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Developing Story: Musqueam showcase preferred option for development on endowment lands

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The site plan for the Musqueam Indian Band's preferred option for its proposed development of a 22-acre site on the University Endowment Lands. Photograph By

Rendering courtesy of Rositch Hemphill Architects

The preferred option for the Musqueam Indian Bands development of a 22-acre site on University Endowment Lands is being presented at an open house tonight, April 18.

The band plans to develop a site known as Block F between University Boulevard and Acadia Road, land which was returned by the provincial government under a 2008 reconciliation agreement. The open house is part of the pre-application process.

The preferred option envisions a commercial village of 30,000 square feet, a four-storey 120-room hotel, residential buildings, including three-storey town homes, four-to-six storey buildings, and four towers between 18 to 22 storeys, as well as open spaces in the form of trails, parks and village greens, according to Gordon Easton, project manager at Colliers International.

Easton added it allows for the mature stand of trees to remain with the wetlands in the centre of the site.

Thats something we heard quite strongly from the community and the Pacific Spirit Park Society that that was something theyd really like to see and also respecting the current trail network connections that exist on the site, he said.

Thursday marks the third open house for the project about 300 attended the first open house in early December and another 170 attended the second one in early February. Almost 1,300 views have been recorded to date for the Block F topic on PlaceSpeak, an online community consultation site.

Easton told the Courier the rationale behind the proposed tower heights is to preserve as much of the park and open space as possible.

Theres still room for amendment and were still looking for feedback on the plan, but I would say the kind of framework thats presented will likely form the application, he said, noting reaction to the project has been varied.

I think there are some that are prepared to look at a tradeoff for the amount of open space and the building height. Because its introducing a change, theres always those who will be resistant to some height on the site. Weve tried to minimize it and weve tried to look at heights that are consistent with UBC neighbourhoods we back onto Acadia Road. UBC has recently introduced 22-storey towers in Wesbrook buildings up to 22 storeys, so on the peninsula there is a precedent.

Tom Nichols, chair of the Pacific Spirit Park Societys Block F task force, said the organization is resigned to the development and is now focused on ensuring natural elements are protected.

Were resigned but were working with the development project team from Colliers, which is taking charge of the public input thats being sought by the developers, and were doing our best to maintain the values that Block F is presently providing and trying to work with them to see how they can be maintained during the development, Nichols said.

The values are connections with the rest of the park and the rest of the parks connections with it, the conifer growth that is there, the wetlands that are there and the waters that come out of them and feed into the streams in the park.

Maurice LeGallais, a volunteer with Spanish Banks Streamkeepers, said the development affects Acadia Creek, also known as Salish Creek, as well as Cutthroat Creek.

LeGallais has attended earlier open houses, talked with Easton and toured the property with the landscape architect.

I was suggesting they go and look at what theyve done with Camosun Bog elevated walkways, leaving the ground and the bog au naturelI mean this is radical thinking as far as design is concerned, he said. I know theyre aware of the upper watershed, that theyre aware of what it means to the streams. What they ultimately do with that knowledge, its up to them I guess, he said prior to the third open house, adding, Most of the drawings Ive seen make some provisions for the two streams. I havent seen any indication of my suggestion that they leave it wild and in its natural state, but thats asking a lot of these guys.

Easton told the Courier theyre trying to preserve the wetland area as much as possible, pointing to a boardwalk trail on the proposed plan.

So it would be a similar situation to the Camosun Bog. Its basically a boardwalk over the natural environment, so theres minimum disruption and it allows people to walk through and interact, but not disturb the environment there, he said.

Easton maintains many aspects of the proposal go a long way in satisfying some of the specific stakeholder concerns.

Weve had lots of questions about just more detail and the purpose of [Thursdays] meeting is to really share that greater level of

detail of the plan, Easton said.

As for what will be lost when the site is developed, he said: Were approaching it from whats retained or gained, as opposed to what might be the net loss and weve identified those key features that both our stakeholders and the general public feel are most important. The reality is it is a development site, so we cant preserve everything so weve tried to be selective in where the development is situated.

Once responses are collected from the April 18 open house, the project team will develop the rezoning application. In a couple of months, a formal application will be filed with the UEL.

The open house is at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Blvd, from 4 to 8 p.m., April 18.

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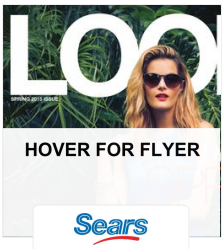

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