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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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Shipyards neighbours at odds

A controversy brewing for over a year in North Vancouver's popular Shipyards District continues to simmer even as the pace of discussion to find a solution has picked up over the summer. At issue is an application from shipbuilder/repairer Seaspan to expand its existing drydock operation - which gives the area its name.

To meet growing business demand and create 100 new jobs, Seaspan has applied to the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority for permission to add two new smaller drydocks and a work pontoon - expanding its operation 40 meters to the west of its existing operations.

Where this gets sticky is that while the Port has jurisdiction over the offshore water lot space, the City of North Vancouver has zoning authority over the land shorefront. A few years ago, the City fostered the development of the Shipyards area, including the construction of high-rise residences that will sit in the shadow of where Seaspan wants to expand its operation.

Some area residents say the westward expansion will make an already bad situation worse - citing dusty air, noise and light pollution from the existing drydock operation that they argue have not been adequately addressed.

Shipyards residents asked Seaspan to consider expanding to the east instead, where Seaspan already has an industrial water lot lease - a position supported by North Vancouver City Council. However, Seaspan says that's not feasible - for both financial and operational reasons.

Decision rests with Port

The decision to approve or deny Seaspan's application rests solely with the Port Authority - an independent federal agency. Rejection of an application to use a water lot already zoned industrial would need to be driven by significant adverse impacts that simply could not be effectively mitigated.

Earlier this summer, Seaspan publicly released its planned mitigation measures and extended its public consultation period to September 14th. I encourage anyone interested to read the consultation document and

provide your online feedback at www.drydockprojects.com.

However, opponents of the westward expansion say the consultation is a stacked deck because it does not encompass consideration of a move to the east. They're not conceding Seaspan's decision to take that option off the table and have asked Seaspan to disclose its detailed rationale for ruling that out.

Path to a solution

As the Member of Parliament for North Vancouver I have a duty of care for the interests of the residents, Seaspan and the broader community.

I have met numerous times over the past year with Shipyards residents and their supporters, with Seaspan, the Port Authority and city officials. Mayor Linda Buchanan and the entire City Council have also taken a keen interest in this issue.

My goal has been to help facilitate a dialogue that encourages deep listening, surfaces key issues, explores options and identifies areas of potential compromise that might lead to a durable solution. I believe there is an opportunity for both sides to build some trust and good will by demonstrating a willingness to listen and act on what is heard.

For Seaspan, that could begin by providing a more detailed rationale for ruling out the eastern option the residents are requesting.

If residents feel they are entering into a sincere dialogue with Seaspan on the merits and challenges of that option, they could reciprocate by entering into a parallel discussion/examination of Seaspan's mitigation plans for a move west - and perhaps through this dialogue, find ways in which Seaspan can more fulsomely address some existing concerns with the drydock operation overall.

While the outcome of all of this is still far from certain, one thing is clear - at the end of the day, the path to a sustainable resolution is likely going to require some compromise on both sides. And for that to occur, there needs to be more genuine dialogue that creates an environment of trust and good will.

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