



British Properties plans expansion

A glimpse at the proposed West Van of tomorrow

Glenn Bohn
Vancouver Sun

Tuesday, March 25, 2008

A forest almost a quarter of the size of Stanley Park is the site chosen for the next suburb proposed by British Pacific Properties, the largest land owner in the community.

During the Depression, a syndicate controlled by the Guinness beer family of Ireland paid less than \$50 a hectare for 1,600 hectares of land on Hollyburn Ridge, then built the Lions Gate Bridge in 1938 to woo the wealthy to a new suburb high above the small summer cottages that then lined West Vancouver's shores.

Today, hundreds of multi-million-dollar mansions with commanding views fill the original British Properties and Whitby Estates, the company's most recent development.

Now, BPP wants to continue its westward expansion on land it owns above the Upper Levels Highway.

If a development plan for the 87-hectare Rodgers Creek area gets West Vancouver council's stamp of approval this summer, loggers and bulldozer operators will begin dropping trees and pushing through second-growth forest later this year.

The land is already zoned for housing. The questions are what type of housing will be built and where it will be built.

British Pacific Properties proposed 538 housing units. About 60 per cent were to be apartments.

But a District of West Vancouver-initiated advisory committee has proposed Option B, a higher-density option on the same land: 736 housing units, about 70 per cent of which would be apartments. The balance would be mostly townhomes (14 per cent) and single-family houses (13 per cent).

BPP community relations manager Andrew Pottinger said in an interview either option is acceptable to the company because both would provide satisfactory revenue.

"It's really a question of what the community would prefer to see as a [housing] mix," Pottinger said.

He said supporters of Option B want smaller housing units in West Van because they are downsizing from larger homes, or are young families that cannot afford houses in West Vancouver.

"West Vancouver is not going to be very affordable by the standards of other places, but relatively speaking, the smaller units will be more affordable and available to different household types," Pottinger said.

But what about the environmental impact of another development on a steep hillside with eight streams and 20 tiny tributaries?

Both plans call for the conservation of more than 55 per cent of the land area -- municipal parks and green space that would set aside creek-side habitat, rock bluffs and some forest stands.

No salmon swim that far upstream, but those cool mountain streams are the year-round home of the coastal tailed frog. It takes as long as four years for their tadpoles to turn into froglets and several more years before they are sexually mature and can reproduce.

According to the B.C. Environment Ministry, tailed frogs may live 15 or 20 years, which makes them one of the longest-living frogs in the world. The Committee on Endangered Species in Canada classifies the coastal tailed frog as a species of "special concern" because it is sensitive to human activities.

In 1997, before mansions started sprouting at Whitby Estates, a group of elementary school students discovered a frog in a tributary of one of the creeks on BPP's property.

The kids had found a critter that BPP-commissioned consultants didn't find or mention in their environmental impact reports.

The children later addressed West Van council to make a nationally publicized plea to protect the frogs -- a plea that delayed the construction of Whitby Estates and led to larger streamside protection areas.

"To have an animal like the tailed frog in our community is fantastic," said David Meszaros, then 10 years old.

"It says a lot about the wonderful place where we live. Unfortunately, if we were to lose this animal after all we know, it would say a lot more."

He asked adults old enough to be his grandparents to do their "very best."

"Frogs don't breed too well in a parking lot," Meszaros said.

Pottinger said ongoing BPP-supported studies show the tailed frog population in the Whitby Estates area is "thriving" and large protected areas around streams

will ensure the next development won't hurt the species.

John Barker, a West Vancouver Streamkeepers representative on the district's nine-person advisory committee, said the development plan put forward by the committee addressed initial concerns that the mountain streams would be harmed and the mountainside scarred by the development.

"Imagine 215 acres of probably some of the most valuable residential real estate in Canada," said Barker, a Seaspan International vice-president before he retired. "Maybe being as valuable as it is affords the present owners of the land the ability to maybe do some things differently, in a little more caring fashion, than some developments."

gbohn@png.canwest.com

© The Vancouver Sun 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#). All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#). All rights reserved.