build the property, and transform it into the warm, peaceful hospice it is today.

In their renovation plans, they took careful consideration to minimize the impact on the community as much as possible. The site was carefully selected to ensure that it met the needs of patients and families, while not causing undue disruption to neighbours. While there were some initial concerns by neighbours about the compatibility of a hospice in a mainly single family neighbourhood, the hospice has had excellent relations with its neighbours since opening in 2014.

Tabrizi says the hospice has been contacted by many supporters who strongly oppose the project, as well as concerned neighbours. "They understand the vital importance of the work we do here," she says. "Death and dying will affect each and every one of us. We believe that the rights of Vancouver citizens in need of quality end-of-life and bereavement care must be taken into consideration when making development decisions of this magnitude. The City has a choice of where to locate these projects," she adds. "We can't relocate."

Representatives from the hospice plan to attend an upcoming Open House hosted by the City of Vancouver on Thursday, April 19th, 2018, at 5:00 pm at the Shaughnessy Height United Church (1550 West 33rd Avenue). Media representatives are invited to attend.

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LINKS:

Online Petition: <https://www.change.org/p/gregor-stop-townhouse-development-next-door-to-hospice>

Information Flyer: <http://www.vancouverhospice.org/>

Rezoning Application: <http://rezoning.vancouver.ca/applications/4575granville/index.htm>

Nancy Johnson Vancouver Sun article:

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/health/pete+mcmartin+fundraising+from+bedside/10962993/story.html>