**Too Big**

The Town of Gibsons Official Community Plan (OCP) establishes planning direction for the entire town. [link to OCP] A huge document, several years in the making, it was drafted by citizens, elected representatives, and Town staff to provide a vision for present and future development. It describes the town as it is now, and identifies how future development will proceed to enhance, not compromise, the values and natural assets that have made Gibsons the most livable small community in the world. [link to ToG website showing the planning award]

The proposed site for The George Hotel and Residences falls within the jurisdiction of the Harbour Area Plan portion of the OCP. Development in the Harbour area is subject to the design guidelines contained in Development Permit Area (DPA) #5 for Gibsons Landing. [link to 5.2 of Hbr Plan in OCP] The guidelines conform to the Town of Gibsons Zoning Bylaws (link to zoning bylaw).

Gibsons’ waterfront is a priceless community asset. Though it is substantially developed – with only Winegarden Park remaining free from buildings – the small scale of that development and the open space of Winegarden Park have allowed the harbour to retain its village character, while still maintaining a “working harbour” look and feel. Its open waterfront with low-profile buildings provides virtually unencumbered water and mountain vistas to the whole of the town’s eastern slope, right around the bay to the north-facing bluff. Considered of paramount importance in the Harbour Area Plan [section 5.2 Hbr Plan, DPA5 guidelines], these vistas are treasured by residents, and are a primary draw for visitors. So important are the social, cultural, and economic values of these views, that the OCP recognizes them, and has committed to protecting them through a View Protection Area Bylaw (link to bylaw). Once lost, these vistas can never be recovered. [link to CR letter from last week, or other source, that bemoans the loss of ocean views from Sooke & other similar towns])

The OCP clearly recognizes the value of our Harbour setting; and it also recognizes the need to keep buildings within the Harbour Plan Area of a scale that will not only preserve our water and mountain vistas, but will maintain the small village charm and character that residents and visitors enjoy. (section of harbour plan)

It is important to remember that development in the Town of Gibsons is governed by law. Our Official Community Plan, which also contains the Gibsons Harbour Area Plan, [link to OCP &/or Hbr Plan] is more than a vision: it is an actual municipal by-law, sanctioned under the Local Government Act of BC (link to LGA section #), and containing policies about what lands can be used for what purposes, what types and sizes of buildings can be placed on those lands, and what must be done to ensure public safety. The OCP is implemented through the Town of Gibsons’ Zoning Bylaws and Development Permit Areas Guidelines. (link to ToG website re: OCP)

Any proposed Harbour Area development, including The George Hotel and Residences, must conform to the regulations set out in the OCP (including the requirement to meet zoning regulations). Issuing a development permit for a project which does not comply with the OCP contravenes Municipal and Provincial laws. In its present form, The George does not conform to the OCP: it is too big.

The Harbour Area Plan does envision mixed-residential and tourist commercial uses for the George site. [link to Land Use map, section 5.1 of Harbour Area Plan on page 205 of OCP] The OCP dictates that “all built form in the Harbour Area, particularly where it fronts on the “Harbour Walk” shall be human in scale, and pedestrian-oriented. Human in scale is defined as the proportional relationship of the physical environment (buildings, landscape, open space) to human dimensions.” The OCP also states that “facades facing these pedestrian routes shall be no more than two storeys in height, or, where a height of greater than two storeys is allowed, shall step back a minimum of 3 m (10 ft.) above the second floor.”

[link to sec.5.2 of Hbr Area Plan] Hotel zoning on this site could permit buildings of no more than 10m/35 ft., measured from the average slope of the land (about half way between Gower Point Road and the harbourfront walkway). [link to zoning bylaw, ref. H1 & H2] This would result in buildings of about 25 ft. tall on the Gower Point side, and perhaps 45 ft. tall at the waterfront, stepped back above the second storey. Architectural drawings for The George show the 118-unit hotel building as 124 ft. 4 in. tall at the waterfront walkway, and 91 ft. tall at Gower Point Rd. The 40-unit condominium building to the south is about 20 feet shorter. [link to the proposal on the ToG site] A development of this height is definitely not ‘human in scale’. What would it feel like if a person were standing beside it? [link to image] Towering overhead from close up, it would also obliterate water views from as far up the east-facing slope as Abbs Rd. It is in blatant contravention of the requirements of our OCP and Zoning By-laws.

Size is about more than height. These proposed buildings are massive. Imagine London Drugs, with 27,000 square feet of floor space (currently the largest commercial space within the town). Now multiply that times seven! Imagine Sechelt’s Watermark, at six storeys from the water. Now add another fifty feet on top!

Size is also expressed in terms of density. Density is the ratio of a building’s total floor area to the size of the piece of land on which it is located, and is expressed as a number.

So, how big is big enough? How big does a hotel/condo development have to be to ensure its economic viability? Developers use rigorous economic analyses to determine whether or not projects will succeed. These analyses consider the costs of land, construction, and financing to arrive at a desired density for their project. – the magic number that tells them whether or not the project is economically viable.

In consideration of a likely future hotel proposal by Mr. Fuerniss, The Harbour Area Planning process engaged Rollo & Associates to provide an economic modelling study to examine the economic viability of the Harbour Area Plan. This economic analysis was instrumental in determining allowable density, heights, and massing of buildings in the Harbour Area.

The Phase 2 modelling in the Harbour Area Plan process ( link to internal document Phase 2 modelling) proved that, based on the cost of land, and costs of development and financing, a hotel project would be economically viable – and conform to the Harbour Plan requirements – if it had a combined floor space ratio average of 1.1.

Rollo & Associates also did an economic analysis in 2008 for a previous Fuerniss project on this site, the Tugboat Landing Marina. On the basis of the 2008 analysis, the proponent now maintains that a density ratio of 2.6 is needed for the George Hotel project to be viable. This is 2.4 times the density that, according to Rollo’s report for the Town, is required for economic viability in the Harbour Area, and one more way in which The George is too big.

According to the architectural designs, The George would be built right out to the property line on the northern boundary, and leave only a 4 m walkway on the waterfront, as opposed to the 15 m setback required in the OCP. (link to OCP) . The George would encroach on the public land of Winegarden Park to the north by using the park for its storm water drainage, and cast a shadow over up to 40% of the public Park. [André Boel, Planner’s report to Council, January 14, 2014]. This shadow effect would also cover the entire landing waterfront north of the project to Molly’s Reach in mid winter. [link to architect’s shadow analysis in proposal on ToG site] It would replace the bottom portion of Winn Rd. with a funnel-shaped, perpetually shaded wind tunnel. The George would completely overwhelm the entire harbour, sticking out like a sore thumb for miles around.

Clearly, these proposed buildings are too big! The proposed George Hotel and Residences project would irrevocably alter the small village character of Gibsons Landing, and is not permitted under our OCP.