JOINT VENTURE

Land consultation continues

Directors are committed to doing the best for the community

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PEAK EDITOR

A joint venture with large land holdings in Powell River is prepared to release its business plan to the public.

Scott Randolph, PRREDS' (Powell River Regional Economic Development Society) manager, told about 30 people who attended a PRSC Limited Partnership open house at Tla'Amin (Sliammon) First Nation on November 14 that he will ask the board to post the business plan on the company's website. PRREDS has a fee-for-service contract to manage PRSC.

Tla'Amin, the City of Powell River and Catalyst Paper Corporation are the partners in PRSC. The company purchased 325 hectares (805 acres) from Catalyst last year, property not required for local mill operations. PRSC plans to subdivide and sell parts of the property and redevelop other parcels.

In the past, the fact that the business plan has not been made public has been a contentious issue for opponents of PRSC, which began life known as the joint venture.

The PRSC open house in Tla'Amin followed a first open house held at the Powell River Recreation Complex on November 8. The company had maps of its land holdings displayed around the room and people were invited to comment on how they would like to see the property developed.

LAURA WALZ PHOTO

ADDING IDEAS: Wildwood resident Milton Johnson provides a few comments about land owned by PRSC Limited Partnership during an open house held on November 14 at Tla'Amin (Sliammon) First Nation.

During the formal part of the event, Randolph gave a presentation about the company and its history, followed by a question and answer period.

Tla'Amin Chief Walter Paul, who is chairman of the PRSC board, welcomed people to the meeting. "We're here to hear what you have to say," he said.

In 2006 the city applied to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) to remove five parcels, or 343 hectares (847 acres) from the provincial agricultural land reserve. PRSC owns four of the parcels and Catalyst owns the fifth. The purpose of the application was to allow development and expand economic opportunities within the community.

The ALC turned down the city's application in September 2007. Subsequently, commission representatives told PRSC directors and city officials that comprehensive community planning needed to take place before the ALC would consider another application for exclusion of lands.

Paul apologized for the lack of public consultation up to now, as had PRSC directors at the first open house. "I know what consultation means," he said. "We've been in the treaty process for a long time."

Chris Roddan and Kevin Sigouin, the city's appointees to the board, were also present to answer questions.

Sigouin explained that Mayor Stewart Alsgard and Councillor Sandi Tremblay stepped down from the PRSC board because of feedback from the community that they were in a conflict of interest. The city advertised for people to volunteer to be on the PRSC board as city representatives and he applied, as did Roddan.

Segouin said one of the reasons why he applied was because he had heard all the conspiracy theories about the joint venture, with no information coming from the company. He said the board of directors is committed to doing the best for the community. "Unless I'm getting the wool pulled over my eyes, to the best of my knowledge, everyone sitting at that table is trying their best to ensure this moves forward in a sustainable manner," he said. "By having this input, it's even greater, because it even solidifies more power for people around the board to push stronger on certain things to ensure that that proper balance occurs."

Some people asked if PRSC board meetings could be open to the public. Roddan said he would take that back to the board, but noted that PRSC was a private company.

Milton Johnson, president of the Wildwood Ratepayers' Association, pointed out that Catalyst had a community stakeholder committee and suggested that PRSC consider setting up a similar group.

The questions and comments people had ranged over a variety of topics, including PRSC's business structure and its plans for the future. Many people called for more detailed plans and a more transparent and open process.

All the questions and answers will be posted on PRSC's website, www.prreds.com/prsc.htm. Randolph's presentation, as well as maps showing the lands PRSC owns, are also available on the website.

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