

Council to review delegation policy

GIBSONS

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JOHN GLEESON/STAFF WRITER

Gibsons council agreed to review its procedural bylaw after a councillor complained that refusing to hear delegations has created "an atmosphere of suspicion and confusion" in the town.

"Right now we've got a situation where people don't know why they can't come forward, and frankly I don't either," Coun. Dan Bouman said at Tuesday's regular council meeting.

Chief administrative officer Mani Machado acknowledged that three requests to appear as delegations had been turned down in recent months.

The requests, Machado said, were "attempts to make presentations about the George Hotel when the application is in front of council and there's a process for that."

Machado said all public input in the form of unsolicited reports, letters, emails and other correspondence — which he said numbered in the hundreds — had been reviewed by staff and forwarded to members of council for information.

"There's been a few individuals who suggest their input ... should receive different treatment beyond what others should receive," he added.

But Bouman argued that council should "just hear what they have to say," anyway.

"If it's about the Town's business, they have a right to appear before council," he said, "I don't see how it compromises anybody's interests. It's the life of the Town."

Bouman said the public hearing stage is "at the end point" of the application process and "people don't want to wait until the end point," but want to speak out earlier.

"The graceful thing to do is let people have their say," he added.

Council accepted Bouman's notice of motion after it was amended to simply call for a workshop to review the procedural bylaw "as soon as reasonably possible," with the review to focus on policies for accepting delegations and correspondence.

Mayor Wayne Rowe said updating the procedural bylaw had been included in council's strategic plan for the past year, "and it's something I'd like to see," but staff's heavy workload is an issue.

"I'll be blunt," Rowe said. "Our corporate officer's time is being chewed up responding to correspondence on The George and so on."

While no delegations on The George appeared at Tuesday's meeting, about a dozen people from the gallery asked questions about the project during the inquiry portions of the meeting.

When asked about contamination at the Hyak Marine site, Machado said the provincial Ministry of Environment would conduct an environmental review of the site and provide direction to the Town on "how they want the proposal to change based on the input we receive from them."

When questioned on the application, Rowe noted that council was bound under provincial legislation to give it due process.

"Under the Local Government Act, councils are required — are required — to consider applications for development permits and rezoning, and that's what this council is doing," he said.

Another speaker suggested the Town compile all the information on the project and set up a venue or forum for the public "to have a conversation."

"At some point," Rowe said, "there will be a package in front of council that will pull everything together. To pick away at it one piece at a time, it gets us confused."

When resident Barry Haynes later suggested holding an informal meeting, "like a George day," to allow people to discuss the project, Rowe said: "I just can't help but think you're not hearing me. We don't have all the reports yet. Wait until the facts are in. Just be patient till we see the reports."

After the meeting, Machado said he expects council will receive a major report on the George proposal's form and character at the end of the month, "and perhaps other items if they're available by then."