

Old building's rehab key to condo trade-off

Some neighbours don't like plan

BY SAM COOPER, THE PROVINCE JULY 15, 2010



Opsal Steel building on East 2nd Avenue in Vancouver is part of a development plan that includes an extra-tall apartment building.

Photograph by: Wayne Leidenfrost, PNG, The Province

Does a dilapidated warehouse with gaping holes in the roof really have "heritage" value?

That's just one of the questions being asked by some business owners riled by a development plan that would trade heritage preservation for an exceptionally tall condo tower in Vancouver's southeast False Creek.

The rezoning proposal by Bastion Development involves rehabilitation and official heritage designation for the Opsal Steel building -- "a prime example of early-1900s construction," according to the developer -- in exchange for bonus density and height in two proposed residential towers flanking the red, barn-like structure.

The plan for a 12-storey tower at 15 East 2nd Avenue and a 24-storey tower at 97 East 2nd Avenue goes to a public hearing next Tuesday at city hall.

Michael Naylor, senior re-zoning planner, said some business owners in the area have complained about the height of the 24-storey tower, which exceeds the area's 15-storey limit.

A staff report calls the response "significant" -- since previous rezoning applications in the area have generated no interest from neighbours.

Tom Shiffman, landlord of a property directly across 2nd Avenue from Opsal Steel, said he doesn't know "how something that is practically ready to fall down retains heritage status," adding that the rehabilitation plan for the rickety 1918 structure is "a bit laughable."

"They're talking about disassembling the building and using the lumber to make a new building," he said.

Shiffman said he supports redevelopment of the site, but argues that a 24-storey tower on 2nd Avenue will open the way for "a big wall of towers on one side and the little industrial ghetto they want to maintain with no views on the other side."

Preet Marwaha of nearby Organic Lives restaurant said he doesn't have a problem with a 24-storey tower as long as Opsal Steel is dismantled, because his clients hate looking at it.

"The building is not much of a landmark. At the end of the day, it's an eyesore," Marwaha said.

The developer did not respond to an interview request by deadline.

scooper@theprovince.com

© Copyright (c) The Province