

Mayor recommends ending tenement demolition bylaw

By Patrick Murphy
Municipal Affairs Reporter

A Victoria bylaw banning demolition of older city tenements should be scrapped when it comes up for renewal Feb. 12, Mayor Peter Pollen said Thursday.

Pollen said the two-year-old bylaw had served its purpose and developers should be allowed to proceed with demolitions to build new apartment blocks and condominiums.

Pollen made his comments on a civic affairs program to be shown tonight on Cable 10 television.

The mayor's comments were at odds with one of his senior aldermen who wanted the demolition-freeze bylaw renewed next month.

Ald. Robin Blencoe was one of the proponents of the bylaw when it was introduced in 1981 to prohibit demoli-

tion of low-cost, older apartment blocks and rooming houses.

Council renewed the bylaw last year for one year.

"The vacancy rate is still critical," Blencoe said.

"The vacancies now are in the extremely high-priced accommodation.

"Until there is a real indication that the Capital Regional District's Housing Corp. is going and the city finally makes up its mind about the Godfeldt site (in Victoria West) we need the bylaw.

"It is hypocritical to say get rid of the bylaw when (the housing corporation) is just getting started."

Pollen said the bylaw should be dropped "to get the development industry going again."

"We have a practical response — It is the CRD Housing Corp. That is the instrument for housing."

Pollen said corporation and city overtures to other land holders would provide adequate low-cost housing.

He said the Bishop Cridge church-owned lands at Cook Street and Hillside Avenue could provide 150-200 new units.

He also said a review of the Godfeldt land was needed.

That is city land in Victoria West which was bought for housing seven years ago.

The latest application by Rainforest Housing Co-operative to lease the land for \$216,000 and build 12 townhouses, has been killed by council.

Pollen said that land could hold twice as many houses and the housing corporation could look at using the land.

Blencoe said the bylaw should be retained for another six months.

The Greater Victoria Apartment Owners Association has asked council to drop the bylaw, calling it an impediment to development.

Pollen has the support of Ald. Ron McKenzie, chairman of the Victoria housing advisory committee.

McKenzie also said the bylaw should be abandoned.

"It is creating some very serious distortions in the market at this time.

"It does not allow affordable housing to go ahead now that there is more Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. low-interest mortgage money around."

So far, there has been no recommendation from city staff on the fate of the bylaw.