

FEATURE Questions swirl as Squamish First Nation plans towers in Vancouver and the North Shore

Band plans spook cities

GLEN KORSTROM/BIV

WESTERN INVESTOR

The Squamish First Nation's (SFN) plan to next year start building two towers expected to be 35 and 28 storeys tall on eight acres of reserve land at the south end of Burrard Bridge is creating both excitement and fear, because the SFN have so far said little about the project.

"We don't have anything for an interview," SFN spokeswoman **Krisandra Jacobs** told *Business in Vancouver*.

"Our department of intergovernmental relations, natural resources and revenue are reviewing the project, so we don't have an update."

Some fear that the project, set to launch construction next year, will impact area residents when hundreds of future residents use city services.

Former Vancouver mayor **Sam Sullivan**, however, likes the concept of highrises north of the **Molson Brewery** site on Burrard Street – a project that he believes Vancouver city council would never have approved had the towers required civic approval.

"Close to the downtown core is where you get the benefits of density," he said. "The SFN could be doing a real service for the city by helping people to rethink densification."

He expects that the Squamish will enter into a similar service agreement with the city to the one that the **Musqueam Indian Band** (MIB) has for developments on its reserve land.

The MIB compensates the city to connect



First Nation band plans to build two towers at the southern end of the Burrard Bridge near the Molson Brewery site, shown at the top left of this photo.

its projects to city services such as sewer and water. Residents on Musqueam land also use city streets, parks, recreation centres and libraries. So, compensation to the city for the non-property-tax-paying residents on Musqueam land is similar to what the city would be able to charge a private developer and home owners were the development built on non-reserve land, Sullivan said.

Not all service agreements are as equitable.

North Shore

North Vancouver District councillor **Alan Nixon** is concerned that the **Tsleil-Waututh Nation** (TWN) is not sufficiently compensating his district for the use of services from

about 1,300 residents at the rapidly growing 450-home Raven Woods development near Deep Cove.

The TWN started developing condominiums that it then marketed on a long-term, pre-paid-lease basis to buyers.

Development proceeded through the years and service agreements that were based largely on a flat fee were renewed several times, Nixon said.

"We now have in the order of 1,300 [non-natives] living on the TWN reserve," said Nixon. "Those 1,300 non-members definitely consume and avail themselves of services that the taxpayers of the **District of North Vancouver** pay for."

Nixon would like to move to a system

where the TWN pays an equivalent amount for using city services as nearby North Vancouver residents.

He is also concerned about the impact of potential future SFN development south of Park Royal on the 528 acres of reserve land that the band controls.

The SFN does not require civic approval for development on that land, just as the SFN does not require Vancouver civic approval for development near the Burrard Bridge.

"Over time, the SFN are looking at several thousand residents in towers near Park Royal," Nixon said. "What is the impact of those several thousand residents on the North Shore transportation network, the hospital network?"

The SFN, meanwhile, has been careful about what it releases to the media.

Secretive

Chief **Gibby Jacob** told media in 2010, when the SFN signed a memorandum of understanding and protocol agreement with the **City of Vancouver**, that the SFN's Burrard towers would likely cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

The SFN has not yet said how it is financing the project or what interest rate it's paying.

Financing can be a problem for a First Nation that wants to build multi-family projects on its land because prospective future residents are not able to buy title to the homes. Financial institutions, pension funds or other lenders similarly have no recourse for projects on reserve land.

"They can't register liens," explained Nixon, who sits on Metro Vancouver's new aboriginal relations committee and was a longtime member of the Lower Mainland treaty advisory committee. ♦