

Check city's plans for your neighbourhood

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REAL ESTATE MATTERS

You moved into your home just a little more than a year ago and suddenly you've received an official notice in the mail advising you that the empty field next door is no longer going to be your favourite green space. Instead it will soon be home to a townhouse development just like the one in which you live.

This is a common occurrence new homeowners are increasingly facing as growth in the Lower Mainland continues at what seems like an explosive pace.

New homeowners who move into areas where growth is continuing often fail to realize that the tranquility that preceded the development that brought them their new home may disappear when the pace of development continues around them. They take too much for granted, make assumptions about an area, fail to do their due diligence before moving to an area or fail to keep up with local decisions.

Your new home was the result of change that occurred in your new neighbourhood. When does that change stop? Can you legitimately declare "not in my backyard" — the protest call of the NIM-BYs — pulling up the drawbridge behind you soon after completion of your own new home and those of your immediate neighbours?

At a recent public meeting attracting a number of high-rise residents protesting commercial activities in the downtown area surrounding them, one resident claimed to have a legitimate right to protest change, having lived in the neighbourhood for "years." The "years" turned out to be two years—just about the length of time that residential development first

signalled huge change in an area that was once exclusively an industrial and commercial neighbourhood.

How long do you need to live in a neighbourhood before your protest voice is a legitimate expression of neighbourhood sentiment?

Certainly, your concerns are taken more seriously if you are informed, if you have done your homework and know what is allowed under formal plans and what is not. Claiming ignorance is simply not an excuse for protesting the next wave of change that follows the development of your home.

When you buy a fee simple lot or single family home, you are provided with a disclosure statement that is little more than a checklist telling you about your property and some of its history. No details are provided about the surrounding neighbourhood and adjoining current and future land uses.

If you buy a townhouse or condominium in a multi-family development, the disclosure statement you receive is more detailed and if your development consists of a number of phases, the disclosure document will provide some details about future plans for your particular development. But it will still lack information about surrounding land uses.

You should try to obtain some basic information from city hall before purchasing any property. Simply stop by the planning department at your local city hall and get a copy of the city's Official Community Plan. It provides a general description of plans for future growth.

Also get a copy of your neighbourhood plan, if one exists, or in the city of Vancouver the document may be an Official Development Plan for a particular district.

Finally, get a zoning map and check the zoning for properties surrounding the one you plan to purchase. Get the list of uses permitted in that zone.

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