

Hello Tahirih, Jane, and Dan

I will title this message as “further observations on the CMS re-zoning application.”

I recently read a petition against the proposal, led probably by group of north end residents. The petition listed several dangers of allowing the proposal to proceed in its current form. If one were to take the accusations at face value, it would appear CMS has been negligent, and perhaps even deceitful, in their attempts to convince the trustees of the merits of their application. These are serious claims and need to be considered closely. Unfortunately, except in rare instances, the petitioners do not provide evidence to support their objections.

Take for example the comment that the Islands Freshwater Specialist calls the area “highly vulnerable”, and “an area in need of critical attention”. That is probably true and could be said of many areas on the island. The letter then goes on to say water testing has been inadequate and the amount of water required to run a year-round retreat has been seriously underestimated.” Really? What evidence do they provide? Its hard to tell. The CMS response to the accusation states that all of the testing, analysis, calculations, and recommendations are from recognized and respected professionals (HyGeo Consulting and Ecosense). What is the average resident to make of these counter claims? This is when we rely on the oversight of our trustees. Either the CMS has not performed due diligence, or the petitioner’s accusations are not supported by the evidence.

On another claim, the petition notes that there are significant indigenous interests at stake: the proposed development is adjacent to Crown Land Lot 87, which may be the basis of a treaty settlement. Perhaps. What has an adjacent property got to do with the CMS proposal? A critical reader might see this as an attempt to add to the list of objections in hopes something will stick.

The petitioners are correct to hold CMS to exacting standards, but not any greater than required by the current standards and regulations. If regulatory bodies find the proposal meets requirements, it is difficult to argue that the proposal should not proceed to the next stage.

I note that it is easier to get residents on board a petition if they believe a proposal for rezoning would have serious negative consequences for their quality of living. Fear is a great motivator. I can image there have been comments made about hoards of wealthy and foreign retreatants invading the island for several months of the year, clogging up public roads with their vehicles, draining or polluting the neighbors’ wells, and destroying the environment. I have lived within easy walking distance to the CMS lands for several years and hardly notice they are there, even when they may be having a monthly retreat. First of all, it is a silent retreat, and it is very quiet. Sometimes I will see retreatants walking on a quiet public road adjacent to the lands. And that is about it. I have met with a few of the CMS members on several occasions and do not view them as deceitful and greedy individuals intent on building a spiritual private retreat center for the wealthy and famous, and damned be the consequences for the neighbors and ecology.

Most residents of the island, likely only have a passing interest in the debate and start to become very disinterested as the copious and mind-numbing details, claims and counterclaims increase. It is unlikely they would be motivated enough to sign a petition in support of the CMS proposal. If they do not see it affecting them personally, why should they care?

There are some good reasons to care. No application for rezoning should be declined on the basis that the values, lifestyle choices, and behaviors of the applicants are not acceptable to the objectors. If the proposal meets regulatory requirements, the deal is done. Galiano should not become fortress against change of any kind. Our population is increasing and the pressures for accommodation along with it. Much has been said in other places about the benefits of diversity and this could be one of those occasions. I do not have a personal attachment to the outcome of the CMS application. If they do not meet regulatory requirements, so be it. However, I do object to deny the application on the bases of fear, suspicion, and discrimination.

Sincerely;

Neil Friedenber

Christine Wilson