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LOCAL NEWS

Seaglass proposal sent back to drawing board

Gibsons Landing John Gleeson/Staff Writer

A developer who is pitching “the greenest multi-family building in Canada” for the Gibsons waterfront has been sent back to the drawing board.

Salish Sea Environmental Enterprises Ltd. applied to the Town of Gibsons for bylaw changes and development permits to construct a 12-unit condominium building with one commercial space at 462 and 458 Marine Drive, at the corner of Jack’s Lane.

The Seaglass building would have two storeys on the street and six storeys on the harbour side, and the proposal aims to provide public access to the seawall and connect the waterfront to the street.

Praised by members of council for its use of innovative energy and water recirculation systems, the project suffered a setback July 16 when councillors agreed that the form and character of the design needed a major overhaul.

Concerns about building height, encroachments and parking were also raised, but the extensive use of stucco and absence of wood in the exterior design were flagged as a major stumbling block.

“The advisory planning commission has very clearly told us that in their view it doesn’t comply with the harbour plan in form and character,” Mayor Wayne Rowe said during council’s committee of the whole meeting. “It doesn’t mean there’s not some room to meet part way, but so far I haven’t seen much change that brings it into compliance with the harbour plan.”

Coun. Lee Ann Johnson concurred, noting the community spent more than two years developing a plan for the harbour area.

“To me it’s my job to uphold the community’s values and the community’s direction. It’s not my job to create exceptions, and this is a really big exception,” Johnson said.

While calling Seaglass “an important project,” Coun. Dan Bouman took issue with the developer’s argument that cedar is not appropriate for salt air.

“I just have to disagree tremendously. Cedar holds up,” Bouman said. “It’s just about the most appropriate material for our heritage that’s imaginable.”

Bouman said he did not want the form and character issue to “fracture us into warring groups that are at each

other and at us” as a council.

“So I think we’re kind of tossing it back to you to say, ‘Are you willing to do what needs to be done to get along with our community?’” he told the proponents sitting in the gallery.

Coun. Charlene SanJenko said the issue goes further than reconsidering the architectural style and application of wood, but is about finding the balance between innovative ideas and guidelines set out in current planning documents.

“There is a dichotomy there. So it’s not just ‘no we can’t do this.’ It’s how we as a community start to think about solutions where this does come together, because this is cutting edge,” SanJenko said.

The Seaglass proposal would require a variance of 5.6 metres above allowed height, and Coun. Gerry Tretick said council needs to “understand how that will impact the rest of the neighbourhood.”

In the end, the committee approved staff’s recommendation to work with the applicant to address the building design’s form and character, consult the public about height impact, and provide more details about parking, setbacks, community amenities and affordable housing.

Staff will come back with another report to the committee of the whole before council considers giving first reading to an enabling bylaw.

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