

Delta council won't watch video after getting legal advice

Filmmaker says he'll demand apology after his reputation is impugned

BY SANDOR GYARMATI, THE DELTA OPTIMIST MARCH 9, 2011



The public heard many submissions at last week's hearing, but could only see five minutes of a controversial video.

Photograph by: Chung Chow, Delta Optimist

A 13-minute video has become the controversy within the controversy over the proposal to have the contentious Southlands placed back in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

During the first evening of the Tsawwassen Area Plan public hearing last Tuesday, supporters of the civic recommendation asked to play a video by Vancouver filmmaker Damien Gillis.

To the chagrin of several in the audience who voiced their displeasure, Delta council, after some discussion, agreed to play five minutes of the video, not exceeding the time limit normally allotted to speakers. Councillors were then to view the remainder on their own time at a later date.

The narrated video, called Saving the Southlands, has scenic shots and interview clips of several people against allowing development on the land, including Richmond Coun. Harold Steves and Southlands the Facts spokesperson Dana Maslovat.

On the next night of the hearing, Mayor Lois Jackson read a statement noting council had received legal advice from municipal solicitor Greg Vanstone, who said the remainder of the video should not be viewed by council "due to potentially defamatory or inaccurate statements."

The mayor read, "I would request that anyone who wishes to display another video immediately provide a copy to Mr. (George) Harvie so that it may be reviewed by our solicitor to ensure that it is appropriate for display."

When contacted by the Optimist Monday, Vanstone refused to comment, citing solicitor-client privilege. He said it would be up to council to direct him to comment any further from what the mayor had already read.

Southlands the Facts immediately posted the video on the Internet, calling it a "banned video" by council. The group claims the Southlands was removed 30 years ago under questionable evidence.

On a website created by Gillis and broadcaster Rafe Mair called Common Sense Canadian, the question was raised whether the banning of the video will lead to a "vetting" of public hearing submissions by civic bureaucrats.

The site states: "Imagine the next time you go to speak at a hearing on an industrial project that threatens the environment in your community, you have to gain government approval for your remarks before delivering them! Is this not a slippery slope?"

Noting a local resident involved with the production has contacted the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, Gillis told the Optimist he'll demand an apology from council for impugning his credibility.

Those in favour of the ALR recommendations also argued developers regularly come forward with expensive and polished videos and Powerpoint presentations to sell their points of view.

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