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8+1 0

Million-dollar views coming to Salt Spring

Sunday, September 5th, 2004

Ashley Ford
Province

CREDIT: Gerry Kahrman, The Province

Coming soon to Salt Spring: Rooms with a view of the Crofton pulp mill in all its steaming glory.



Above: Artist's conception of the homes in the new village. At left: Highbridge plan includes trails open to all islanders.

Would you be prepared to pay over a million bucks for a Gulf Island home with a panoramic view of the Crofton pulp mill on Vancouver Island in all its steaming, industrial glory?

Thomas Ivanore, president of Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. the Vancouver company planning to build a \$200 million "new town" to be known as Highbridge on the north end of Salt Spring Island, has no doubts about it.

"Actually," he says looking across Stewart Channel to the belching mill stacks, "it presents a very spectacular view at night. It's fantastic."

He has reason for optimism as there have been early expressions of interest, plus a \$2,000 refundable deposit, from about 800 potential buyers for the 405 residences that will rise on the 580-hectare site over the next few years.

Although the new community has won approval of the Islands Trust, the body that governs the island, there remains "community concern" on an island deemed to be the hardest place on earth on which to develop.

Salt Spring was once described as an argument surrounded by water. Its population is highly-educated and when riled they act.

While there is some unhappiness with this project, the largest-ever single development in the Gulf Islands, there is also general acceptance that it is going to happen, says Kimberly Lineger, a member of the Islands Trust.

"People understand, many reluctantly, there are going to be 577 residences on that property, but they also understand that must be the limit of it," she says.

Ivanore acknowledges there is opposition to the town that will eventually house 1,200 residents, but argues the majority of islanders support it.

He says the village will be "self-sustaining and environmentally sensitive and will not be a burden to other areas of the island . . . This will be the largest and most environmentally sustainable community with the most sought-after lifestyle in the Gulf Islands," he insists.

It will have its own sewage system and more important for an island often starved for water, a self-sustaining water-collection system that will use a system of rooftop water collection and underground collection pipes that won't impinge on other precious water resources. Although the site has already largely been cleared — actual construction will begin next year — Ivanore points out that wherever possible, trademark Arbutus and Garry Oak trees have been saved.

"We have also donated 277 acres to the water district and 600 acres have been designated as parkland reserve through which 200 miles of marked trails with kiosks and maps will eventually be created that will be open to all islanders."

The company, a collection of 304 investors from B.C. and Alberta, has already spent \$13 million on the project and plans to spend \$7 million alone on the sewage and water systems.

The town will have 80,000 square feet of commercial space, designed to be pedestrian friendly and include tennis courts, playing field, a wellness centre, spa and a crafts workshop.

The houses, which will officially go on the market this month, will vary from \$500,000 to \$1.6 million

It remains to be seen whether a pub and hotel get added to the commercial mix.

It could become a very contentious issue and the company is seeking release from a restrictive covenant imposed in 1984 limiting density on the site to the 557 residences.

Relaxation of that density would permit 130 additional units.

Continued from Page A44

The covenant holders are the North Salt Spring Waterworks District, School District #64, Salt Spring Water Preservation Society and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Woman's Services.

Lineger says many residents see it as an end-run by the company to get more density on the site.

"We are now talking to all of the covenant holders to see what their view is. We don't want them to release the covenant," she said.

"I'm pretty firm on keeping the cap," Lineger said.

She says the company could probably win permission for a pub, but the hotel is a whole other question. The current island Official Community Plan does not provide for a hotel, she said.

Another contentious issue is that the developer intends selling fractional or multiple ownerships allowing up to five owners for one property.

Lineger says that has further heightened concerns. "We envisaged a permanent residential community there. "It was always seen as a resident-based community and never as a part-time resort development like Whistler Village."

Many properties are being purchased by Americans looking for it to be their summer home.

This transitioning from a quiet rural farming community to one with more of a focus on tourism worries some and they see Channel Ridge as the thin edge of the wedge into a more urban, tourist island.

David Essig, Islands Trust chairman says the trust has no problem with the project.

"The key distinction is that this develops as the community plan envisages it will and to this point in time anyway that has been happening," he said

"There is grudging acceptance that Salt Spring must grow and they want to be assured it happens in a manner consistent with island values and the way the community plan envisaged it would."

aford@png.canwest.com

Adequate water supply is the most challenging problem for the Gulf Islands and Salt Spring Island, despite having several lakes, is no different. Channel Ridge Properties says it will provide its own sustainable water supply and not add to the island's water burden. How will the system work?

- The village site has been designed to protect many of the original water corridors. n A collection system that will imitate the natural hydrology of the land will keep water recycling within the community. n Water will be harvested from roof tops, captured by underground pipes and stored in reservoirs after treatment. n The system has been designed to collect 140 per cent of water required by a community of 1,200. n The quality of water after treatment will be better than that of Salt Spring's water supply, the company says. n Grey water will be treated and stored in lakes and used for irrigation. n Water use will be further minimized through use of low-flow toilets and shower heads.

SALT SPRING

- It is the largest of the Gulf Islands encompassing 246 square kilometres.
- It is the most geographically diverse of the islands with several lakes and peaks.
- The first settlers arrived in the 1850s. Farming, logging and fishing were the original core of the economy.
 - Tourism is now the mainstay of the island's economy.
- It is home to 10,000 residents, many of whom commute to work in Vancouver and Victoria.
- The Channel Ridge lands were originally assembled by Louis Lindholm in the early 1980s.
 - The village concept plan was conceived in 1984.
- Lindholm died in Nanaimo and family squabbling resulted in the land being purchased by Channel Ridge in 2001 for \$7.1 million.



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Les Twarog & Sonja Pederson
 RE/MAX Crest Realty (Westside)
 1428 W 7th Avenue
 Vancouver, V6H 1C1, BC, CANADA
 Office: 604-602-1111 • Fax: 866-617-9249
 Email: mml@6717000.com

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