

COWICHAN VALLEY CITIZEN

North Cowichan to amend OCP to help West Vista Terrace project to proceed



[Robert Barron](#)

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North Cowichan will amend its OCP to allow the West Vista Terrace project to proceed. (Citizen file photo) | (Citizen file photo)

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The developers of the approximately 30 acres of land north of Herd Road where the comprehensive West Vista Terrace project is planned have jumped through another hoop in efforts for it to be included in North Cowichan’s urban-containment boundary.

Council decided in a tight 4-3 vote at its meeting on Sept. 3 to have staff proceed with amendments to North Cowichan's official community plan to include more than 100 acres of property north of Herd Road, including the West Vista property, in the UCB and proceed to a public hearing on the issue.

A staff report said there are significant arguments against amending the OCP to expand the Bell McKinnon growth centre to include the properties at this time, and recommended against it.

Staff said that with space for more than 22,000 additional units currently within the existing UCB, the expansion is not warranted at this time.

The report also pointed out that there is no servicing capacity available for additional development, even within the existing UCB, at this time, and changing the OCP will delay and/or increase costs for ongoing projects.

But a slim majority of council members did not agree with staff.

Coun Mike Caljouw said he's supported the West Vista project from the very beginning, and a big reason for that comes from the fact that the land was originally in the UCB.



"I just don't see how, with a swipe of a pen, they can say that this area is not able to be developed," he said. "I think it should be included [in the UCB] now. If we pass this tonight, it doesn't mean the project will be developed tomorrow. To me, this is a future growth area and I think it should stay a future growth area considering the parameters we have here for infrastructure."

The proposed West Vista project includes the construction of 700 residential units, retail and commercial spaces and a 95-room hotel on the property located on the north side of Herd Road, close to where the new Cowichan District Hospital is under construction, which is currently just outside the UCB which ends on the south side of Herd Road.

The project, which is being proposed by Mill Bay-based West Vista development company, was turned down by North Cowichan council in a 3-3 vote in March, 2024, but the company resubmitted its application to the municipality and Coun. Chris Istace changed his vote on the issue at the meeting on Nov. 20, 2024, allowing the project to continue its way through the municipality's application process.

But at the meeting on Sept. 3, a number of council members expressed misgivings about it.

Mayor Rob Douglas echoed many of staff's concerns with the project, including that the municipality currently has sufficient land supply for the construction of 22,000 housing units within the existing UCB, while just 7,023 units are required over the next 20 years.



He said North Cowichan is also struggling with significant infrastructure limitations.

"Currently there is no available water or sewer servicing capacity for new development, even within the current UCB," Douglas said.

Coun. Bruce Findlay and Coun. Tek Manhas said they liked the award-winning Bell McKinnon local area plan to guide development in the area of the new hospital, but calls for phased development in the area are unrealistic.

Manhas said the municipality can't force developers to develop their land, so phased development doesn't really work.

"Developers are ready to develop when they're ready and numbers make it work for them, and West Vista is ready to go, and I think some [property owners] in the north of Herd Road are also ready to go now as well if they can sell their properties to developers," he said.



Coun. Becky Hogg also said she supports the project.

"I don't want to see urban sprawl, but this is right on the corner by the hospital and the land was originally in the UCB, so I'm in favour of this," she said.

Coun. Christopher Justice, who has consistently voted against the West Vista project, said to council that he feels he needs to try one more time to "shake a little sense into your heads".

He said staff have been closely studying the project for years and are recommending that council reject it.

"Staff have informed us that this is unnecessary for meeting our gross needs and, additionally, staff tells us that even if we want to move forward, no housing could possibly be built there for the foreseeable future because we're lacking the servicing capacity for that area right now," Justice said.

Coun Chris Istace said he voted for the project the last time it was at the council table, but a lot more information has come to light since then, including North Cowichan's major infrastructure problems.

"It puts our future development that's already zoned in Crofton and Chemainus at risk," he said.

"I met with [West Vista's property owners] and I think they're great people and I have empathy for them and I want to see them succeed, but people look to this table for governance, and good governance means looking at the community as a whole and not jeopardizing existing developments that are on the table."

The motion passed, with Douglas, Justice and Istace opposed.



***About the Author:* Robert Barron**

Since 2016, I've had had the pleasure of working with our dedicated staff and community in the Cowichan Valley.

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