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Development raises water worries

IRVINES LANDING

By Mike Purdon/Staff Writer
Reporter

Concern over a 32-unit condo/motel planned for Irvines Landing ran high at Thursday's meeting of the Sunshine Coast Regional District board, but that didn't stop directors from granting a height variance for the project.

Opponents of the project told the board that uncertainty over the amount of water that can be drawn from Hotel Lake, the local water supply, should be enough to force a reconsideration of the project. Some residents who take their water from Hotel Lake are worried there won't be enough for everybody if a water licence for the development is granted.

There are also concerns that increased sewage outflow will jeopardize the quality of drinking water.

"Hotel Lake is the equivalent of your Chapman Creek," said James MacPhail, speaking for the recently struck Hotel Lake Water Conservation Association (HLWCA). "But ours has no controls. We don't want to be back here again saying, 'I told you so'."

The lake, much less of a conservation focus than Chapman Creek, already sees enough activity, MacPhail said, since it is ringed by heavy-traffic roads and is frequented by tourists who don't know the lake is a residential water supply.

The HLWCA presented a 50-plus-name petition calling for a moratorium on water licences for Hotel Lake until a full environmental impact study is carried out.

The developer, Dan Schindle, who owns Irvines Landing Marina and the associated pub, thinks he may have a way around residents' worries. He himself is concerned about water quantity and quality, he said, and that's why he's decided to spend as much as \$150,000 on a desalinization plant to draw water from the ocean rather than the lake.

"I've been there 30 years, and I'm very aware of the water situation," he said, adding that the clientele at a four-star facility,

such as he plans to build, expect reliable, safe water.

As for the sewage outflow, Schindle said the existing permit already covers the increase in sewage outflow that would be created by the project. His permit, granted in 1993, allows for a 24-unit accommodation and a 3,000-square-foot conference centre that were never built. The 12 additional units proposed now could simply be substituted for the conference centre, he said.

“We already have the licence for that,” he said. “The Ministry of the Environment has already said it is safe.”

A recent engineer’s report ordered by government has concluded that the sewage outflow would be within safe limits, he added.

The development would see a four-storey condominium-style structure built next to the pub. The 32 units would be sold as holiday homes to be occupied by owners for part of the year. The rest of the time the units would go into a rental pool for vacationers.

Pender Harbour director John Rees, who raised the scorn of some of the 40 residents present by supporting the project, suggested that a local symposium may be in order to fully deal with concerns about water supply in Pender Harbour. He further suggested that the issue of water management in the area be referred back to the SCRD’s Infrastructure Committee for further examination.

The amount of water in the aquifer that feeds Hotel Lake is a big question mark, directors agreed, and it may one day pose a serious problem.

“We really don’t know what capacity we have, and that’s very, very dangerous” said Halfmoon Bay director John Marian. “But it’s beyond our financial capacity to fully study an aquifer and how much water is in one. It’s hugely expensive and virtually impossible.”

Rees said there is certainly enough water to support some development, especially considering the area for some reason consumes 786 litres per day per capita, which is about 260 litres more than the rest of the Coast. If water usage was reduced, or large-scale wastage stopped, the savings alone would be enough to service a development the size of the one being proposed, Rees said.

Rees was unapologetic in his support of the project, which has also raised residents’ concerns regarding increased traffic, loss of views for some, fire protection, impact on fish habitat and the change to the rural character of the neighbourhood.

“I’m sorry if it upsets some folks who would like their retirement

Shangri-la to never change,” Rees said, noting that he has to consider an “endangered species,” that being the 25 Pender Harbour grads that may want to find work in their own community. “I am not pro-development. What I am for is meaningful employment.”

The height variance, which technically must be considered on its own merit and not in relation to the effects of the rest of the project, was passed with directors Adrian Belshaw and John Marian opposed.

“I haven’t seen any pressing need to grant the variance,” said Roberts Creek director Adrian Belshaw. Except, he said, that it would be “more convenient and more profitable for the developer.”

The Sechelt Indian Band has raised its own red flag, demanding that an archaeological assessment be done on the site before the development proceeds. At least two middens are known to exist in the immediate area, the band council said in a letter to the SCR.D.

There are about 60 sites in Pender Harbour and “an additional number of as-yet unrecorded sites.”

Considering the nature of our aboriginal interest, we believe it is necessary to have an archaeological examination carried out ... to determine whether the cultural remains extend to the location under application.”

Schindle said he’s “not sure there’s much to dig for, but we’ll do it.”

While he can’t legally accept money from interested parties, Schindle said he already has commitments for 30 to 50 per cent of the units. He’s developing the land in the hopes of selling it to a Vancouver-based businessman.