

Delta council drops proposal that would pave way for townhouses

Decision to abandon Tsawwassen Area Plan comes after public hearings at which residents opposed rezoning to allow for higher density

BY SANDOR GYAMATI, DELTA OPTIMIST NOVEMBER 5, 2010



A public hearing on the Tsawwassen Area Plan drew a standing room only crowd to the South Delta Recreation Centre last week.

Photograph by: Sandor Gyarmati, Delta Optimist

After a long and often controversial process stretching nearly two years, Delta council has abandoned its proposed Tsawwassen Area Plan.

The move came during the third day of public hearings last week at the South Delta Recreation Centre, after council heard concerns from residents in single-family neighbourhoods just north of the town centre. They were opposed to redesignating the area to higher density, which would allow townhouses.

Saying it was never council's intention to impose a plan without the public's consent, Mayor Lois Jackson said the plan would be abandoned.

A report will be prepared reflecting the comments and remarks received during the three-day hearing, she said.

Delta chief administrative officer George Harvie said his report would come next year, followed by a new bylaw for consideration.

Residents turned out en masse last week for the hearings, with most of them expressing strong opposition to a proposal to designate their neighbourhoods, as well as the power-lines corridor, for future townhouse development.

An analysis of options to maintain the economic viability of the Tsawwassen town centre, taking into consideration potential commercial developments at the Tsawwassen First Nation, will be undertaken.

As well, Delta will look at the need to amend the Official Community Plan to provide additional housing options in Tsawwassen and the possible effects on existing neighbourhoods after considering the legalization of secondary suites, the development of Tsawwassen Springs and the residential build-out of Tsawwassen First Nation.

Harvie said that analysis would be part of his report.

Following a municipal mail-out survey that found opposition to development on the Southlands by about a 60-40 margin, staff recommended maintaining the agricultural designation of the 538-acre property. It was approved by the area plan committee and received tentative approval from council.

However, another controversy erupted as residents opposed the proposal to alter the designation of some existing single-family neighbourhoods to allow townhouse development. Speakers said they like the character of their neighbourhood and don't want that changed.

"Why are you allowing land developers to dictate an area plan?" asked homeowner Michael Preston.

Several people said their property values would plunge, while others complained they were only recently notified of the planned change. Others suggested they were being penalized because development wasn't being allowed on the Southlands.

Phil Andrew, a Camaro Drive homeowner, said the financial impacts for residents in his neighbourhood would be considerable.

"The only buyers for these, very shortly, will be developers," he said. "There's some irony to me in developing a community plan that one of the unintended consequences is that it'll destroy a very real community."

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