

Town urged to 'secure' Gospel Rock property

GIBSONS



John Gleeson photo

Realtor Kenan MacKenzie addresses council's committee of the whole Tuesday night, calling for the community to raise funds to buy Gospel Rock and offering to donate his commission toward the purchase.

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JOHN GLEESON/STAFF WRITER

It's time for the people of Gibsons to get serious about protecting Gospel Rock — by buying it, the owner's realtor told council's committee of the whole Tuesday night.

Kenan MacKenzie of Prudential Sussex Realty said the owner of Block 7 on Gower Point Road bought the property for \$8.5 million and now wants to sell, with the price listed at \$5.75 million.

"And I'm sort of surprised that we haven't seen any real initiative, or at least any public initiative, of trying to purchase Gospel Rock," McKenzie said.

Last year council approved a Gospel Rock neighbourhood plan that disallowed development on the waterfront, ending years of often-emotional debate over the property, which some residents compared during public hearings to Stanley Park.

While many people came out to oppose development and describe the wonders of Gospel Rock, MacKenzie said, "nobody seems to have put any effort, now that the fight is over, towards actually purchasing the property."

Agreeing the land "probably should be a park," MacKenzie said he would donate his commission — about three per cent — toward the purchase.

"Here is an opportunity for the Town to actually secure that, once and for all," he said. "We know the taxpayers of Gibsons can't afford it, but I think there's enough people who felt very strongly about the property — so it's time for us to do something."

Responding to MacKenzie's plea, Mayor Wayne Rowe reiterated the position he stated during last year's deliberations on the Gospel Rock neighbourhood plan.

"If there's a will in the community to raise funds for that, that will be up to members of the community to do so. I don't see the Town being able to do anything about that," Rowe said.

"As it is, right now we're just trying to raise a humble \$200,000 to get a public market going and I'm not even sure we're going to succeed with that," Rowe added. "So this would be an undertaking that I wouldn't be prepared to take on."

Coun. Dan Bouman referenced advice from MacKenzie's real estate column: "If you want to sell your property, and you're serious, you have to hit the right price point."

In the case of Block 7, Bouman said, "I don't see the right price point."

Bouman said he was committed to the results of last year's neighbourhood plan process, and what's needed now is a buyer willing to develop within those constraints.

With a lower price and a buyer willing to move the ecologically important parts of the property into a land trust, a public fundraising drive could happen, he said.

Another option, Coun. Gerry Tretick said, is to sell the land for an educational facility.

"I know we've had large educational interests looking at the Sunshine Coast in the past, but it never came to pass, and I think that would be a lovely location for higher education," Tretick said.

MacKenzie, in his closing remarks, warned council of the "very real risk" of "a private purchaser buying it for their private use."

The real estate listing for the property notes that it's designated for future high-density development in Gibsons' official community plan, permitting up to 400 units of commercial, apartment, townhome, cluster housing and single-family residential.

"The subject property provides the full range of possibilities, from a small and exclusive gated community with large lots, to a long-term master-planned community or a legacy property for future generations," the listing says.