

Truce bid falls flat with protesters

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Langford planning additional karst, archeological surveys in interchange route

Langford is planning another archeological survey within the Spencer Road Interchange route, but the city is unlikely to get any co-operation from activists blockading the project.

An archeological assessment has been sited for a “small sliver of land,” due to Langford realigning the interchange to avoid what is known as Langford Lake cave, said Tim Stevens, the interchange project manager.

The City is also planning a karst survey within the forest off Leigh Road, as requested by the B.C. Speleological Federation, Stevens said. The survey would include surface karst features such as limestone sinkholes, but not the known cave.

“The cave is effectively moot because we are not touching it with our work,” Stevens said. “We will be following Ministry of Forests guidelines and will do a review of surface land forms.”

Whether the City will be able to carry out its surveys is another question. On Monday activists at the tree-sit off Leigh Road blocked a survey crew out to demarcate the legal boundary of the \$32-million interchange. Several survey crews have been met with interference in the past months.

In a Jan. 28 letter to Ingmar Lee and Zoe Blunt, the two most prolific activists, Langford administrator Rob Buchan asked the protesters to stand down. Stevens also met with Lee and Blunt Monday to ask for co-operation.

The interchange was shifted to the east to avoid the cave, Buchan said, and surveys need to be completed to investigate further protester concerns.

Activists will be happy to co-operate — but only if Langford uses a consultant other than Golder Associates.

They also want a new archeological impact assessment (AIA), Lee said. He argues Golder’s original AIA from December 2006 was inadequate and missed potential First Nation artifacts, specifically in sinkholes. Probing digs last year revealed bones, which were reinterred at the request of Songhees First Nation, he said.

“It’s the first time we’ve been approached by Langford to look for co-operation, and we are eager to co-operate,” Lee said. “The tree-sit will co-operate with surveyors provided Langford hire another consultant. The tree-sit will even help, but not if they use Golder.”

It’s not a certainty all the protesters would stand down even if an agreement were reached. People at the tree-sit have varying motivations, and Lee admits his is to hinder full build-out of Bear Mountain.

If an interchange is necessary, the overpass should be at Spencer Road to spare the forest, Lee said. "It would cost more, but so be it," he said. "Just get the developers to pay more."

A truce is probably not in the cards. Stevens said Golder Associates will conduct both the karst survey and the added archeological assessment. Another full AIA is not being done, he said.

"We have highly skilled, very professional people working for us," Buchan said. "There is no reason to change it."

Ray Kenny, manager of permitting and assessment with the B.C. Archeology Branch, said Golder's archeological report was adequate for the original interchange route. The branch's concern is the completion of an additional assessment in the area of the realignment, Kenny said.

It remains unclear when the interchange project will break ground. The City had hoped to start last December, and has had little luck completing ground surveys. Langford council passed a bylaw last week to allow the interchange to go ahead, but is still waiting for the province to authorize a \$25-million loan.

"We are just trying to get through the process to get going as soon as we can," Stevens said. "We are already later than we want to be."

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