

Facilitator can't ease Bear Mountain impasse

Boundary change axed by CRD municipalities

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A facilitator has been unable to resolve the stalemate blocking Highlands from turning on the water tap for Bear Mountain resort development expansion.

Under the five-year-old regional growth strategy, Highlands needs an amendment to its urban containment boundary to supply an expanded Bear Mountain development with Capital Regional District sewer and water.

Highlands has applied to include 267 hectares of mostly Bear Mountain property within the boundary.

But in order for Highlands' requested amendment to pass, it needed unanimous consent of all 13 municipalities -- something it failed to get, as nine out of 13 of Greater Victoria's municipalities objected. That prompted the attempt at facilitation.

After receiving the facilitator's report yesterday, CRD planning committee members recommended simply sending a letter to the province, saying no resolution has been found. It will now be up to the province to determine the next step, which could include binding arbitration.

If the boundary adjustment was granted, Bear Mountain would be permitted to build 150 homes, 250 tourist accommodation rentals, a golf academy and golf-related commercial facilities. Without the boundary extension, the golf course -- about half the 267 hectares and already excavated and planted -- and about 62 homes are permitted.

In his report, facilitator Gordon Sloan suggested a number of options, including one in which the urban containment boundary extension could be shrunk into an intensive development zone of about 85 hectares from the 267 being sought, but still maintain development at the municipality's south end abutting Langford and including accommodation for a hotel and housing.

But the compromise has failed to find favour with a majority of Highlands councillors and isn't likely to soon. Coun. Ken Brotherston is on indefinite leave, leaving the remaining six council members deadlocked in a three-three tie on development issues.

Mayor Mark Cardinal said Sloan's report offers little to his municipality.

"When you have compromise you have to have agreement from all parties. Never was Bear Mountain brought to the table," Cardinal said.

"What Gordon Sloan brought forward was a significant reduction by 80 per cent of our urban containment boundary [expansion]," he added.

Cardinal said in order for a compromise to work, there would first have to be agreement amongst Highland councillors. Then it would have to be taken

back to all other 12 municipalities in the CRD to get their approval.

"It's far from being a compromise that's going to allow the urban containment boundary to be adjusted because I've talked to mayors of other communities and they've said there's no way their council is going to accept any amendment to the urban containment boundary," Cardinal said.

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