

Waterfront Landing concept approved

Former mill site to accommodate 3,500 dwellings
Squamish Chief – Friday June 23

District of Squamish council had their first official look at the Waterfront Landing project Tuesday (June 20), which involves 3,500 dwellings including townhomes and three 20-storey apartment towers. Despite some concerns, councillors endorsed the \$100-million concept.

For two years, Pridham Development has been planning and holding public meetings on the proposed project, which will be situated around a new lagoon on the 53-acre former Interfor sawmill site across the Mamquam Blind Channel.

“We want to reinvigorate the waterfront,” said Norm Hotson, architect and co-author of the Squamish 2000 plan for downtown. “We want to get the public down there. We’re wanting it fully public 24 hours a day so the Channel almost becomes a main street.”

But a significant portion of the lagoon’s waterfront is currently reserved for Waterfront Landing residents’ private use, leading councillor Patricia Heintzman to express concerns.

Heintzman said that although she likes the look and feel of the project, Squamish has committed to ensuring all waterfront land is publicly available.

Part of Pridham’s deal with the district will entitle Squamish to ownership of the lagoon, leading councillor Mike Jenson to question the burden of maintenance the district will take on.

Director of planning Cameron Chalmers said details regarding maintenance are yet to be hashed out and the point of the initial meeting is to approve the concept in general.

Acting Mayor Corinne Lonsdale said an affordable housing component is extremely important and she’d like to see affordable units or cash in lieu.

Both Lonsdale and councillor Raj Kahlon said they'd like to see some of the land reserved for industrial use.

Sam Hanson of Pridham said that none of the project is dedicated to industry, but a portion of the bottom floor of one building is designated "choice of use", which could mean a shop for light industry such as canoe making.

Both Heintzman and councillor Mike Jenson said they're concerned with the height of three proposed 20-storey towers, which Pridham relocated to make less visible from the downtown following public consultation.

Jenson is concerned with blocking of views, but Hanson assured council the towers will be no higher than an escarpment of rocks and trees behind it and will blend into the natural background.

Heintzman said she doesn't believe the Squamish "psyche" is prepared for 20 storey buildings and would prefer to see 12 storeys.

The next step in the approvals process will be council's consideration of the project in detail through rezoning and sub-area plan Official Community Plan (OCP) amendment, a process that will include a public hearing.