SkyTrain leaves no room for Sears: mall

Proposed Lougheed SkyTrain station will make the Sears site 'useless,' mall management says

By Mike McQuillan

The proposed Lougheed SkyTrain station will force the Sears outlet store to find a new location.

Rick Armour, with Lougheed Mall's management company, said the mall has stopped negotiating with the Rapid Transit Project Office (RTPPO) because it would lead to Sears having to close its doors. The proposed station and bus loop, located on the north side of Lougheed Highway and straddling Austin Avenue, would reduce the store's parking lot so much that Sears will no longer be able to conduct business, said Armour. He also noted the space would be unrentable for future tenants.

"We've chosen not to negotiate with RTPPO. We consider the plan that currently exists is not a good plan," said Armour. "It's detrimental to our site, across the street at the Sears site. There's nothing to negotiate. The only thing to negotiate is the demise of my tenant over there."

"Our position is that the combined use of the site for a bus loop, the extension of Government (Street) and the SkyTrain station, leaves us with a site that is largely useless to us," he added.

Armour said the owners of Lougheed Mall and the Sears site, Ontario Pension Board Realty, will not sell the land to the province so the SkyTrain line and station can be built there. Instead, they have chosen to fight the province when it began the CONTINUED PAGE 2 – SEE ROOM

Christmas light display a gift from the heart

It started out as a simple light display but because Florence Chandra became obsessed with making it perfect, it became the Winter Wonderland of Woodhurst. With the help of boyfriend Dave Beaupreux and other family and friends, the Burnaby woman created a Christmas light display that features over 15,000 lights.

The spectacle can be seen at 7897 Woodhurst Drive.

Chandra took time off work and spent 12 to 18 hours per day labouring over her lights. She began preparing the project in October as a way of honouring her father Michael and raising awareness for the Canadian Diabetes Association.

The display alone took three weeks to complete.

"If it was worth it," Chandra said.

"It was never done before. It was always something my parents did when I was younger. And when I grew up the party was always at someone else's house. When we finally had everything in place I was like: 'Oh my god! It actually turned out. It's very pretty.'"

Both Michael Chandra and Florence's brother Francis suffer from diabetes type II. Michael Chandra was also diagnosed with kidney failure two years ago and is currently on the waiting list to have a kidney transplant.

"He didn't really know why this was going on until just a few days ago when he saw the Canadian Diabetes Association banner being put up. Beforehand he was just overwhelmed watching (Dave and I) working on his house and garden, thinking we were crazy," Florence Chandra said. "When it was all done he thought it was great."

"So too must have B.C. Hydro," Chandra has placed a donation box in front of the home for anyone wishing to make a contribution to the diabetes association.

Five arrested in foiled kidnapping

A Burnaby man is safe after being kidnapped and held for two days. Police have arrested five suspects and charged them with kidnapping and extortion.

Investigators say the man was taken from his 5000-block Carouse Street home Saturday night when three men burst into the residence armed with a machete. The 18-year-old man was blindfolded, forced into the truck of his mother's luxury automobile, and driven to a Vancouver residence.

"The man was held for two days while his life was threatened. The kidnappers demanded more than $225,000 for his safe return."

On Monday afternoon, the victim convinced his captors to take him to his bank at Metrotown Mall where he would be able to obtain the ransom. Burnaby RCMP were alerted once the man and his two kidnappers entered the bank. The suspects were then arrested in the mall's parking lot.

Further investigation led police to a home in the 1900-block of East 2nd Avenue where the man had been held. With the assistance of the Vancouver emergency response team, RCMP arrested two more suspects.

A fifth suspect was taken into custody Tuesday afternoon.
Thieves steal Christmas dinners

Food hampers destined for needy families is stolen before it can be delivered

By Janis Cleugh
Metroloplis News Service

Thieves stole the Christmas spirit last week when they pinched hampers from local families in need.

The hampers were stored in two trucks parked outside the Burquitlam Lions' warehouse on Schoolhouse Street.

Lions members and volunteers had been sorting through the boxes all last week to deliver boxes to 1,100 families in Coquitlam, Burnaby and New Westminster. But culprits tried their way into the vehicles Thursday night - depriving 20 families of their Christmas meal.

"Obviously, someone's eating very well," Lions member Larry Fleming said. "I guess we've made a mistake because the trucks weren't right up against the building. There was still some room for them to get the boxes out. I don't know how they did it," he said.

As well, the trucks broke a window to one of the trucks, in which a small radio. Fleming believes at least three people were involved in the operation, and were monitoring the site while trucks of food were moving in and out last week.

It is the first time in 20 years that the Burquitlam Lions' hamper project has been targeted. Fortunately, the Lions had enough money to buy more food.

"That's $2,000 that I could've gone to somebody else," Fleming said. "We worked all year for this. It's terrible something like this has to happen before Christmas."

Safeway vouchers were also passed out to needy families by the herevoicant local group.

Wendie Maclean, spokesperson for SIRIUS, the agency which controls the food bank, praised the Burquitlam Lions for supplying the cash, however, she said SIRIUS would have stepped in with more hampers for the 20 families if the Lions hadn't. "They purchased extra food so that the families wouldn't do without," Maclean said. "It's really a tragic event that this has to occur but we are facing it as a time where these types of things happen."

Anyone with information on the missing hampers is urged to call Cpl. Jeff Kriola at Coquitlam RCMP at 945-1550.

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process of expropriating the land.

The mall owners, the city of Burnaby and Coquitlam and residents want the station to be located where the mall's bus loop currently is. According to TransLink, that location was abandoned because the mall's two-storey parking lot would have to be relocated at a cost of more than $20 million.

Cheryl Clark, MLA for the local provincial riding, believes the RTPO probably didn't negotiate in good faith with the mall.

"If the land owner wants it there, the city and the public want it there, why wouldn't the government put it there? The police even want it there. It's really hard to believe how incompetent the RTPO has been on this," said Clark.

There seems to be this view from the government that they're going to do this for the people, it's going to be good for the people whether they like it or not," added the Liberal MLA. "Citizens should be guiding government, not the other way around."

Members of the Lougheed Area Residents' Association still hope to change the province's mind on the station location, even though SkyTrain line construction has already begun on either side of the site. Jim Fraser from LARA said the group has met with various levels of government, hoping to have their message heard.

Fraser said some members of LARA believe civil disobedience is the only option left for them to stop construction. "We hope it doesn't come to that," he said.

Paul Bertram, with RTPO, said some concerns for the station had already been let. The RTPO still plans to hold a public meeting on the station's design.