

Revised Bamberton concept revealed

By SARAH SIMPSON
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Three pillars: people, prosperity and the environment were at the forefront of Three Point Properties' latest public presentation with regard to their proposed development plans for Bamberton on Tuesday night.

About 200 would-be neighbours gathered at the T. Gil Bunch Theatre at Brentwood College School to get a sense of just what the developers have in mind with the old industrial area they just spent \$15 million remediating.

The purpose of the open house was to show a revised Bamberton concept plan and give folks an initial look at the character of the new development as well as to allow a chance for further public comments and questions about the project.

"What I was very happy about the meeting was there was a lot of really thoughtful dialogue by the community," said Three Point Properties' Joe Van Belleghem. "A lot of the comments were great suggestions; really great things for us to consider. I think people were generally excited about what we're proposing. I know we were even more excited because we got some more ideas to take away and incorporate."

Despite the plans boasting leading-edge sustainability ideas, opportunities for affordable housing, eco-tourism and many other desirable aspects, some neighbours still had issues with the project.

"I think you should always expect some concerns out of any public meeting," said Van Belleghem. What he wasn't expecting, however, was the way the majority of the attendees rallied around the developers in response to those dissenters.

"That was a real pleasant surprise," he said. "I think it was a reflection that we've been really meeting with a lot of people about the plans and getting their input and listening to them and building on a vision. It's always great to see when people get excited about something and start to really get engaged in it."

Shawnigan Lake's Greg Simmonds was one of several who chose to address the questions and comments of unhappy area



SARAH SIMPSON/CITIZEN

Joe Van Belleghem addresses questions from the gallery during the latest public meeting regarding the proposed development of the Bamberton neighbourhood.

residents.

"Usually you get the folks that have an axe to grind out at those things and there were a couple — nobody wants it in their back yard — you're always going to get some of that but there were very little given the scope of the development they're proposing," he said. "I think (the developers) are going above and beyond to try to make it a development that works for everybody. That is pretty high-end considerations for that development, I think, as far as its environmentally friendly initiatives and I just think the developer seems very straightforward and very transparent about what they're doing."

Concerned neighbours were worried about the growth of the population and the

increase in traffic the Malahat might see as a result.

Simmonds and others noted growth is imminent, regardless of whether or not the Bamberton neighbourhood is realized.

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"It's going to happen," he said. "Something's going to be there and if it's not there it's going to be somewhere else and (other developers) won't do it nearly as thoroughly or thoughtfully so why not have folks that clearly have an interest in doing it right do it? It just makes sense."

Area C (Cobble Hill) Director Gerry Giles, was not so quick to dismiss those with concerns.

"I think that when people voice concerns and ask questions and make comments on the proposal, they're really enriching that proposal," she said. "With people pushing

the envelope so to speak, the decisions made in the end are far richer and the development in and of itself is a better development."

Giles said there is a legitimate need to address the expected population increase.

"I think what they were driving at, or should be driving at is a growth management study for the south Cowichan area to determine impact of growth and what that does to the infrastructure and what that does to community services that need to be provided when an influx of people happen," she said, noting she was excited about the ideas introduced but said "the devil is always in the details."

The developer agreed increasing population is a sticking point.

"The problem is the way growth is occurring right now. It's not really creating the kind of communities we all want to have happen. It's creating a series of, in some cases some pretty bad examples of suburban sprawl," said Van Belleghem. "What happens is people have to drive everywhere. What we're hoping with this project and being part of a community planning exercise is to really concentrate the growth in a responsible way to address a lot of those issues that are happening every year and are being compounded because of not really looking at growth from a different perspective."

It's really all in the way you look at things, he added.

"I think as developers we've got to be more creative and share what we learn and we've got to be all committed to designing our projects in a more responsible way. Our big thing is we recognize we're a neighbourhood that's part of a bigger community and we just really want to look at doing the right thing," said Van Belleghem. "Obviously my belief is that when we're approaching the way we build buildings and build our communities that we need to be coming from a perspective of becoming ecologically responsible and socially responsible as well as being economically responsible. It's really the three pillars of people, prosperity and the environment."