

## Colwood approves rezoning historic estate

By Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette

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Essencia is a go after Colwood council unanimously approved rezoning for the project.

Despite some reservations about building height, council supported denser residential and a hotel development at 3221 Heatherbell Rd., formerly the Pacific Family Centre property.

"It is the compromise that one must make in order to provide protection of a significant chunk of greenspace," said Coun. Gordie Logan of the potential 15-storey buildings.

Councillors applauded UnaVera Resorts' approach to public consultation, and even more so its willingness to adapt the proposal in response to it.

The final proposal was strikingly different from the initially one, Logan said, noting the maximum building height dropped from 22 storeys to 15.

"We found the whole process quite refreshing," he added.

Located on one of the last properties capable of dense development at Esquimalt Lagoon, Essencia will redevelop the historic single family estate into a hub of residential and commercial activity. Anticipated business tenants include a grocery store, brew pub, office space and hotel. The existing Pendray House will continue to house a community art gallery, as well as a potential restaurant.

Public consultation started in 2007 and the project came to committee March 3. At that time, residents raised concerns over increased traffic on Heatherbell Road, the sole access for the property. Proposed traffic calming measures and transit links should help alleviate those concerns, project manager Shawn Ripley told the committee.

People also expressed concern over emergency egress from the area and the maximum height of the buildings.

There has been a lot of talk about view corridors, said Mayor Dave Saunders. It's an argument he has trouble supporting since those views were created through past development.

"(The views) weren't there until the land was logged," he said.

To UnaVera's credit the proposal calls for a significant number of trees left bordering Bee Creek on the property, Saunders said, which will mask the buildings somewhat while protecting the creek.

The rezoning allows flexibility for the developer in that the project could consist of solely residential or hotel units, or a mixture of the two. Approving 15 storeys for condo buildings without a hotel didn't sit well with councillors Cynthia Day and Ernie Robertson.

"There is a big difference to me if it's a condo or a hotel," Day said.

The proposed height makes the project economically viable, Ripley said. One condo is equal to two hotel units, so based on floor space all three scenarios need to be housed in the same building configuration, he said.

What residents are compromising in height they are gaining in access to green space and community amenities, Saunders said.

Improvements to Heatherbell, Lagoon and Metchosin roads is also included in the rezoning. Traffic calming, sidewalks and a traffic signal at Lagoon and Metchosin are all planned.

The Calgary-based company is also committed to following Green Shore standards — similar to the LEED program for environmental building standards applied to the shoreline. Several restoration projects, including further enhancement to Bee Creek and the lagoon shoreline are included.

"(This project) sets a very high standard in this community in terms of green development," said Coun. Judith Cullington.

Once development permits are approved the project will be phased. The hotel component is expected to be built first if market demand calls for it.

The Essencia development now moves to public hearing, for which a date has not been set.