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Blackwell balks at petition result

After 30 days of going door-to-door collecting signatures, advocates of participatory democracy in Langford say they have collected the names of more than 2,250 residents opposed to the city's plan to grant Bear Mountain developers a \$25 million loan to construct the Spencer Road Interchange.

Petition organizers set out to prove to Langford council that residents object not to construction of the interchange itself—although many do—but to the process used to arrive at a business arrangement they say leaves taxpayers on the hook if the loan recipients default on payments to the province's municipal finance authority.

"Voters have said in large numbers that they want a different process, that they want a say," petition organizer Steven Hurdle said in a media release. "Even supporters of the interchange project sign the petition because they feel the process is flawed."

Loans of this magnitude can be brought to referendum if 10 per cent of the electorate requests it. Langford circumvented this process by designating the interchange a local area service—a label normally reserved for sewers and sidewalks—to be paid for by the users. In this case, those "users" are a consortium of property developers.

Langford councillor Denise Blackwell says the signatures on the petition don't mean the signatories actually understand the nature of the loan agreement. Blackwell maintains Langford taxpayers won't be on the hook, even if the developers default. She says the properties in question have been assessed at \$135 million under their current zoning designation, well above the value of the loan.

"I think Mr. Hurdle may want to run in November," Blackwell suggested.