

Saturday, March-02-19

Mayor and Council,

My name is Kristin Guité, and I am writing to express my support for the Tamitik Status of Women (TSW) Housing Project, and the associated zoning and OCP amendment that is before you now. I am an employee of TSW, however, I am not writing as a representative of the organization, but as an individual.

I came to Kitimat during the KMP boom and decided to stay because I wanted to give back to the community that gave me financial freedom. I blogged about these choices in 2014, 2015 and 2016 here:

<https://kristinguite.blogspot.com/2014/01/mountains-once-more.html>;

<https://kristinguite.blogspot.com/2015/04/catch-up.html>; and

<https://kristinguite.blogspot.com/2016/04/systems-and-difficult-feelings.html>.

I hope you will find the time to read those posts.

A neighbourhood is a place where one feels safety and understanding. It is not an imaginary place where different people get together and everything is a fairy tale of cooperation and harmony; where you have diverse people together, with their diverse opinions, you have conflict. That conflict, however, does not need to be so adversarial.

I understand the expressions of concern that have been voiced by some residents in Kitimat surrounding this project. I myself would want more information if there was a new building proposed close to the home that I have purchased, and I might even have some opinions on a building that would be taller than those typical of my neighbourhood.

At the same time, I know I could never support a campaign against any portion of a project with this much importance, and I cannot believe that the concerns voiced at this juncture of the public hearing process are due to height or any other design related component.

When Mr. Oviatt publicly announced his opposition to the project at the December Public Hearing, where he rallied the Strawberry Meadows neighbourhood around his cause, the words he said were "Strawberry Meadows is not the right place for this project." Mr. and Mrs. Oviatt then offered to \$400,000 to TSW and the District of Kitimat to ensure that the project was not in Kildala neighbourhood. It was in mid-February that the argument shifted from "not here" to "not this design", with both Mr. and Mrs. Oviatt writing the District up until the end of January suggesting alternate locations, with the assumption that they understood the needs of TSW's clients and the project. On February 19, 2019 Mr. Oviatt enhanced his financial buy-off to include construction work, with the knowledge that the significant design changes he says are simple, puts the entire project at risk.

These offers are red herrings.

As the owner of a construction company, and an individual with a great deal of land assets that are being turned into subdivisions and other developments, Mr. Oviatt knows that you must spend money before you are able to get government approvals for any project, and that any work to be completed on a project with any amount of public funding must go through a competition process to ensure that there is no favouritism or nepotism. In my public administration courses, this was taught in the first week of school, and I can't imagine that a man with so much construction experience does not also hold this knowledge. His changing and increasing money gifts are nefarious and distract the community. They perpetuate the cycle of misinformation that he and Mrs. Oviatt have intentionally spread in the community. Do not be fooled, the intention by the Oviatt's is to cripple the project; it isn't about the design. It is about poor and marginalized women having a beautiful building to call home next to a wealthy subdivision.

As some of the wealthiest individuals in Kitimat, I understand that Mr. and Mrs. Oviatt are more likely to expect that the community is built and developed under their guidance and terms, but this is an instance where private monies must hold less power, and where government must protect the vulnerable.

The qualities of a good neighbour include being helpful, affable, hospitable, civil, warm, accommodating, and supportive. The ongoing attacks by the Oviatt's are exactly the opposite of these qualities. When signatures were

collected against the project before the first public hearing in December, if there would have been an honest effort to take correct information to the neighbours, we would be in a very different place today. I believe strongly that the Strawberry Meadows residents would have not been galvanized in the way they have been if it weren't for those ill-informed actions. The perceived infringement of rights by a proposed building can only be explained by willful disregard of publicly available information.

The amount of media coverage the project received, and the number of conversations that I had with individuals living in and around the Kildala neighbourhood had only been positive up until Jack began his campaign. With so much ongoing and early knowledge of the project, I constantly find myself questioning why the Oviatt's campaign against this project only began at the public hearing, and why Jack was very supportive up until that point?

The project is going to change the community, and this is not something that can be denied. The project, however, is an attempt to address the scary parts of change that are coming to Kitimat, and it is not this building that is frightening. Kitimat is on the cusp of dramatic social and economic change. Part of the reason that LNG Canada chose Kitimat is because it was originally planned to be a much larger community than its current population of about 8,000. If Kitimat wants to successfully grow into that community without the social and economic ills that other resource-based economies, like Fort McMurray, have faced then you must plan to mitigate the inevitable harms to come.

Wealth in this way does not allow for quaint country living in the downtown core and any illusion otherwise is a disservice to citizens.

The argument that the design is easily changed puts TSW in a position where the costs would be so prohibitively expensive that BC Housing may decide to pull its funding. If this happens, the project will remain a figment of our imaginations, and you will have done an injustice to the women and children who are going to be harmed because of your decision not to trust one of the oldest women's organizations in the Province that this project with this design meets the needs of the community. I suspect that the challenges and difficulties that this project is currently experiencing is doing very little in telling the Province that Kitimat is a good or easy town to work with.

My husband and I made a tough decision to leave Kitimat in 2018 because we didn't want to raise our child there. We have lived across the world and have seen how unfettered growth, and a lack of government supported social services harms a community and everyone in it. The project that Tamitik Status of Women is proposing counterbalances the socioeconomic catastrophe that is breakneck industrial development. If we had faith that the community and the local government would support and encourage more projects like TSW's, then we would have felt safe enough to stay.

Kitimat is a beautiful town, with beautiful people. In terms of Council's policy making decisions I have witnessed you scale back all the progressive pieces of legislation put before you, and your most vulnerable citizens suffer for it. I have seen your willingness to bow to money over people, and that's not the type of community I want to show my child as they learn about this world.

Prove my husband and I wrong for leaving the community and approve this amendment application. Show people that Kitimat is the inclusive town you all say it is and encourage families to move there as you experience growth and change.

As the late Mr. Roger's said, "Won't you be my neighbour?"

Sincerely,

Kristin Guité

P.S. That women's organizations should permanently struggle for subsistence is intolerable.