

Tenants question need for another highrise

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Fearing the loss of affordable housing, tenants of a West Side apartment building want the city to deny a development permit application that would force them to move.

Antony Vyhnak has lived at 1076 West 14th Ave. near Spruce Street with his wife Debi for 11 years. He recently learned about plans to demolish the building to make way for a 12-storey, 42-unit building.

The Vyhnaaks pay \$700 a month for their one-bedroom apartment in a building that allows pets, including Libby, their 50-pound border collie mix.

Vyhnak says it's difficult to find affordable housing in the area, particularly apartments that accept animals.

He cites one building across the street that charges more than \$1,000 a month for a one-bedroom. "There's a lack of affordable apartments in Vancouver," said Vyhnak who works in hotel maintenance. "We can afford \$1,000 bucks a month, but ouch."

The couple subscribed to a rental guide, which they said hasn't been much help, and they're checking out housing co-ops, but waiting lists for co-ops are lengthy.

Vyhnak said tenants received notices from the landlord about a month ago, indicating the building was being sold and it would be demolished at the end of October. They were offered reductions in rent if they signed an agreement to stay until the end.

He's watched crews dig test holes around the property for soil samples to determine the foundation. "It looks like the developer has already figured, 'Oh, I've got the go-ahead. This is going to be a piece of cake-nobody's going to object to this,'" Vyhnak said.

Although Vyhnak said he's not against growth and development, he questions why highrise condos are being built in quieter residential neighbourhoods like his, which he noted is near L'cole Bilingue elementary school.

Kenneth Vint, another long-term tenant, is equally opposed to the proposed development. He has a dog and has lived in his apartment for eight years, paying \$735 per month in rent.

Vint, who's about to undergo heart surgery this week, is on medical employment insurance, and worries where he'll live if the building is knocked down. "I took a year to find this place," he said. "It's very hard to find apartments here with pets and then whatever you find the rent is so high you can't afford it, especially in this area."

Vint also noted many tenants are confused by a City of Vancouver notice about the proposed development, which lists 1088 West 14th Ave. as the address of the building. That that will be the new address if the development is approved, but not everyone is aware of that point.

"That makes it confusing for people," he said. "If they're doing it that way to make people confused, it shows they don't want people to know exactly which building it is."

The city is accepting comments about the development application from tenants who will be displaced if it is approved, as the application falls under conditional approved use. Tenants have until May 15 to deliver comments by letter or email.

While Vyhnak has sent a letter outlining his objections, he's not convinced the city will reject the development proposal.

"But we're hoping the city will take the side of the little guy for once," he said.

A call to the city was not returned by the Courier's deadline. The management company of the building did not have contact information about the developer at press time. The current registered owner is listed as Tiara Investments Inc., but it could not be reached for comment.

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