

Waterfront village proposed for Colwood, including commuter ferry

Proposal would link Royal Bay marina with downtown Victoria

By CARLA WILSON, Timescolonist.com April 27, 2011



Site of proposed marina for Royal Bay waterfront in Victoria, B.C. April 25, 2011.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, timescolonist.com

A commuter ferry between Royal Bay and downtown Victoria is part of a massive marina plan pitched to Colwood council, according to a document obtained by the Times Colonist.

The ferry "makes a tremendous amount of sense," says a partner in a company that has mapped out potential uses for Royal Bay, an exhausted gravel pit and now a fledgling residential development along Metchosin Road in Colwood.

Anthony Utley, a board member with Victoria-based Crown Marine Management Ltd., points to thousands of West Shore residents who make the daily drive to work at CFB Esquimalt and downtown.

The idea of a ferry is part of a Royal Bay plan drawn up by Crown Marine and presented to an in-camera meeting of Colwood council earlier this month. No deal has been struck with the property owner and the Royal Bay Village outline is merely a concept, Utley said.

Victoria developer Bob Evans is also on the Crown Marine board. He is a partner with WAM Development Group in a controversial plan to build a marina for luxury yachts in Victoria Harbour in front of Songhees. The size of the marina was halved in a rezoning decision by Victoria city council last year.

WAM spokesman Lachlan MacLean said construction on the Victoria marina needs federal and provincial approvals, and a development permit is required from the city for two adjacent buildings. WAM is not involved in the Royal Bay proposal, MacLean said.

Lehigh Heidelberg owns the 172-hectare Royal Bay site, once known as Producers Pit. It is zoned for 2,200 homes, including multi-family units, a town centre, schools and a waterfront park. So far more than 300 homes have gone up on the outskirts of the site, leaving the central area of 172 hectares open for development.

A spokesman for Dallas, Texas-based Lehigh Heidelberg could not immediately provide an update on the status of the property on Tuesday.

While various developers have looked at the site and Colwood is eager to see something happen, there are unanswered questions about its future.

Utley said their concept was to present creative ideas for the property. Costs have not been calculated, he said.

Other potential uses include a 150-slip luxury yacht marina, a hotel and conference centre, as well as condominiums in a waterfront village. Utley expects that a few other companies are also coming up with ideas for the property. The marina design has been configured to prevent erosion of Esquimalt Lagoon, he said.

Crown Marine is also suggesting the possibility of a First Nations partnership for a facility at Beecher Bay to service vessels and provide marine repair trades training aimed at aboriginal job creation. A Beecher Bay band representative could not be reached for a comment.

Under the Crown Marine concept, much of the property would be green space and include an amphitheatre, allowing for public festivals and art shows, Utley said.

Colwood Mayor Dave Saunders said names of developers who have expressed interest in Royal Bay are confidential.

"As far as I know, the property hasn't sold but I'd like to see it sold," he said. "It's one of the nicest pieces of property on Vancouver Island for development potential and it is going to be an economic driver for the city of Colwood."

After the city of Victoria balked at the original marina plan, Saunders said he called Evans to view those plans and see if a commuter ferry service or marina could be developed at Royal Bay.

With transportation options such as transit, rail and the Langford trolley, Saunders said "it makes sense to look at every option to alleviate traffic congestion in the West Shore and in the region for that matter."

Rick Gladych, a Crown Marine board member, said a marina at Royal Bay would create needed slips for luxury yachts visiting the west coast. The yachts bring big economic benefits — an average of \$15,000 per ship per visit, said Gladych, managing director for the Pacific Region for Yacht Path International, a yacht transportation company.

Last year, Yacht Path brought 450 vessels into Victoria and this year he anticipates the number will be close to 600. "Canadians are buying yachts in record numbers," Gladych said, citing the strength of our dollar against other currencies and low prices in today's yacht market.

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