

Salt Spring News

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News

Musing on the Merchants' Mews

Musing on the Merchants' Mews

by Joanne O'Connor

The crisp buildings and ebony asphalt at 315 Upper Ganges Road, at the junction of Robinson Road, exude a quiet expectancy, as if anticipating the day when their potential will be fully utilized.

These are the Merchants' Mews, and according to owner Sean Hodgins of Century Group, that day is not far off.

Seven of the 23 units have already been leased to local businesses. Currently, the Mews are home to vehicle inspection, chocolate production, three metal work shops and a furniture repair shop.

In April, 2000, the Century Group assumed ownership when the original owner abandoned the project. Then dubbed "Function Junction,"

the development was plagued by financial woes, and the final building was still at the framing stage. After paying the outstanding debts, the new owners completed the building and landscaping.

Moving onwards and upwards, Century Group decided to rename the development.

"Function Junction had a bad air over it," explained Hodgins, "We thought we'd make a clean break from it. Local realtor Marshall Lindholm came up with the name, Merchants' Mews, and I bought into it."

He and leasing/sales agent John Cade, of Royal LePage, envision an exciting future for Merchants' Mews. Century Group recently applied to the local Trust for a Temporary Commercial Use Permit (TCUP). The site is currently zoned Commercial Services (C6), which allows such uses as warehouses, and machine and motor vehicle repair. Public service use and one residential unit are also included. If approved, the new permit might allow for a retail facility.

As John Cade explained, much business goes on at the coffee shop, and with this in mind, the TCUP application includes a petition for a small (maximum 400 square foot) restaurant.

"We don't want to compete with what's going on in Ganges proper," maintained Hodgins. "We're trying to create an atmosphere where there's some life."

Linda Adams of the Islands Trust explained that the TCUP coincides with some of the uses already proposed in the draft Land Use Bylaw 355, currently under discussion. Adams said the TCUP would allow such uses to be "tried out" for two years, after which point an extension may be granted, or Bylaw 355 may be in effect, thereby allowing such uses to continue.

Century Group's TCUP application was received and discussed by the Trust in a December 21, 2000 meeting. At the same meeting, a letter from Ingvaard Straarup, of Leisure Lane Farm was presented. Straarup, whose farm lies below Merchants' Mews, indicated his concerns regarding drainage.

Adams explained that the Trust decided to table the temporary permit application to consult with Century Group and Straarup. "We normally try to be really careful where there's an interface between agricultural and commercial areas," Adams added.

Cade, Hodgins, and Adams each stated that the drainage system for Merchants' Mews was professionally engineered. Hodgins said the issue has never come up before. "I'm trying to meet with [Staarup] to deal with it."

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