

Crowd divided as hundreds pack rec centre for Southlands meeting

Sandor Gyarmati

The Delta Optimist

Monday, October 26, 2009

The public didn't get a chance to speak but it was clear from the applause on both sides how the Southlands is becoming a divisive issue for Tsawwassen.

A crowd of roughly 500 showed up at the Tsawwassen Area Plan Committee's forum at the South Delta Recreation Centre Saturday afternoon to hear about a proposal by the Century Group to develop the contentious property.

While the meeting's theme was also focused on urban agriculture, there's no doubt the Southlands was the main issue for the crowd.

Before the session began supporters, some wearing "Yes" T-shirts, handed out leaflets explaining why the development proposal is a good one. While not much as far as protest placards could be seen, a petition with around 400 names in opposition was given to the committee that afternoon.

The Southlands is the biggest single issue the committee will deal with as it comes up with recommendations on revising the area plan, which was last updated in the early 1990s. Those recommendations to Delta council could include allowing development on the 530-acre Southlands property, which is zoned agricultural and in Metro Vancouver's Green Zone, but no longer in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The Century Group is hoping to develop the site with 1,900 homes and various other amenities using concepts of new urbanism and agricultural urbanism.

While there were mostly receptive crowds during previous open houses sponsored by the Century Group, it remained to be seen what kind of response there would be at the first municipally organized forum on the potential development.

Unlike the highly contentious TDL proposal 20 years ago, which drew a swift, overwhelmingly negative response, there seemed to be a sizable number at Saturday's session that were clearly supportive of Century's plan. However, there was also a large number that were steadfastly opposed.



CREDIT: Photo by Sandor Gyarmati
Hundreds of residents turned out Saturday afternoon for the Tsawwassen Area Plan Committee's forum on Century Group's proposal for the Southlands.

The meeting's format was designed to have an open house before guest speakers made presentations. After the presentations, audience members had an opportunity to talk to the speakers or committee members as well as fill out questionnaires.

Committee chair Bruce McDonald, who got an earful after the meeting from some concerned residents, made it clear the forum was not to debate the Southlands proposal and it was not a public hearing. He noted the Save the Southlands group was invited to speak but declined.

Century Group president Sean Hodgins received a polite response from the crowd as well as supportive applause. Speaker Wendy Holm, an agrologist who is opposed to developing the Southlands, received a more thunderous ovation when she said, "I don't think those quality soils should be growing houses."

The first speaker was Kristi Tatebe with UBC's Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning, who talked about food security issues and the need to create a more blended agriculture-urban edge.

She recommended ways to increase "food resilience" should include greater support for small-scale organic biodiversity farms, as well as making space for agriculture within communities. Tatebe didn't discuss the Southlands specifically but many of the concepts she talked about are part of Century's development plans.

After guest speaker Ron Plowright, representing the food security program at Fraser Health, the audience got to hear from Hodgins, who gave a heartfelt presentation about his vision for the Southlands, including urban agriculture that would be managed by the community.

Noting there would be other benefits, including the protection of open space and housing options for seniors, Hodgins promised the dedicated farming area would be given to the community.

"Preserving agricultural land, and not just preserving but activating it, and I dare say enhancing it to make it something more meaningful for the community. For the first time, this community will own that farm, and it's the largest single component of that plan," he explained.

"There's well over 200 acres of agricultural land dedicated to the community ... I don't know what the future will bring to this process and I don't know what someone else would do to develop this land. I don't know if someone else would only farm it with only profit in mind. All I've worked on is something that might work for this community and the community has some difficult decisions.

"I'm in your hands in terms of what the future will bring, but it really comes down to the fact that we all live here together. I believe we all want to find a solution that makes it the best thing for all of us."

Hodgins, citing the efforts of the Southlands Community Planning Team, acknowledged there are issues to be worked out, the biggest of which is traffic, and promised there would be solutions.

Saying the Century proposal seems like a good one at first read, although it's not the first time one-third of good farmland somewhere had been promised for agriculture in exchange for allowing housing, Holm made it clear the property

should remain entirely agricultural.

Noting how valuable agricultural land capable of growing a wider variety of crops was being lost at an alarming rate in the Lower Mainland, Holm claimed normal farm management practices would enable the Southlands to be a productive farm. She said there are many alternatives for the site, including apprenticeship co-ops, where local farmers can mentor young people wanting to learn the business.

The Century Group submitted an application earlier this year for an amendment to the Official Community Plan, but that's been put on hold until the area plan committee presents its recommendations to council. The committee, which will have a final report early next year, has been gathering information. To date, however, it has not scheduled any meetings to allow residents to speak on the Southlands.

Saturday's meeting was its final public forum, but the group's meetings at municipal hall are open to the public to observe.

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Both camps show strength

Sandor Gyarmati

The Delta Optimist

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

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CREDIT: photo by Sandor Gyarmati
Century Group president Sean Hodgins shared his vision for the Southlands with a packed South Delta Recreation Centre Saturday afternoon.

made presentations. After the presentations, audience members had an opportunity to talk to the speakers or committee members as well as fill out questionnaires.

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Friday » October
30 » 2009

Answer not easy when crowd split

Ted Murphy

The Delta Optimist

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

I don't envy the folks tasked with devising a new Tsawwassen Area Plan.

When I left Saturday's public forum on the Southlands I had heard so many conflicting viewpoints my head was spinning. I was certain of one thing, however: I didn't want to be on that committee about now.

Twenty years ago when the TDL housing proposal was before the public, the eventual decision made by civic politicians became an easy one given the long and loud opposition to what was being pitched. The record-setting public hearing made it painfully obvious what the community thought of the 1,900-home rezoning application.

This time around it's nowhere near as clear-cut. In fact, it was difficult to discern which side had the upper hand in the packed gymnasium at the South Delta Recreation Centre on Saturday. Agrologist Wendy Holm got the loudest ovation when she said the Southlands soil was too good to sprout houses, which could mean either the "no" side was larger or she simply uttered the best line of the afternoon.

Whatever the split, it's obvious that, unlike two decades ago, both camps are of a considerable size, which will make arriving at a consensus darn near impossible. I like the area plan committee's chances of walking across Boundary Bay to Crescent Beach better than making everyone happy with its decision on the Southlands.

There's no denying the plan put forward by Century Group president Sean Hodgins, who received much help from local citizens and out of town experts, is an innovative one, complete with small-scale farming and walkable, pedestrian-oriented neighbourhoods.

There's also no getting around the fact there's a sizable contingent that wants to see the land preserved, whether for farming or simply community ambience, and has fears of traffic congestion and more should the plan proceed.

It was difficult to gauge public sentiment Saturday as there was no opportunity for the crowd to speak, those in attendance left to listen to the panel speakers, chat with civic types individually and fill out questionnaires. The area plan committee can now sift through those questionnaires to get a better handle on where the people stand, but even then I suspect there'll be a sea of conflicting viewpoints.

The problem here is there isn't any middle ground. Sure, the proposal could be modified, but the real question is whether the land should be developed.

And only the area plan committee has the answer to that one.

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Teaching farm isn't a new idea

Hodgins takes issue with agrologist's proposal for Southlands, saying there isn't any money to make it happen

Sandor Gyarmati

The Delta Optimist

Saturday, October 31, 2009

It's important to clear up some misconceptions conveyed by an agrologist who suggested the Southlands be turned into a teaching farm, says Century Group president Sean Hodgins.

"She had her facts wrong about the soil ratings for the entire site and what she is proposing isn't something new, it's been talked about before," said Hodgins, responding to a presentation made by Wendy Holm at last weekend's public forum at the South Delta Recreation Centre.

Hundreds of people showed up at the meeting, hosted by the Tsawwassen Area Plan Committee, to hear presentations about urban agriculture and, in particular, the Southlands.

Holm, who was asked to make a presentation by a group of residents, drew loud applause when she insisted the entire Southlands had good quality soil and shouldn't grow houses.

An idea she said that's worth exploring is having the property used by colleges or universities for apprentice programs to train a new generation of farmers.

"It seems to be one of the nice visions if it was a possibility. The economics have changed for the parcel, obviously. It's not about hauling spuds through the (George) Massey Tunnel anymore," she said in an interview with the Optimist this week.

"The next thing for me is to put together a discussion paper and see whether we can get a dialogue going. Maybe it will be Metro Vancouver who will invite the universities to the table," she said.

Holm said with remediation and good farm management the soil would be suitable for farming activities, so it's just a matter of determining what's the best possible use for the agriculturally zoned land.



CREDIT: photo by Sandor Gyarmati

Century Group president Sean Hodgins was one of four speakers at a Tsawwassen Area Plan meeting last Saturday.

Holm also said there doesn't need to be a trade-off to farm some of the land in exchange for allowing housing.

"Now the buck stops at Metro Vancouver because it is out of the ALR. That was a bad decision ... now Metro Vancouver is holding the line on it and it's being held as a food lands inventory for a reason," she said.

"That's good public policy: how can we put that land to its best use. The fact that it's in a developer's hands now is just a natural extension of it being out of the ALR."

Holm said Hodgins has put together a "nice looking" development and he did a good job bringing together the community, however, development is not right for the site.

"Maybe there's another better vision and maybe it's the minor co-operative where you have someone doing dairy and someone doing organic and someone doing urban agriculture."

Hodgins, noting someone will have to pay for the extensive drainage and irrigation required to make the land more feasible for soil-based farming, said he offered a farm teaching area to UBC a few years ago and was declined.

"It's all very well meaning and I've heard it all before. Nothing she (Holm) said is new. And we've been very up front about the soil qualities," he said.

"We offered land to UBC when we thought they were going to close down the UBC farm and they refused. They didn't have the operating dollars to do it. So it doesn't really wash what she's suggesting.

"Her supposition that a collaboration of universities magically come and take over the land, she hasn't identified the first dollar where that's going to come from."

Hodgins said his proposal is getting a positive response from many in the community. Those include residents who previously were opposed to anything being built on the Southlands but see a mix of housing types with urban agriculture as an idea worth discussing, he said.

"There isn't a shortage of farmland as she (Holm) would have you believe. What we have is a shortage of farmers and what our plan does, working with Kwantlen (Polytechnic University), is have a farm that's more meaningful to the community," he said.

Century's plan would see construction of 1,900 housing units on one-third of the property to help fund the farming activities.

Hodgins said the Southlands is a difficult subject for the Tsawwassen Area Plan Committee but he's hoping it sees his vision, which received community input, as the most suitable for the future.

Completed questionnaire/comment sheets on the Tsawwassen Area Plan review have to be submitted by Friday, Nov. 6. For more information, go to the Corporation of Delta website at www.corp.delta.bc.ca.

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South Delta Leader

Southlands talk muted



Sean Hodgins was one of four speakers at a public forum on the relationship between urban agriculture and urban living in Tsawwassen.

Jim Kinnear photo

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By [Philip Raphael - South Delta Leader](#)

Published: October 29, 2009 11:00 AM

Updated: October 29, 2009 1:09 PM

It was a recreation centre gym divided Saturday (Oct. 24) as a standing room audience of about 500 gathered to hear presentations on the final public forum on the Tsawwassen Area Plan.

The majority of those attending on the bright, sunny afternoon were there to listen to commentary on the potential future of the Southlands—a 220 hectare tract of land that faced weighty public opposition 20 years ago during one of the longest

public hearings in Canadian history.

Saturday's meeting lasted only a few hours, where the crowd—a handful wearing white and green "Say yes to the Southlands" T-shirts—heard from four speakers.

Up first was Kristi Tatebe of the Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning at the University of B.C. She spoke about ways of making the borderline between rural and agricultural areas more "permeable" and less rigidly defined.

Tatebe said there needs to be ways of looking at ways of integrating agriculture into a community, and "really changing our relationship with our food systems."

Ron Plowright from the Fraser Health Authority's Food Security Program said reliable food supply is one of the determining factors in maintaining health.

Century Group president Sean Hodgins made an impassioned address about his vision for the Southlands.

"We're here to talk about the future of the Southlands, and of course it's much more than that," he said. "It's really the future of Tsawwassen."

Hodgins added the nature of the community has changed over the years as farming families have seen their younger generations not opt to continue the family business.

"The only generation that grew up with the backdrop of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) was the one that did not go into farming," he said.

Hodgins was quick to add the ALR is today more important than ever to preserve farm land, "But, we can talk about preserving farmland all day long, but if we don't preserve farmers, we have nothing."

During a three-year, community consultation process, Hodgins has proposed dividing the Southlands into thirds with residential, small scale farming, and public parks space.

Capping off the speaker's list was agrologist Wendy Holm who spoke in favour of preserving Southlands. She said the status of the soils on the property being poor for farming is a myth and drew the biggest response from the crowd when she said, "I don't think those quality soils should be growing houses."

To the chagrin of some in the audience, there was no provision for the public to offer their comments at an open microphone. Instead, municipal staff were collecting comment sheets distributed as people entered the recreation centre. The public also had the opportunity to discuss matters with municipal officials during the final hour of the meeting.

editor@southdeltaleader.com

Feedback wanted

Residents have until Nov. 6 to complete comment sheets related to the themes of the five public forums held on the Tsawwassen Area Plan review.

Find the questionnaires and comment sheets at the Corporation of Delta's [web site](#).

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Find this article at:

http://www.bclocalnews.com/richmond_southdelta/southdeltaleader/news/67274942.html



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Saturday » October
31 » 2009

MLAs weigh in on Southlands

Sandor Gyarmati

The Delta Optimist

Saturday, October 31, 2009

Delta must finally settle, once and for all, what to do with the Southlands, says Delta South MLA Vicki Huntington.

The independent MLA was asked this week for her thoughts on agrologist Wendy Holm's idea of turning the site into a teaching/co-op farm.

Huntington said the site is a large, intact parcel, making it valuable agriculturally. She said she doesn't believe it should be severed into small acreages or large-scale development.

"I agree with Ms. Holm that if it is not used for large-scale agriculture then other related uses should be found and if that turns out to be an university/government research operation, then I will do everything I can to enlist provincial government support for such an arrangement."

She said unless the community finally settles the issue, proposed development in one form or another will continue to resurface.

"Perhaps a reasonable compromise for (Delta) council consideration would be to trade zoning density along the 56th Street corridor in exchange for returning the remainder of the land to the ALR."

Delta North NDP MLA Guy Gentner said the Southlands is good quality farmland that still has the capacity to be farmed.

"Why should anyone feel any empathy towards the speculator who purchased the property already knowing it was zoned agriculture and that most people want it to stay?" he asked.

Former Delta South Liberal MLA Val Roddick said the community has to agree on a reasonable and realistic solution because the land is no longer in the reserve.

She said the proposal by Sean Hodgins appears to be a reasonable answer.

"The issue here is that you can make it into a park or maybe an agricultural research centre, but this land is not in the ALR. We all know that if it does not have that ALR designation, it's worth more," she said.

"If somebody wants to step up and buy it, I'm sure Sean would say, 'Be my guest.' But you can't just take it away from him."

Roddick added, "I understand where Wendy (Holm) is coming from, I've known

her for ages. But I think that because there's the UBC (training) and Agassiz (research) farms, it's changed the dynamics.

"If it supplies what the community needs with housing and leaves a good chunk available for local community farming and access, I think it's a suitable project. Times have changed and this is a worthwhile proposal."

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