

## **Interchange loan riles Langford citizen group**

By Rick Stiebel - Goldstream News Gazette - January 11, 2008

Symbolic counter-petition launched to rescind borrowing bylaws

A group of Langford residents are organizing a counter-petition they know won't fly to show many residents don't approve of the way the City passed borrowing bylaws for the Spencer Road Interchange.

Steven Hurdle and a group of supporters are going ahead with the counter-petition process that can force a referendum if more than 10 per cent of voters sign on within a 30-day period, even though he is aware it cannot proceed legally.

Langford clerk administrator Rob Buchan said because the landowners petitioned the city to establish a local service area, consent of the electors, i.e. a referendum, is not required under section 217 of the Community Charter.

With Langford having about 17,000 registered voters, Hurdle is confident supporters will meet or surpass the total of 1,700 required.

"We want to mimic the political point even if we can't proceed legally," said Hurdle, a Green Party candidate in the last provincial election. "We believe a lot of people don't support the way this went down. We want to give them the opportunity to have their voice heard."

While Langford has indicated for the past two years that developers would pay the lion's share of the cost of the \$32-million project — the provincial government is funding \$4.9 million — there had been no mention of a loan, he said.

Hurdle takes issue with the lack of advertisement for a special council meeting on Dec. 27 where Langford council gave first, second and third reading to bylaws that established a local area service and terms for repayment of a loan of up to \$25 million.

Hurdle, 34, also questioned the timing of the meeting during the Christmas season when many people are away or occupied with the holiday season.

Buchan noted that Langford is not required to advertise special meetings of council in the newspaper, and notices were posted at city hall.

Although the original agenda indicated the bylaws would only receive first reading, the decision to add a second and third reading before the meeting will not impede the public's ability to comment, Buchan said.

"The bylaws will be brought back to a second open meeting of council for consideration of adoption once the Ministry of Community Services, specifically the Inspector of Municipalities has approved them," Buchan said.

Acting mayor Denise Blackwell disagreed with criticism of a lack of transparency in the process.

"People against something tend to use that argument," Blackwell said, pointing out staff continued to operate over Christmas, and the bylaws were part of eight council dealt with at the Dec. 27 meeting.

"There was about 12 people at the meeting, more than we get at some regular council meetings," she said.

There was no comment from the public concerning the bylaws at the meeting, Blackwell added.

The loan, to cover the cost of the developers' share of the interchange, would be paid off over a 10-year period by the five landowners in the service area.

Although Langford has indicated taxpayers are protected from anyone defaulting on the loan through acquisition of their property, Hurdle said the development value of the property could drop significantly if the housing market took a sudden downturn similar to what is happening in the U.S.

About 50 people are involved in organizing the counter-petition and canvassing residents door-to-door, which Hurdle said will begin Jan. 12.

While some of the volunteers support the interchange, they are concerned about the way the process has unfolded, Hurdle said.

"The response so far has been tremendous," Hurdle noted. "It shows the level of engagement on this issue."

Until the bylaws were brought forward, Langford has argued the interchange is a benefit to the entire community, Hurdle said.

By creating a local service agreement that comprises a small portion of the area, they are now saying it only benefits a small area.

"If it's a benefit to the whole community, then the entire community should vote," he said. "I feel strongly that by creating a local service agreement they are defeating their own argument. This needs to be taken to the people."

Supporters of the counter-petition are launching the 30-day campaign from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Jan. 12 at Redeemer Lutheran Church, 911 Jenkins Rd. For more information, call Hurdle at 884-0575.

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