

Pretty Pictures not Needed at Southlands Information Meeting

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 01 November 2012 22:07



Mayor and Council,

While this is a letter that deals with the Southlands, it does not deal specifically with the rezoning application. Therefore I request that this forms a part of Correspondence Received for Mayor, Council and Staff.

I attended the "information" meeting held this past Thursday at the South Delta Rec Center. Upon observation of Delta staff and the power point presentation by Mr. Harvie and the story boards that were set up a couple of things sprang to mind.

First, I was surprised and taken aback by the presence of Mr. Hodgins and other Century employees and the role that they had taken upon themselves. Initially I thought they were there to observe what the response was by the community, which was fair enough. Instead I noted that Century had set up story boards with all kinds of pretty renderings of a development that still has many questions unanswered. It's quite easy to dress up a picture that has no grounding in reality. I am sure many of you remember the "award winning" design of the project that became known to locals as the Chicken Coops. The "award" for that design was solely based on artists rendering of the proposal. The artistic representation was nothing like the reality of the actual development, which is nothing like those pretty pictures.

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Mr. Harvie, during his presentation, made a point of telling the crowd who were there, that this was a strictly Delta meeting. Really? Then why was Century there with the exact same story boards and staff who had been present during the Century led information meeting? Why was it that Mr. Ransford, a Century employee and Mr. Hodgins were heard from at all? I heard them selling the merits of the project to people who were present at the meeting. So, respectfully, I will say that the information WAS NOT a strictly led Delta meeting.

I will also tell you that many people, especially older people who attended, were intimidated by their presence there. One elderly lady and her husband made a good deal of effort to get to the meeting. Upon arrival, they were filmed at the sign in table, which they didn't like, fearing their names and address could be viewed later. I will touch upon that later.

This couple told me, as they left after a quick and only cursory look at the story boards, that they were upset by the "lurking Century people" (their words word, not mine) who were listening to a conversation they had attempted to have with a Delta staff member. They were not the only ones who felt like this, I can assure you. Any official attendance by Century was inappropriate and left a very strong impression that Delta was there to sell the development, not to give unbiased information to residents.

This impression was further enhanced by the presentation by Mr. Harvie. The point form information provided no Century Group's Involvement at new information and Mr. Lam omitted the latest information on the fill amount, including the number of tandem dump trucks loaded with fill that will be required. That was significant information and yet was not mentioned during the presentation. Over 200,000 tandem trucks making their way down 56 St is no small detail. It is a rather large one since increased traffic is one of the major points residents want information on. Later on when Mr. Lam was asked questions by residents about the flood proofing, he was unable to come up with the requested information. Another resident asked about the trucks and how Delta would be dealing with all these trucks going through town. He said HE DIDN'T KNOW and Delta would deal with that AFTER THE APPROVAL was achieved. Seems to me that is information that should be dealt with before this rezoning application is approved. Mind you he did say the trucks could use 56 St during non peak hours. When asked if those non peak hours would be during the night, he once again said that this was something the DEVELOPER WOULD DECIDE ON AND HE WOULD NEED TO ASK HIM.

In another instance, I the Deputy Planner, why a study to determine how services would be affected would be done, only after Delta had approved 1st and 2nd reading and after Metro had given its approval to remove the Southlands from the green zone. That is ridiculous. We are already in a situation where there is overcrowding at Tsawwassen's pools and programs and to

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ignore the impact on our police, fire, hospital, library, fields, etc. is ridiculous.

How on earth can Delta Council and then Metro, make a fully educated decision when all of the information is not received before approval and a large part of the information they do have, is based on information and reports done by Century? I have yet to see a developer come forward with information that is unfavorable to their project. How can residents decide their direction to Council without full and unbiased information being provided. The fact is, they can't.

Mr. Harvie did make some comments that referred to costs associated with getting these questions answered, so his excuse for not doing these studies was the cost to Delta taxpayers. I would strongly suggest that Delta do these studies and garner the needed information before any further steps are taken. As to the anticipated costs? Those should be born by the developer, not the taxpayer.

We see what has happened in Richmond and South Surrey, where large development occurred without any forethought as to traffic and services. It is the taxpayer who will now pay for over stuffed services and roads. Even so, if this development was occurring in Surrey, Century would be paying over a million dollars in development cost charges. How much is Delta receiving? I would like to see those figures made public.

So many unanswered questions still exist. Mr. Lam made mention that a new interchange would be needed at Hwy 17 and 56 St and that would entail removing land from the ALR to build it. It would also require Delta to purchase ALR land at Hwy 17 and 56 St. Land that is coincidentally owned by Century. ALR land, by the way, that is not being farmed because Century claims that dumping has occurred there. Gosh, that sort of looks like a pattern doesn't it. Buy agriculture land, don't farm it because the land is no good, so it might as well have something built on it. Funny though, seems Snow Farms has a successful organic farm right next to this unused agricultural land. That is also zoned ALR.

Better yet, develop a property that will require a road upgrade on land the developer owns because the development has created an increase in traffic.

It also seems that Delta has said there will need to be an interchange at Hwy 17 and 56 St. That one though, which will also require land removed from the ALR, must be paid for by TFN

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because it is TFN development that will cause an increase in traffic. So, here we have 2 major intersections needed because of a projected large increase in traffic.

Delta has determined that the TFN should alone should pay those costs, yet Delta will not require Century to pay for the same kind of interchange costs, which will be in the millions. Keeping in mind that Century will also be responsible for an increase in traffic because they have approval to build his Northgate project. A development that also includes more commercial space. If TFN must bear the costs of the 52 St interchange, then in all fairness, if Delta approves Century's development on the Southlands, then Century must bear the costs of a 56 St. interchange.

So, in conclusion it seems to me that the best way to save Century and Delta residents millions and millions of dollars and more angst and time, this whole exercise needs to be stopped right now.

If Council will not do that, I would also ask that there be another Southlands information meeting held, without Century's employees and beautifully rendered fantasy pictures being present. Of course, this meeting should be paid for by Century. Apply the same rules to them as you are applying them to TFN.

Debbie McBride