

Gibsons APC weighs in on original George proposal

WATERFRONT HOTEL
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With a revised proposal for the George Hotel expected later this summer, members of Gibsons' advisory planning commission (APC) took a few parting shots at the original plan during their Aug. 13 meeting.

"My message back to the developer is that I feel like this hotel would look great in Whistler," said APC member Aleria Ladwig at Tuesday's meeting.

While saying she supported the concept of a waterfront hotel, Ladwig said the form and character of the original George proposal did not reflect the historic West Coast character of the Landing.

"The look and feel of it is very Whistler, very downtown, and I don't feel like it captures the heart of what Gibsons is about," she said.

Katie Janyk noted the proposal did not include "a lot of visual access" to the harbour and "nothing very naturish," she added, citing provisions in the harbour area plan that call for preserving "proximity to nature" in developments.

"Some of it is a success and some of it is an abysmal failure," Janyk said. "It's just so much building and so little nature that it makes me smile when I see it."

The commission was responding to a planning report updating February's application by Klaus Fuerniss Enterprises Inc. for a 96-room hotel and conference centre at the corner of Gower Point and Winn roads. The Town's principal concerns were contained in director of planning Andre Boel's report, but some APC members took the opportunity to add their comments to the record.

On the purchase and closure of Winn Road, Janyk said waterfront access would have to be provided, both for emergency vehicles and to comply with the harbour area plan.

"Any plan that removes significant waterfront access like that, visually and/or physically, is unacceptable to me personally," Janyk said. "We have taken a view corridor that extends pretty much up the hill, clearly, and just blocked it. To second a piece of Winegarden Park for example in lieu of that access, to me, would be a big mistake."

While Janyk argued that the hotel's waterfront walkway plan should be altered, APC chair Pam Roberts said she would like to see computer modeling for the walkway, which would extend the harbour seawalk from Gibsons Marina.

"I would like to get a better sense of what that experience is going to feel like," Roberts said.

Sharon Goddard praised the waterfront plan.

"A really great part of this project is that we will be able to walk continuously along the water," she said.

Howard Leung said the Town should ask for significant compensation since the developer is "asking for a lot of things — extra density, closing Winn Road, blocking view corridors."

As an example, Leung said the Town could mandate water-saving capabilities and green features in the building, and a public art component.

Gerry Zipursky noted the applicant had engaged a new architect for the revised proposal — identified by Boel as Omicron Consulting Group — and was expected to address issues raised by Town planning staff, including scale and height.

"The assumption is that there will be changes made that reflect the kinds of concerns that staff have presented to Klaus," Zipursky said.

Public consultations will be scheduled after the revised concept is submitted to the Town, and APC members agreed that the commission should review the application after the public has had an opportunity to respond.