

The 14,650 coincidence

By Jim Wright

Slightly abridged from a blog post published on the Garden City Lands blog at <http://gardencitylands.wordpress.com/2008/04/24/the-14650-coincidence/>.

A reader recently clued me in that the population of the proposed development on the Garden City Lands development can be estimated with much simpler calculations than we've previously used in this blog. The idea was to use Richmond city staff's own estimates of the total floor area, as provided on page 10 of the Dec. 13, 2007, staff report to council.

Assuming that development would occur on 50% of the land, staff calculated the total floor area as a maximum of 6,294,800 square feet. The actual total would be very close to that figure because:

- Developers build to the maximum allowed.
- In this case, the master plan developers would plan and approve the rezoning. (Naturally the city would approve the rezoning too, but the developers are in the stronger position to impose their wishes.)

That figure does not include parking and balconies. In effect, it also doesn't include common areas in the buildings either, since Richmond's zoning typically allows a sort of bonus of about 10% extra floor area for "public amenities" such as hallways. To estimate the population, we therefore only need to (a) divide the total floor area by the floor area of an average unit and (b) then multiply by the number of people in an average household.

Let's be generous and consider that the average unit would be 1200 square feet. For the number of units, the calculation is simply $6,294,800 \text{ sq. ft.} \div 1200 \text{ sq. ft./unit} = 5,245 \text{ units}$. For the average household, we can simply use the Richmond average in the 2006 census, 2.8 people. Assuming one household per unit, the calculation is this: $5,245 \text{ households} \times 2.8 \text{ people/household} = 14,686 \text{ people}$.

The total floor area might be slightly lower, but the average size of a unit would likely be lower too, so we've come up with a pretty realistic figure for the population. The funny thing about it is how well it supports what Richmond citizens have been saying all along about the amount of parkland the Garden City Lands agreements would make available: just enough to provide green space for the development.

Bear in mind that there the city has a standard of 3.25 acres of park within the City Centre for each thousand people living within the City Centre. The maximum number of acres of available parkland in the development, if it goes ahead, is 47.6 acres. To find out how many residents that would support, we can use another simple calculation: $47.6 \text{ acres} \div 3.25 \text{ acres}/1,000 \text{ residents} = 14,646 \text{ residents}$.

Bringing those figures together, the developed Garden City Lands would have a population of 14,686 and enough City Centre park for 14,646 residents. Rounding those numbers slightly, we can say that the development would be accompanied by just enough park to meet the City Centre park requirement for its own population of 14,650.

Of course, Richmond's park requirements are more complex. In a slightly confusing but useful way, the City Centre standard only supplements the main standard (and does not replace it). If the Garden City Lands development goes ahead, then somewhere in Richmond a lot more park will have to be found to meet that main city-wide park requirement, which is 7.66 acres per thousand people. But that's another story. You can read about it on the new "Our Stanley Park" page.