

Council blocks Beach Hotel changes

Oak Bay News

VICTORIA - Half a metre made all the difference to **Oak Bay** councillors, who rejected variance requests for the proposed **Oak Bay Beach Hotel**.

The variances to the original 2007 plans, among them a half-metre extension of the south wall of two upper floors, were scrutinized at committee of the whole in June and were largely expected to be approved at later council meeting.

But after a lawyer hired by two of the hotel's next-door neighbours outlined concerns with the design changes, council rejected them in a 3-2 vote.

"I can't vote for it without (good) drawings. They just don't show me what you're telling me," said Coun. John Herbert, referring to plans intended to show renderings of the hotel before and after the variances were included.

Councillors **Nils Jensen** and **Pam Copley** also voted against the changes.

Coun. Allan Cassidy, who is an architect, had tried to persuade Herbert that the changes, which included reducing standard-sized balconies to narrow Juliet-style ones, would actually improve the look of hotel's



Oak Bay resident Judd Buchanan stands at the balcony of his condominium overlooking the Oak Bay Beach Hotel site.
Sharon Tiffin/News staff

exterior and provide an angular, stepped profile.

James and Lenore Hopkins live in **Hampshire House**, a condominium building on the south side of the hotel site. They were

represented at the meeting by lawyer Jack Angus, who spoke against the variances.

"The balconies are going in, but the building is going out," he said. "Moving a large building four feet like this is

not a small detail change."

Angus also raised concerns about moving a central terrace stairway to the south side and pointed out that the upper floor roofline was being extended to the west and

east.

The result, he said, would be a building "that may not look like it belongs in Oak Bay."

Hotel developer **Kevin Walker**, sounding weary, defended the proposed changes, saying that Oak Bay's planning department had OK'd adding roof dormers. He also said Juliet balconies would mean more quiet for southerly neighbours and improve esthetics.

Copley disagreed.

"There is a lot more glass in the 2010 drawings," she said of the ocean-facing wall. "The lines are harsher and it has a monolithic look."

Jensen also spoke up about the south wall.

"The penny hadn't dropped until I heard it from Mr. Angus," he said of the potential for the building to move closer to the property line.

"You're going to feel it, and not just a little bit."

With Mayor **Christopher Causton** and Coun. **Tara Ney** absent - Causton has said he was in favour of the proposed changes - councillors **Cassidy** and **Hazel Braithwaite** were out-voted.

Walker promptly left the meeting, missing out on a discussion by councillors about how the variances

might be reintroduced at their mid-July meeting, with perhaps clearer plans or an updated model to study.

Beach Drive resident and former federal cabinet minister **Judd Buchanan** lives across from the hotel construction site.

He wrote a letter to council supporting the Hopkins' concerns, but afterward had mixed feelings about Walker's request being turned down.

"I'm happy and unhappy. I'm not out to do Kevin any damage at all. I happen to like the man. But I just feel council has been too kind, too generous in allowing all the (previous) variances."

Reached at a conference in South Carolina, Causton said he was surprised the variances request package was turned down.

"I am very concerned," he said. "I thought council did all the questioning. We had looked at it and there wasn't any big questions about it ... Quite frankly I didn't think there would be a split vote on it or it would get turned down."

Causton said he will reintroduce Walker's variance request package at a special council meeting in mid-July.