

**FEATURE** Pandering to NIMBY trims pizzazz – and innovative public space – from new Vancouver projects

# Going bland

GLEN KORSTOM/WI STAFF

WESTERN INVESTOR

**V**igorous protests over major Vancouver development proposals such as **Paragon Gaming Corp.**'s mega-casino attached to BC Place are proof that the city's way of soliciting community input is broken, say critics.

Architects, designers and real estate consultants believe more consultation is needed earlier in the process to provide clarity and reduce the chance the public will be surprised with projects that some call "spaceships" that land without warning.

"It's not developers that are the enemy. The enemy is the flawed process that the city uses for rezoning large development sites," architectural designer **Annabel Vaughan** told city council in March at a public hearing into **Rize Alliance Properties Ltd.**'s plan to build a 19-storey tower at the corner of East Broadway and Kingsway Avenue.

"The current public process brings out the worst in everyone; developers and architects design projects in isolation and then land spaceships into neighbourhoods," said Vaughan, who is a principal at **publicLAB RESEARCH + DESIGN** and a sessional instructor at the **BC Institute of Technology**.

The city consulted residents in the leadup to November 2010, when council passed the Mount Pleasant Community Plan (MPCP) and designated three sites in Mount Pleasant as ideal for towers:

- the **IGA** property on Main Street and East 14th Avenue;
- Kingsgate Mall; and
- the Rize Alliance site across Kingsway Avenue from Kingsgate Mall.

The problem, say members of the **Residents Association of Mount Pleasant (RAMP)**, which opposed Rize's plan to build the 19-storey

tower on the site, is that the city never specified in the community plan how tall a tower would be built on the Rize site.

Rize originally designed a 26-storey tower but has since reduced the height, though not enough for RAMP activists who prefer the size of the 10-storey structures built on West Broadway.

Developer **Will Lin** shrugs off many of the protesters as simply "coming to the table too late."

He's confident that he has followed the MPCP, which both council and the community endorsed, and believes protests are a natural part of living in a democracy.

"[RAMP] is entitled to voice their opinion," Lin told *Business in Vancouver*.

Changes to the original 2010 Rize proposal have already jettisoned 30 rental homes, 32 rental artist live-work homes and a 9,200-square-foot artist production space that was to be donated to the city, according to **Chris Volland**, vice-president of development for Rize Alliance.

The Rize plan, approved in late April after a series of public hearings, still includes a \$6.25 million community contribution for local amenities and affordable housing, Volland said.

## Marine Gateway

**PCI Group** faced community protests two years ago when it revealed designs for its Marine Gateway project, which resembled stacked containers in an innovative and controversial design.

PCI altered its designs to a more standard podium and towers.

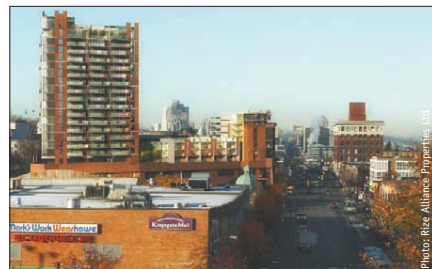
They proved so popular that 11,000 people expressed interest with marketer **Rennie Marketing Systems** before the homes went on sale March 17, and the towers' 415 units sold in four hours.

The new design is "not bland but it is not wow either. It is normal," said Vancouver real-



**LEFT, BEFORE:** Marine Gateway's original bold design generated local protests. "Looks like stacked containers," one critic quipped. **RIGHT, AFTER:** Marine Gateway's damped-down final design. (Its 415 condominiums still sold out in four hours.)

**RIGHT:** Rize Alliance's proposed 19-storey condo tower at Kingsway and East Broadway.



tor **Brian Lau** of **Re/Max City Realty**. "If [PCI] spent more money on architecture they would not have been pricing 200 homes for under \$350,000."

**Brook Pooni Associates Inc.** principal **Gary Pooni** said that the biggest weakness in the city's consultation process is that too often it relies on traditional public hearings and doesn't effectively use technology.

"The public hearing process has been around for over 100 years, and it came from people lining up at City Hall, with or without their pitchforks," he said. "They've got to find a better way to engage the next generation."

**Michael Green Architecture** principal **Michael Green** plans to launch a website soon

to seek public input for how to challenge conventions in Vancouver architecture.

He also moderated an April discussion with innovative Danish architect **Bjarke Ingels** on that topic at the Chan Centre.

Ingels has a cult following in global architectural circles and has designed a twisty, 49-storey tower, modelled after New York City's Flatiron Building, for **Westbank Projects Corp.** next to the Granville Bridge at Beach Avenue and Howe Street.

"We don't have a name for the website yet," Green said, "but it will be about how to transform Vancouver with ideas that don't necessarily conform."

Good luck with that. ♦