

The Watchdog Bulletin



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Keywords:

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Photo at right: Wildwood Bluffs' devastation is Stage One of the Joint Venture.

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Unexpurgated Report: the ALR Public Hearing You won't read it in The Peak!

The City Council of Powell River held a public hearing last Tuesday evening on their application to remove nearly 900 acres of land from the ALR. This is the so-called 'joint venture' land now owned by PRSC, the umbrella corporation for the City of Powell River, Sliammon, and Catalyst Paper Co.

There was a large crowd (200 plus) in the Evergreen Theatre. The evening began with the City Clerk and City Administrator reading at least ten, maybe more, letters of support from citizens (one in opposition). Clearly, these letters were solicited by City Hall as there had been no notice to citizens to provide written submissions ahead of the meeting. The letters, and many of the individuals who spoke in support of the application, sounded as though they had been scripted – and, most likely, they had. Their were 34 speakers – 17 in favour of the application and 17 opposed. One attendee summed it up: "The hearing was incompetently run and the chair was belligerently partisan."

Wildwood resident Nelle Maxey was the second person to go to the microphone at the Public Hearing. She was less than one minute into her statement, just beginning to discuss the bias of city council in this matter, when

city administrator, Stan Westby, got up from his chair on the stage and walked over to the Chair of the Hearing, Councillor Bob Astrope. Astrope then started haranguing Maxey about not 'speaking to the application' – in spite of the fact that she was clearly 'speaking to the application.' She read a few more sentences and then was interrupted again. At this point, the audience loudly came to her support amid cries of "Let her speak! We want to hear."

Astrope's interruptions and the crowd's support for Maxey continued for a number of minutes. When the audience refused to back down, Astrope finally relented and Maxey again commenced reading her statement. At this point, she was interrupted by the City Clerk, Marie Claxton (the person who read most of the letters at the beginning of the meeting just to set the tone) and informed she only had 30 seconds left to finish her statement. Clearly, with all the interruptions, Maxey did not receive her full five minutes of time. Similarly, Astrope attempted to keep Debby Waslewski from speaking twice, even though she had not used up her allotted five minutes the first time around.

And, he was particularly rude to another speaker, telling him "... you've said enough" even though the individual had spoken for less than 3 minutes.

However, it was a different story when the supporters of the application spoke. They were allowed to drift into areas that did not 'speak to the

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support having already been read at the beginning of the meeting. Another proponent, Joyce Carlson, owner of the The Peak, was so out in left field with her comments that the crowd started yelling, "Speak to the application! Speak to the application!"

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owners of the land, but without any details, what a good idea the joint venture was for us. We listened to fairy tales about how removing the land from the ALR would magically provide jobs for Sliammon youth – as well as all the people in Powell River – be they grandfathers, fathers, or children.

Some important points which came up at the meeting:

1. It was pointed out by a few of the speakers that the City had successfully applied for exclusion of land from the ALR in years past and that this land had not been used so why was the City asking for almost 900 acres to be removed now? Good question but, of course, no answer was forthcoming from the five council members who sat mute and scowling on the stage.
2. Three of the Council members at the meeting, Brenda DeGraag, Ted Byng, and Bob Astrope are directors of the Powell River Waterfront Development Corporation (PRWDC). The PRWDC is one of the partners in PRSC. These three had voted to send the City's application to the ALR. This vote was an obvious conflict of interest. A director of PRWDC has a fiduciary duty towards the corporation. A city councillor has a fiduciary duty to the city and its citizens as well as numerous other duties that include such things as providing information and operating in an unbiased manner. When Martin Rossander tried to raise the conflict of interest issue, he was stopped by Chair Astrope and told nastily that he was not 'speaking to the application.'
3. Most of the proponents seem to believe magic will occur if the City's application for exclusion of the ALR lands is successful – either that or they have been snorting too much cocaine. According to them, jobs will flow into the City overnight, the tax base will be diversified with new industry, and gold will roll through the streets. The fact that there is no basis for believing these fairy tales does not affect their fervor.

4. Dave Formosa indicated in an article with the Agricultural application that he implied that ALC staff was helping him develop a successful application to appeal the ALC decision.

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About half-way through the meeting, the skirt on the table at which the Councillors were sitting, fell off on one side. The Councillors who were sitting behind the table could not see that the skirt, meant to cover their lower-halves from view, had given way. The symbolism of the Councillors not knowing what was happening was not lost on us in the audience.

The Story of the Greased Pig

Once upon a time, a Sliammon warrior by the name Powell River wanted to buy some land for development from a big corporation named Catalyst. The big corporation wanted to sell him a parcel of their almost 900 acres of 'surplus' land; however, most of the land was in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and the piece the warrior wanted to buy would have to be excluded from the ALR before it could be developed. So, as Dave Formosa stated at last week's ALR public hearing, he brought his development plans to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) when he was told by ALC staff that his application for removal of the land from the ALR could not succeed. However, if he recast his proposal in the context of a local Government request based on Community Need, the application could ultimately succeed. And, if he partnered with a local First Nation group, why it would start to look like a 'greased pig.'

Catalyst (then Noranda) wanted to sell all their surplus lands in order to lower their taxes (and maybe to use the proceeds to help pay the interest payments on their billion dollar debt) but, in addition to the fact that the land was in the ALR, the Sliammon First Nation was rumored to have land claims on much of the land. And, there were potential environmental issues. As a result of these problems, Catalyst was unsuccessful in attempting to sell the land to a private developer.

Thus, a marriage of convenience took place. Dave Formosa desperately wanted to get involved in the development of Catalyst land and Catalyst desperately wanted to sell their 'surplus' land – to someone with a deep pocket. So, Catalyst and Formosa, who formerly worked at the mill, came up with a great idea: Convince the local politicians and the Sliammon First Nation chiefs to enter into a secret deal with them where Catalyst would get \$4.5 million for their 'surplus' lands. In addition, if the partners in the deal forfeited on the mortgage, Catalyst would get all the land back. Even without a forfeiture, Catalyst demanded to have absolute control over the most lucrative parcels of the land they supposedly sold (the old golf course and waterfront lands). Wow! What a deal!

Getting the First Nation and the City involved in the secret deal would help Formosa/Catalyst get through necessary provincial approvals, including the ALC. And once the lands were out of the ALR, under the Formosa/Catalyst schema, the cost of the 'servicing' (roads, sewers, streetlights, etc.) of those lands would be the city's responsibility rather than theirs. And being such nice guys, they'd let the City undertake the clean-up of at least one of those toxic, ugly hulls sitting right offshore as well.

PRSC is the umbrella corporation of the Powell River Waterfront Development Corporation (PRWDC) which is wholly owned by the City of Powell River.