



## **\$25 Million for Who?**

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Jason Youmans

Opponents of the proposed Spencer Road highway interchange in Langford are taking their case door-to-door in an attempt to block a \$25 million loan from the municipality to Bear Mountain property developers.

Langford's elected officials made crafty use of the province's community charter as the year drew to a close when they pushed two contentious bylaws through first, second and third reading at a hastily called and poorly advertised December 27 council meeting.

"Throughout this process, Langford has told its residents that the interchange is for the benefit of the whole community, so why wasn't the whole community consulted? It doesn't make sense," says Steven Hurdle, who is helping organize the January 12 door-to-door petition campaign he hopes will gather enough signatures—from approximately 2,500 residents—to force Langford to take the loan authorization bylaw to a referendum.

If adopted, the bylaws—1147 and 1148 respectively—pave the way for construction of the controversial highway interchange.

Bylaw 1147 establishes a local area service plan—namely, the highway interchange itself—to go ahead. Bylaw 1148 authorizes the city of Langford to borrow up to \$25 million from the province's municipal finance authority to pay for construction costs not covered by the \$4 million the B.C. government has already committed to the project and the \$2.4 million Langford has promised to throw into the pot.

Opponents of the interchange are concerned by the nature of the arrangement, which sees the principle and financing for the loan—according to Langford officials—paid by the property owners directly affected by the local service—namely LGB9 (Bear Mountain Developments), Totangi Forestry, Goldstream Heights, Clara Kramer and Bear Mountain Parkway Estates.

Langford officials say residents weren't asked for their opinion because the request for the local area service came from the aforementioned parties affected by the service area and the costs will be borne by them, in keeping with rules laid out in B.C.'s community charter.

City clerk administrator Rob Buchan told the Goldstream Gazette (he did not return Monday's calls) that Langford is positioned to seize the properties used to finance the loan if the proponents prove unable to repay the borrowed amount within the 10 year time frame at the agreed five percent interest rate.

Hurdle says that formula only works if property prices maintain their current upward trajectory. If the housing market tanks, Hurdle says paying off the loan would become the burden of all Langford taxpayers.

Adding to the controversy, interchange opponents are taking exception not only to the slick multimillion dollar loan arrangement, but to the way Langford council has ensured the bylaws made their first appearance in council with no opportunity for public input.

"We are very concerned about the process," Hurdle says. "What they have done is, if not outside of the rules, then outside the spirit of the rules."

The agenda for the December 27 meeting shows that bylaws 1147 and 1148 were only scheduled for first reading.

Langford deputy administrator Jim Bowden says that was simply a typo on the agenda borne of employee error, but Hurdle says that alone may have impacted the loan-authorization process, as it would have come before greater public scrutiny if it was known it would be fast-tracked to third reading at that meeting.

Langford council must still have been swimming in holiday spirits at the December 27 meeting, as of the three councillors to whom Monday spoke, none seemed to recall the bylaw actually passed third reading.

Denise Blackwell, who chaired the affair in place of an absent mayor Stew Young, was convinced it had only passed first reading. The Langford councillor and CRD board chair needed a few minutes to confirm with city staff that yes, apparently it had passed third reading before she returned Monday's call. Four-term councillor John Goudy could also only recall the bylaws passed first reading, while councillor Lillian Szpak was a little closer to the mark, asserting the bylaws had made it through second reading.

"The important thing is that we're paying attention to the details of what we pass," Szpak told Monday when asked why she and her fellow councillors seemed unable to recall what occurred at the meeting.

—Jason Youmans

The door-to-door campaign to challenge Langford loan authorization bylaw 1148 takes place Saturday, January 12. Anyone wishing to participate is asked to meet at Redeemer Lutheran Church at 911 Jenkins Avenue at 9 a.m. Call 885-0717 for more details.