

## Interchange gets green light

By Rick Stiebel - Goldstream News Gazette - January 25, 2008

Langford waiting for province to approve \$25 million loan

Calls for a referendum and comments from tree-sitters didn't sway Langford council from adopting a bylaw that clears the way for the Spencer Road Interchange.

During a sometimes stormy 90 minutes of public participation, Mayor Stew Young vigorously defended the interchange and council's decision to loan a group of developers \$25 million for the project.

Under the terms of two bylaws given first, second and third reading at a special meeting of council on Dec. 27, Bear Mountain developments, Totangi Forestry, Goldstream Heights and Clara Kramer and Bear Mountain Parkway Estates would pay the loan off over a period of 10 years.

Langford resident Steven Hurdle, a former Green party candidate, told council that he and a group of volunteers collected more than 1,100 signatures in nine days calling for a referendum on the loan and the establishment of a local service area, adding there is no precedent for using a local service area in that fashion.

"Many of the petitioners support the interchange but want a referendum," Hurdle said. "We urge council not to adopt the bylaw."

Hurdle, and several other speakers also questioned the lack of advertising and timing of the Dec. 27 meeting.

Young said council would have opted for a referendum for the loan if it was to be paid back by all Langford taxpayers.

"The developers, not the taxpayers, are paying for the interchange," he said.

Young also pointed out that Langford has borrowed money in similar fashion to build sewers in different neighbourhoods at least a dozen times in the past.

When asked why the developers weren't borrowing the money themselves, Young said "try to find a bank that will lend you money to build an interchange that will belong to the municipality after its built."

Developer Les Bjola said Bear Mountain has always believed in paying their own way, and had approached the provincial government with plans to build a \$12-million local interchange.

"The province said no, you will build a regional interchange," Bjola said.

He applauded Langford's initiative in tackling a "provincial problem" before it becomes a "disaster like McKenzie."

Young also took issue with criticism of the meeting being scheduled during the holiday season by saying Dec. 27 was just another business day for the City's busy staff.

Young listened without interruption while several of the protesters staging a tree-sit to block the interchange aimed the bulk of their criticism at the Bear Mountain development, calling it a visual blight and the worst kind of urban sprawl.

Young emphasized the 1,500 permanent and on-going construction jobs the resort has created and the more than 150 acres of green space Bear Mountain has donated to Langford, as well as 60 to 70 acres of sensitive eco-systems that will be preserved.

He did react, however, when Victoria resident Ingmar Lee — a self-described environmental activist with a degree in environmental studies — opened his remarks by saying Young was “very rude.”

Lee called the environmental assessment conducted by Golder and Associates “bogus,” and said what council is doing is unacceptable.

Young said the people of Langford are sick and tired of people from other parts of the Capital Region coming out to Langford to tell them how to run the city.

When a resident said commuter rail is needed more than another interchange, Young said Langford has led the push for rail for years, and hinted there may be an announcement in that soon.

He said the interchange addresses existing transportation and safety issues that will only worsen if it isn't built.

Langford can't afford to wait for the province to pay for it, Young said, pointing out the province has agreed to fund only \$4.9 million of the \$32-million project.

If it isn't built, the same traffic problems that plague the McKenzie and Tillicum stoplights will take place in Langford, with traffic backing up the Malahat, he added.

Council did not adopt the borrowing bylaw, pending approval by the Ministry of Community Services, specifically the inspector of municipalities.

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