

Highlands plan faces hurdles

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Highlands council is plotting its next move in trying to get the rest of the region to buy into the municipality's development ambitions.

The region's smallest municipality wants to grow by allowing the developers of the Bear Mountain subdivision to build an adjacent subdivision complete with a golf course, 250 recreational units and 150 homes within its southern boundaries.

But in order to do -- and to ensure the new development can be fed by the regional water system -- Highlands has to adjust its urban containment boundary as it is currently spelled out in the regional growth strategy.

That would require unanimous approval from all 13 Capital Region District municipalities.

Those municipalities have submitted a detailed context statement for the growth strategy, which was set in broad-brush strokes two years ago.

But Highland's submission faced a rough ride at the CRD board table and squeaked through with just a 10-9 approval.

Highlands must now seek amendments to the growth strategy to make it consistent with the context statement.

The big question facing councillors is whether the municipality has a better shot at winning approval for its plans by going ahead and seeking permission now, or by waiting until other municipalities submit their own requests for amendments to the regional growth strategy -- a process that could take years.

Some feel there's safety in numbers, Mayor Mark Cardinal said.

"If we are part of one group of amendments to the regional growth strategy, we might have more success of getting ours accepted," Cardinal said.

"If, say, Metchosin had some sort of amendment and they weren't in favour of ours but they're in favour of theirs, it's sort of all or nothing if they're all tied together in one amendment."

Cardinal said he doesn't hold out much hope that his municipality's request will receive unanimous approval.

"Personally, I think it's a flaw in the regional growth strategy that you need unanimous consent of all member municipalities, because all of our other governing processes aren't governed like that. There are very few things that require unanimous consent."

Some CRD directors have voiced opposition to the proposed change, arguing that that once water lines are pushed in to the Highlands, it will open the floodgates for urban development in the area.

Bear Mountain plans to use CRD water for homes -- as it does in Langford -- while watering the golf course with treated wastewater. The development could be tied in later to CRD sewers.

Highlands council is waiting for more information from its staff before deciding how to proceed.

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