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A win-win for Galiano's forest lands

Suzanne Fournier

Residents of Galiano Island showed remarkable unanimity on an unseasonably warm day May 6, when the Local Trust Committee convened a public hearing into a 'win-win' solution in the often fractious issue of residential development of forestland.

Richard Dewinetz, Galiano's largest private owner of forest-zoned lands and a long-time protagonist in the extended conflict, agreed to transfer 161 of 221 acres of forest-zoned land adjoining Bodega Ridge Provincial Park to BC Parks as part of a rezoning, in exchange for extra density—a 12-lot subdivision of five-acre residential lots. Dewinetz has posted a billboard off Vineyard Way for 'The Estates at Panorama,' with views from Vancouver to Mount Baker, and prices starting at \$259,000, including GST and driveway.

Every speaker supported the rezoning. Dewinetz told the hearing that he was pleased to sign over waterfront and forest lands, thus giving to Galiano residents—and all of BC—a 'coast-to-coast' park 'that the public will own.' In a brief break, over coffee and treats provided by the Galiano Food Program, Dewinetz joked that the somewhat uncharacteristic harmony of the meeting might have been due to the ongoing 'Random Acts of Kindness' week on Galiano.

Long-time Galiano resident Gary Coward, whose father Woody Coward was one of the architects of Galiano's first official community plan under the *Islands Trust Act*, said he supported the Dewinetz proposal '13 years after our bylaws have been in place to allow that kind of arrangement, to bonus density in exchange for land.' Coward thanked trustees Sandy Pottle and Louise Decario, both in their second consecutive term in office, for working cooperatively to bring about an 'innovative' solution in the Gulf Islands.

Decario said after the bylaws enshrining the plan were given second and third reading and sent on to the Islands Trust executive that she indeed considers the Dewinetz plan a 'win-win' solution. 'This is planned, orderly development and that's what we promised as trustees all along, that we wanted to plan development not restrict it, protect our forest lands for the future and save some waterfront for the public to enjoy as well.'

Dewinetz also agreed to provide additional community benefits as part of the plan as donations to specific community organizations. Net proceeds from the sale of Lot 12 is designated for construction of seniors' housing, \$50,000 is designated for construction of the new North End fire hall after the sale of the fourth of the other 11 lots, and \$100,000 will go toward construction of the Galiano Museum after sale of the fifth lot.

Some residents' concerns about BC Parks were eased by a letter assuring the LTC that the park will be developed only with full community consultation.

The May 6 decision could provide a model for more successful, cooperative development through rezoning, within the terms of Galiano's Official Community Plan. The local trust committee has other proposals at various stages of development. Dewinetz, himself, still owns several 20-acre waterfront forest-zoned lots facing the Strait of Georgia. They would also require rezoning with community input to achieve residential use.

Dewinetz acquired 650 acres on Galiano when his partner Mark Consiglio went bankrupt, shortly after forest giant MacMillan Bloedel destabilized local planning by plunking more than half of Galiano's forestlands onto the open market as real estate. Residential development on those forest lands has been slow thanks to Local Trust Committee bylaws aimed at protecting the forested character of the island. ✍

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