

City Sees Light On Community Forest

Date 2007/9/14 0:10:00 | Topic: Port Alberni News

By Florentia Scott

Alberni Valley residents are closer to controlling part of the forests that surround them. Ken Watson, city manager, says the lengthy process of applying for a Community Forest License on Crown land is nearly over.

The process has reached the public consultation stage, so the city is hosting two public open houses Sept. 17 at City Hall and Sept. 18 at the Sproat Lake Community Hall.

“The city will present some mapping of the lands the city is applying for, a lot of background information that foresters have compiled, the city’s intentions in applying for a Community Forest license, how it will work, what our objectives are,” said Watson.

The Ministry of Forest and Range has offered the city two areas north of Sproat Lake, and south of the Taylor River.

“You don’t just tell the ministry what lands you want to apply for; the ministry tells you what lands you can apply for,” said Watson.

“They go through a consultation process with stakeholders, including First Nations, to make sure that the lands offered are acceptable, before they tell us what land we are able to apply for.”

The province first invited the city to apply for a community license three years ago.

After government officials determined which lands to offer, the city hired a consultant to evaluate the proposal.

“We hired Darren Hiller at DRH, a local company here, to do a feasibility study to make sure the land was viable from a business perspective and they assured us that it was, so we decided to go ahead with a formal application,” said Watson.

“It has to make a profit. That was a condition of our application.”

The community forest would be managed by a limited company, wholly owned by the City of Port Alberni, but operating at arms-length and with an independent board of directors.

“We would not undertake this with our own staff,” said Watson. “Hopefully, local road builders and contractors would be hired.”

Watson said it was premature to assess how much revenue the city would gain from the community forest.

Once the public input stage is complete, the next step will be to prepare a detailed business plan.

“We hope to be able to log by next spring,” he said.

The meetings will take place Monday, Sept. 17, from 2 p.m.-8 p.m. in the Committee Room,

across from Council Chambers at the back of the City Hall building at 4850 Argyle St. in Port Alberni, and on Tuesday, Sept. 18, from 2 p.m.-8 p.m. at the Sproat Lake Community Hall, on Bomber Base Road off Lakeshore Drive.

The City is also seeking input via public survey forms, which are available at City Hall and at <http://www.communityforest.ca/>

More detailed information is available at <http://www.communityforest.ca/>

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