

Cumberland signs on to regional growth protocol

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Cumberland has signed on to the MOU that will guide development with cross-border impacts as the Comox Valley develops a government-mandated regional growth strategy.

The memorandum of understanding will require local governments to listen to the concerns of their neighbours for developments with cross-border impacts, however the final decision on any project remains with the jurisdiction in which the project will be built.

"The goal is not to stand in the way (of development)," said Rob Roycroft, regional district manager of special projects and long-range planning.

"The idea is to try and make as level a playing field as possible. We think it's a good step forward in bringing the four jurisdictions to a common level."

The reason for the MOU, said Roycroft, is to head off a flood of development applications while the RGS is being hashed out.

"We're trying to avoid what has happened in other places, where there's a rush of applications that come in just to get in under the wire," he said.

Each of the elected officials present for Monday's council meeting -- Mayor Fred Bates and councillors Leslie Baird, Bronco Moncrief and Gwyn Sproule -- unanimously agreed to support the MOU.

"I really support this," said Bates. "There can be nothing but benefit, there's no harm can come out of it, I think."

Moncrief appeared to think deeply about the implications of the MOU and subsequently wondered why the provincial government didn't go a step further than mandating a regional growth strategy.

"If you're getting a bunch of kids to sit together and play by the same rules, why not just amalgamate?" asked Moncrief. "That seems to be the route (the province) is going in when they split the regional district, but they just didn't have the intestinal fortitude."

While council agreed to support the MOU, it appeared to go on and breach the agreement's very first principle later in the same meeting.

The first principle of the MOU states: "New urban-style developments should be located in existing urban areas. Urban-style developments in new growth areas should only be considered where there is clear support for such development in adopted official community plans."

The largest of several projects planned in Cumberland is the Trilogy development along the Inland Island Highway, and council agreed on Monday to move forward with a public hearing next week that will allow the final lots in the development to be brought back to council in the near future.

The Trilogy development is well removed from the existing urban area in Cumberland and the village's official community plan required, and still requires, substantial modification to allow the project to move forward.

When asked whether the apparent contradiction signaled that the village does not take the MOU seriously, Bates said that was definitely not the case.

"You can't hold up something that's in a legal process," he said at Monday's council meeting, referring to the Trilogy project. The MOU, he said, "isn't even in place yet until the other communities sign on."

The regional district board and Comox council have both also agreed to support the MOU while it has yet to be brought before council in Courtenay.

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