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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2015

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Aberdeen Centre was home to the largest public Chinese New Year event in the city.

Matthew Hoekstra photo

Threat of monster homes has residents worried

Legal loophole in land use contracts allows developers to bypass normal house-size restrictions

by Martin van den Hemel

Staff Reporter

Some residents are worried that developers will scramble to take advantage of an expiring legal loophole that bypasses the normal limit on house size.

Thousands of residential properties across the city don't have to conform to the city's zoning rules because of 1970s-era land use contracts that pave the way for developers to construct homes more than twice as large as permitted elsewhere.

According to the City of Richmond, these land-use contracts are "currently producing a form of redevelopment that was not envisioned in the 1970s...houses which are much larger than the original housing stock that was built when the neighbourhood was established," city spokesperson Ted Townsend said.

Land-use contracts were used in the 1970s to establish land-use regulations for large parcels of land. Historically the contracts could not be modified or discharged from a property without the property owner's consent, Townsend said.

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Richmond rings in Year of the Goat

Thousands turn out for countdown event at Aberdeen Centre, which drew Canada's Prime Minister

by Matthew Hoekstra

Staff Reporter

Eyes were dotted, firecrackers exploded and a golden dragon entertained at Chinese New Year celebrations across Richmond Thursday. Aberdeen Centre was home to the largest public event in the city, beginning with

a countdown ceremony the night before at which Prime Minister Stephen Harper dotted the lion's eyes just before midnight.

In the morning, more than 80 performers from seven Chinese martial arts groups entertained a multiethnic crowd of hundreds in Aberdeen's Hazelbridge Way courtyard. Some onlookers gathered outside, while others clambered for window position inside the three-storey mall—many training smart-phone cameras on the action.

After dignitaries dotted the lions' eyes—a traditional start to the lion dance—fireworks exploded while acrobats moved the colourful costumes to the sounds of Chinese percussion. Martial artists then danced an 18-metre

golden dragon around the courtyard.

Mayor Malcolm Brodie told the crowd his wishes for the new year—kindness among them.

"We know that the Chinese New Year has become a huge cultural festival in the city of Richmond, and it's also a time for our families. So we need to emphasize in this year...to be kind to the people we love, whether they are near us or whether they are far away."

Chinese New Year is a spring festival celebrated at the turn of the Chinese calendar, which this year is the Year of the Goat—an animal of the zodiac also interpreted as a sheep or ram.

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Matthew Hoekstra photos

Chinese New Year celebrations at Aberdeen Centre Thursday morning featured 80 performers. Photos clockwise from top left: A family watches the action in the mall's courtyard from behind a velvet rope; a lion dance; performers wait for their turn; a photographer snaps a photo of the stage with the grounds littered with debris from firecrackers; golden dragon performers; and Thomas Fung, CEO of Fairchild, and fortune teller Sherman Tai take turns dotting the eyes of the dragon.



Jason Ransom photo

Prime Minister Stephen Harper dotted the traditional dragon during a Chinese New Year's celebration at the Aberdeen Centre.

Prime minister comes to Chinese New Year countdown at Aberdeen

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Prime Minister Harper's visit was a surprise for the countdown crowd that numbered in the thousands, said Aberdeen spokesperson Joey Kwan. "At first it was pretty intense, but everything went as planned," said Kwan. "This was very, very special for us."

Richmond Centre MLA Teresa Wat said people of many ethnicities came to the celebration. "This is a great demonstration

of the flourishing of multiculturalism," said Wat, B.C.'s Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism.

Chinese New Year celebrations continue this weekend:

- Friday through Sunday Canada Berries winery at 12791 Blundell Rd. will host a family-friendly celebration from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. featuring entertainment, fireworks and dancing.

- At Aberdeen on Saturday, the

B.C. Chinese Orchestra and B.C. Youth Chinese Orchestra perform at 1 p.m., and the Vancouver Academy of Dance performs at 3 p.m. On Sunday, Zhong Yang Music and Arts Academy takes the stage at 1 p.m., followed by Colours of Dance at 3 p.m.

- On Sunday, the Tzu Chi Foundation will host a celebration event from 1:30 to 5 p.m. at R.A. McMath Secondary, 4251 Garry St.