

Council and residents rally to preserve Sidney stand of Douglas firs

By James Clarke

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Representatives of the Roberts Pointe Residents' Association squared off with Sidney council Monday night in a heated debate over a proposed development that would see a 1.44-acre wooded parcel on Beaufort Road subdivided into six lots.

The issue of how best to preserve Sidney's largest remaining waterfront stand of Douglas Fir trees — a bird refuge and tree sanctuary known as Beaufort Grove — has pitted residents against elected officials since the proposal surfaced in mid-October, and on Monday emotions ran high as council prepared to pass a series of motions meant to help find a compromise.

Headed by long-time architect and urban designer Phil Esnouf, the residents' association was formed when 53 residents of the area rallied to prevent the tract of land, located at 2445 Beaufort Road (formerly the Britten property), from being decimated by development.

Esnouf has levelled numerous verbal volleys at Sidney Mayor Don Amos over the proposed subdivision, and has threatened legal action against council.

Councillors Peter Wainwright and Jack Barker defended their mayor Monday night, calling Esnouf's approach "deplorable."

While the land is identified as environmentally sensitive in the town's official community plan, the OCP also designates the par-

cel as single-family residential with a minimum lot coverage of 6,500 square feet.

According to zoning regulations currently in place, a developer could subdivide the property into nine lots without ever having to approach council.

Steve Price, one of nine area residents to speak to council Monday, conceded the subdivision has many neighbors outraged.

"There's been (a lot) of bad blood raised over this already, so we really have to get through that for the good of the community and for future generations," Price told council.

In its deliberations, council passed two motions tabled by Coun. Wainwright.

Council agreed to buy half of Lot F (located at the corner of Beaufort and Goddard and considered the densest part of the parcel) if 75 per cent of area residents agree to register conservation covenants on their land titles, similar to those which will be placed on the developer's subdivision. The residents must also come up with money for the other half of Lot F — about \$125,000.

That agreement would protect the entire area from future over-development and limit the subdivision to five homes.

Since the subdivision doesn't require rezoning, council, in its second motion, said the municipality will not block the development because of possible legal repercussions.

Should three-quarters of the residents agree to the covenants, council suggested property owners could raise their portion of

the buy-out through a land trust, CRD Parks, or the Provincial Capital Commission. The lot is valued at approximately \$250,000.

Another option would see council and residents establish a "local improvement area," which would allow neighboring property owners to collectively pay the \$125,000 over a 15-year period through additional taxes. That scenario, not including any money generated through fund-raising, would cost homeowners in the area about \$600 a year.

With the motions passed, a committee comprised of Mayor Don Amos, Couns. Peter Wainwright and Tony Whittal and clerk administrator David Bartley was struck to begin the process of securing a purchase price with the developer.

"I guess the key thing here is whether or not the residents agree to the covenants," Coun. Wainwright said after the meeting, adding if the two parties are unable to arrange the buy-out within the next 60 days, "it likely won't happen."

"Clearly there were some people unhappy with the role we were taking, and that's their right, but I really think they've been unfair to the Mayor," Wainwright said. "The suggestion (Amos) has done nothing, that he made a bunch of promises and then walked away is simply not true.

"What they were asking was for us to stop the development no matter the consequences and to pay for Lot F in its entirety without any strings attached, and that was something we weren't prepared to do."

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