

Big plans unveiled for Sooke resort property

Proposal envisions a village concept including resort, marina and residential units

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Sooke residents were allowed into the fabled Grouse Nest lodge once again yesterday to look at the latest plans for a resort, a 300-berth marina and residential development.

This was the fourth open house in almost two years at the secluded waterfront property on Gillespie Road -- and some found little to grouse about.

"They've been listening to the community," said Ludmyla Millar, studying one of the displays. "I'm really quite impressed. I've come to the three previous open houses and this will definitely have an impact. It's one of those things where you work with it."

"So far, so good," said Ron Douglas, who lives nearby. "It's a lovely piece of property and it really does deserve some attention."

Douglas is resigned to the prospect of growth in his rural neighbourhood.

"It's inevitable," he shrugged. "But it appears they're going to leave as much of the nature alone as they can."

Owners Mike Ryan and Kurt Bohn bought the property in February 2005. Two weeks ago, they brought forward an application for rezoning to Sooke council. Both were on hand to answer questions about their vision for Grouse Nest. Environmental, traffic and archeological consultants were also available. Information, concept plans and technical studies of the development were set up on easels in a large room on the main floor.

If the proposal goes forward, Grouse Nest lodge will be turned into a clubhouse for the community. The lodge will be central to the marina, a 250-unit resort that will wrap around the shore and a village with 20,000 square feet of commercial



CREDIT: Bruce Stotesbury, Times Colonist
 Kurt Bohn, left, and Mike Ryan have big plans for the scenic Grouse Nest Resort property located on the south shore of Sooke Basin.

space. There are also plans to build between 850 and 950 residential units including 30 single-family homes, townhouses and larger multi-family buildings.

The village will be a centre for the community and a place where cyclists on the Galloping Goose Trail can drop in. It might also be a venue for local artists and craftsmen.

"We've had three open houses and it was very clear to us that the residents want to make sure we retain the ambience, the character and the natural setting," said planning consultant Frank Limshue. "The natural setting is the big draw to the property. We took those comments to heart. The goal of tonight's meeting is to unveil the concept plan we're proposing to council."

"This is the first time the public can see all the technical background," added architect Tom Moore.

A great deal of residential area has been clear-cut, said Moore, but the owners want to restore the logged areas and a culverted creek. They also want to rebuild a trestle on the Galloping Goose that runs through the property.

Plans for green roofs on residential buildings have been put on hold while the owners assess how the insurance industry deals with it, said Moore.

"One of the key terms for a site like this is sustainable," said Limshue. "That's why we want to minimize the impact of the footprints of buildings. We want to make it walkable. We want to be able to utilize water from the treatment plant and bring it back to development for landscaping."

One man, who didn't give his name, said the development would create even more traffic problems on Gillespie Road.

But Laura Doll, who lives in Sasseenos, thought the plans looked 'pretty' good.

"They're getting into more details," she said. "We like where we live, but we might take advantage of the amenities."

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