

August 22, 2024

Open Letter from Friends of Point Grey to City Hall Staff, Mayor and Council

Dear Mayor, Council and City Staff:

Re: Revised Proposal for 4545 West 10th Avenue (Safeway site in Point Grey)

Thank you for posting online BGO's revised rezoning application for [4545 West 10th Avenue](#) for public comment.

Over the past three years, [Friends of Point Grey Village](#) (FPGV) have dedicated hundreds of volunteer hours to this project in recognition that a well-designed development on this large 3-acre site could make a tremendous contribution to the enduring prosperity and livability of Point Grey Village. Vancouver Plan, endorsed by Council in 2022, has clearly articulated the vision for healthy, prosperous neighbourhood centres and in our volunteer capacity we have worked hard to make that vision a reality in our neighbourhood, working closely with the Point Grey Business Improvement Association.

FPGV have evaluated the revised scheme released at the end of July 2024 to determine if community aspirations have been achieved. We regard the following revisions as important improvements:

1. A podium height reduction from six storeys to four storeys and setting the high rise buildings back by 22 feet, from previous proposed 10 feet from the property line to 32 feet, to help maintain the village scale.
2. Additional vehicle entrance/exit off Sasamat Street to provide a second and essential access point.
3. Relocation of the west tower lobby from West 10 to the plaza – reducing the amount of boring frontage on West 10th and resulting in wrapping the westerly commercial unit around onto 10th, providing more pedestrian interest.

We are disappointed that the developer at this stage in the public process continues to propose the bare minimum in terms of community amenity/urban design. For example, the community and the Urban Design Panel asked for a much better designed, larger plaza in an optimum location. In response, BGO made the plaza only 1.2 % larger (100 square feet)

and left it in the same poor location, away from the focal point where it should be in the centre of the block.

The community is aware that Sun Life Insurance bought this site from Empire Company Ltd. with an existing C-2 zoning which permitted one storey commercial and three storeys residential. Sun Life/BGO's acquisition costs presumably reflected those zoning rights. Later, City Council changed the C-2 zoning schedule to permit up to 5 storeys of rental housing in addition to one storey commercial. BGO informed Friends of Point Grey Village at the outset of the project that it wished to build rental housing as the business model for Sun Life, a multinational corporation holding onto financial assets for the long term.

We understand that BGO was willing to build under the existing zoning. City staff and Council intervened and asked BGO to build under the MIRHPP (Moderate Income Rental Housing Pilot Program) and changed the MIRHPP parameters for this particular unusually large development to be eligible. The formula involved density bonuses in exchange for 20% of the rental units to be below market. This proved to be a misguided policy direction on the part of the City, not recognizing the importance of the large site to the future of the village and not understanding the need to have community facilities accompany large increases in density. The well-intentioned MIRHPP policy is badly flawed and was designed for one or two lot infill projects where additional amenities would not be needed or could not reasonably be required for such small projects.

This particular MIRHPP development grew from 6 storeys as permitted under the C-2 zoning, to 14 storeys in its first proposal in May 2022, then 17 and 19 storeys in the initial rezoning application, and now 19 and 21 storeys in July 2024. Despite the large density increases, no community amenities or creative urban design elements are proposed. Density without amenities does not build communities.

BGO will now lobby Council demanding that the project be approved immediately and claim it has responded to community/staff input. The truth is that BGO has wasted its own time as well as City Hall staff and citizens by not responding to input at critical steps in the process. The amount of floorspace BGO can cram on the site remains its prime, narrow focus, not community enhancement.

The MIRHPP program since its inception in 2017 has been modified many times, including significant program changes to reduce subsidy levels required by the development industry. FPGV and the community are asking for similar flexibility in the modification of

20% below market parameter. A reduction in the number of below market units can help finance community amenities such as a childcare centre. Another alternative is that BGO be required to allot a portion of the site for co-operative housing, which would provide truly affordable housing rather than the private sector version of affordability.

We offer the following additional suggestions for improvements:

1. Match density increases with necessary community facilities.

With 571 housing units proposed, both new and current residents require access to necessary community facilities. The provision of a childcare centre is a bare minimum requirement.

We have researched and visited other projects of this scale and found all sorts of imaginative City/developer collaborations on the mezzanine level of a supermarket.

2. Create significant improvements to place-making.

The size, location, ownership and banality of the plaza has received much criticism, stuck at the west end for the developer's convenience without consideration of how to make a lively and dynamic public space and streetscape. We suggest that the plaza be moved to a central location. The shape and entrance of the supermarket can be re-configured to accommodate a central plaza. The large Canadian supermarket chains also have a responsibility to show how creative size and design of the space can contribute to community place-making. A central plaza would be the heart of the village, a place for people to gather.

Ensure perpetual rights of unrestricted public access to the plaza.

Reimagine the western end of the development: We realize that the current plaza location is a result of the developer needing to provide a separation from Point Grey Place, the existing condo building on the south west corner. The placement of one or two storey commercial/institutional buildings in the current plaza location at the western end of the development would allow closer building proximity to Point Grey Place and make good use of the real estate.

Widen 10th Ave sidewalk: We note that the width of the sidewalk has not changed from the last proposal and remains at 19 feet, except for a few minor locations of deeper setbacks. All of the existing 10th Avenue village frontages are too narrow to accommodate

safe, functional public space as well as room for outdoor café/restaurant seating, tree planting, public seating, bike racks and the display of retail goods.

This is the village's opportunity to enhance the public realm by having wider sidewalks at this location. We ask that the sidewalks be increased from 19 feet to at least 22 feet for the entire frontage.

The wider sidewalk will also help make up the deficit in green space on the site through perhaps double rows of tree planting and other landscaping. These public realm improvements should be made with no further increases in density.



An urban designer's impression of what the Safeway development could look like if the City and the developer pursued financial viability in conjunction with community placemaking and amenities.

3. Implement transportation solutions which enhance safety and livability

It is most unusual in an urban setting with densities reaching almost 4 FSR to have an open ramp for truck and car access. This creates much noise and pollution as sound bounces around the walls of the ramp and buildings. We ask that the ramps originating from Sasamat Street be enclosed.

The best urban solutions, particularly in commercial areas where the public realm is so important, often come from a collaboration of the public and private sector. *Vancouver Plan* in Direction 5.2 People First Streets provides many important policies to calm arterials in neighbourhood centres that could be implemented in this project.

No mention has been made so far on how the City can contribute to the quality and safety of the development and the village. One popular idea is a mid-block crosswalk. The 4500 block is over 200 metres long which is 50 metres longer than typical city blocks. A mid-block crosswalk would help create an attractive streetscape and address safety and excessive speed problems.



An urban designer's impression of what a crosswalk could look like connecting the Safeway development to the south side of the street. The sketch imagines a lively, safe, human-scale streetscape as outlined in Vancouver Plan.

4. Provide more functional, livable and affordable housing units

Many residents have pointed out that the units are too small for families with no room, for example, to park a stroller, walker or wheelchair and all the other space requirements for families. There is no indication of which units are handicapped accessible nor how many there are. The guidelines in the MIRHPP policy are still being ignored with respect to housing mix. Given the many flaws in the MIRHPP model, co-operative housing instead of private market housing would be a better enduring solution to the affordability crisis.

Conclusion: A whole village and community should not have to suffer with bad design and lack of community facilities for decades to come because of a mis-applied housing

experiment. We are all anxious to have the development approved and built as soon as possible. The improvements listed above can be implemented through one additional design iteration. We would be happy to meet with you and the developer to discuss these ideas

Friends of Point Grey Village request the developer and the City not to squander this opportunity to create livable density and contribute to the future prosperity of our local businesses. Significant community improvements and good design will only be achieved through clear direction from City staff and Council.

Jean Baird

Chair of Friends of Point Grey Village