

Falling membership has left the club in a tight financial situation; members think Darwin land swap is the best way ahead

Questions over Winter Club land swap proposal

BY BARRY REUGER

The North Shore Winter Club's dream of a new facility on Dollarton Highway was questioned by District of North Vancouver council at the March 4 meeting.

The club plans to build a new \$200-million facility if they could do a land-swap deal with Darwin Developments at the site of the former International School on 2420 Dollarton Highway.

Darwin will swap that for the ownership of the current NSWC property on Keith Road with a proposal to build new residential towers. That land parcel is next to Darwin's proposed Innovation District.

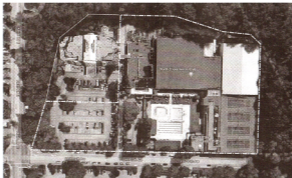
The NSWC's current facility is in need of an estimated \$50 million in repairs and renovations, an amount that NSWC President Jay Frizell says is far beyond the club's capacity to borrow.

Falling membership numbers have left them in a tight financial situation, he says, and the club's members believe the Darwin land swap is the best way to ensure the club's future.

The NSWC began looking for a new location after members voted 94 per cent in favour of relocating.

If built, the club complex will include two full-size ice rinks, and a smaller training rink; fourteen tennis courts; racquet courts; a 25-metre pool, a gymnasium; and a restaurant. The new facility will expand their building from 225,000 to 300,000 square feet.

The club has 2,200 members, two-thirds of whom live in the district, and more than half of whom live east of Highway 1. A further 20,000 non-members each year visit the club to take part in classes and activities.



The club hopes the new facility will draw in new members and cost less to operate.

Mayor Mike Little asked what had changed since the 1980s when the club received council approval to subdivide their property to deal with another cash crunch.

"My concern is some of the history here. About 1982 there was a period of time there where the club itself was not solvent. The club was in a very difficult spot financially and it came to the District for help. But specifically at the time the District said 'this can't happen again'."

In an email, Little said his concern from the 80's was still relevant. He said the club's survival required unlocking value from the property from the then council.

"Even though they were told at the time that they needed to raise their dues to

cover the proper maintenance and replacement of their facility, successive NSWC Boards refused to set aside enough money and here we are again where the survival of the club is based on further up zoning the property."

Councillor Megan Curren suggested that there had been a lack of transparency and wondered about lack of community benefits.

"One of the concerns I first had when I learned about this project was the impact to the community and the fact that the community is not hearing the whole story," she said.

Councillor Lisa Muri also shared Mayor Little's concerns.

"What happened years ago when the district did agree to allow a rezoning in order to fund the club. What's changed? It

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still seems to be that that's the same solution. It's like selling bits of your back yard to pay off your credit card."

Despite the negative response from council, Frizell says that the next step is to prepare a package for the district, outlining the project — the NSWC's needs, and what it would take to renovate their existing home. At that point the NSWC hopes to get direction from council about whether it's worth proceeding, or what elements like traffic studies will be needed next.

Frizell says if the club doesn't get approval, then the plan is to try to start renovating.

"We've been delaying a lot of upgrades because we've been waiting to hear from the district," he said.

When asked if he thinks the current council will support the Darwin project, Frizell says "I will be very surprised if they approve anything. Our hope is to get some direction one way or the other. If there are going to be traffic studies, and area studies and various hoops that we have to go through before anything can be considered, we'd like to get that started so that we're ready three years from now when there may be a new council."