

New George design splits project in two

GIBSONS



Ian Jacques Photo

The revised George Hotel design would split the project into two separate buildings, with a view corridor and public plaza set between the hotel complex and condominium block. The height of the hotel building remains the same as last year's proposal, at six storeys from Gower Point Road and eight storeys from the waterfront side.

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JOHN GLEESON/STAFF WRITER

The redesigned George Hotel plan was unveiled in Gibsons last Saturday, drawing more than 200 people to the proponent's open house at Cedars Inn.

The new design would split the project into two separate buildings, with a view corridor and public plaza set between the hotel complex and condominium block.

Calling the change "significant," planning consultant Art Phillips said proponent Klaus Fuerniss spent about \$1.3 million to redesign the plan, purchase an additional property on Gower Point Road and create the view corridor along Winn Road.

"The Winn Road element now will become a strong public element realm leading from Gower Point Road to the waterfront, and that will now connect to the boardwalk, which will be contiguous around the harbour," Phillips said at the Nov. 2 open house.

The change was intended to address concerns from the Town of Gibsons and some members of the public about the mass of the building.

"It was at a considerable cost, but the client decided that rather than argue with the Town on the initial concept, he wanted the path of least resistance," Phillips said.

"Mr. Fuerniss is not a developer. He's a hotelier and he is strongly interested in the Town of Gibsons. He's hoping that the general community will support this as well."

Under the new plan, the southerly hotel and convention centre would retain the same height as last year's proposal — eight storeys from the waterfront side and six storeys from Gower Point Road — while the condominium block would be one storey lower.

For the hotel, that translates into about 125 feet (37.5 metres) at the waterfront and 91 feet (27.3 metres) at Gower Point Road, building architect Colleen Dixon said. For the condo block, she said, the height would be 98 feet (29.4 metres) at the waterfront and 55 feet (16.5 metres) at Gower Point Road.

Dixon acknowledged the harbour area plan includes "a guideline that says three and four storeys, for sure," but the plan also "will entertain each proposal on its individual merits."

The revised concept, Dixon said, is consistent with the goals of the harbour area plan.

"We looked at scale and character, keeping the village aspect of Gibsons because that's what's really good about the place," she said. "We are respecting that by breaking up the form with different materials, to have a setback from Gower Point Road, so the six-storey portion is set back from the street."

The revised plan also increases the number of condo units from 28 to 40 and hotel rooms from 110 to 118.

"We bumped it a little bit, as a result of the additional land acquisition," Phillips said.

One element dropped from the plan was the proposed waterfront pub.

"There was some concern about having another pub in the lower village," he said. "The other thing was having the pub next to the residential building."

The two buildings would be joined underneath with 224 parking stalls and an underground loading port, which would keep deliveries off the street, Phillips said, calling it "another major change."

Also in the new plan, the buildings' roofs were redesigned from peaked to flat, and a grand staircase and elevator were added at the end of the public plaza, providing accessibility to the waterfront.

Some members of the public praised the new design, while others said it still did not comply with the harbour area plan.

"Too big," said Suzanne Senger of the Gibsons Alliance of Business & Community, a staunch critic of earlier proposals.

"What the harbour plan actually envisions is three storeys at the street. So play by the rules, Klaus. Respect the plan, respect the people. We worked really hard on that," Senger said, adding that the harbour plan, as it is, represented a compromise.

Ian Thomson, a board member for the nearby Sunshine Coast Museum and Archives, said he was in favour of the project and pleased with the changes.

"The view corridor will be very good for us," Thomson said.

As a retired geologist, he said he was "not worried about any impact on the aquifer."

The new design will be presented at council's committee of the whole meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 12 and to the Town's advisory planning commission (APC) on Friday, Nov. 15. Phillips said a three-dimensional model would be available for the APC meeting and left on display at the Town office.

Phillips said he expects a report will go to council in early December, "and then if council likes what they see, they can direct staff to prepare a bylaw for first reading."

If all goes well, he said, public hearings could take place by early March next year and approval could come in May, with groundbreaking later in the year and opening in late 2016.