

Some strings attached

By [Susanne Martin - Bowen Island Undercurrent](#)

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Quite a few people have set their sight on Belterra, the property west of Island Pacific School, as their future home. But they don't plan on outbidding one another, no, they are going to live there together. And the concept of co-housing will keep the homes affordable. The process to develop the property has been a long one and at the council meeting on September 12, council gave first reading to the amendment of the land use bylaw that will allow the project to move forward.

Hap Stelling, the municipality's director of planning, said the proposal includes "30 ground-oriented stacked town houses that would be organized in five compact buildings. Twenty-five of these units would be market units, the other five being price restricted. There'll be a variety of units, including one-, two- and three-bedroom units ranging in size from 460 to 1,200 square feet with an overall average size of 950 square feet. It's estimated that the 25 market units will start at about \$215,000 and the price restricted units will start at around \$155,000. The proposal includes a common house with a dining area, kitchen and guest accommodation, a children's play area and meeting spaces as well as garden sheds and green houses and workshops."

Council and municipal staff have long been familiar with the project and a 10-page report by planning consultant Michael Rosen gave a wealth of background. It also laid out a number of terms and conditions. One of them is that five units are allocated for non-market housing.

Councillor Nerys Poole said, "This is an exciting proposal, I feel that this is a much-needed answer for Bowen in terms of providing some housing diversity. Looking at the prices, I would say that the whole thing is affordable."

Poole pointed out that the site is located close to Snug Cove and a lot of effort has gone toward ensuring efficient water and energy consumption. But she also charged municipal staff to look closely at the cost of extending water and sewer lines.

In order to connect Belterra to the municipal water and sewer systems, the report suggests a contribution of \$600,000 towards necessary and identified upgrades to the Cove Bay Water and the Snug Cove Sewer systems. If these options are not available, Belterra will have to develop a private water system and an on-site sewage collection and disposal system.

Councillor Doug Hooper said, "We just paid for a \$2.1 million upgrade to the septic system and it stops at the public school. There is going to be a significant cost to take the line all the way up to that property."

Andy Beaird, a planning consultant working with Belterra, responded that "we have a water line at the property line. The \$600,000 is a rough estimate of the money that would be contributed to the municipality to be used for offsite improvement at their discretion given that we are allowed to connect to both systems."

Beaird added that the plan envisions capturing about 90 per cent of the run-off through roof water harvesting and detention ponds.

Another condition suggested by Rosen focused on the protection of three mossy bluffs that have been identified as environmentally sensitive areas. And the Terminal Creek corridor is to be dedicated to the municipality for conservation and park purposes. The developers will also be required to secure a 30-metre buffer to adjacent Agricultural Land Reserve land and fence the outdoor areas of units with dogs.

Stelling said, "Existing trails will remain available to the public and a new pedestrian trail will be constructed as part of the trans-island trail network. Carter Road will be used for vehicular access to the site."

Hooper had a concern with that, "That road is in poor condition. It's an important egress for fire and safety. If you ever had to bail out Cates Hill Chapel or IPS, the Carter Road bridge is a bottleneck and it would be helpful for the municipality to be looking at having due egress out of this area given the number of people we are putting into that tiny parcel."

But, according to the report, the impacts of the projected low traffic volumes on the road and the one-lane bridge are expected to be insignificant. It is also hoped that the proximity of local amenities will encourage Belterra residents to leave their cars at home. Beard stated that the fire chief hadn't expressed any concern about access to the site.

All councillors except Councillor Peter Frinton, who as a neighbour of Belterra Cohousing had excused himself due to what may be perceived as conflict of interest, were in favour of giving the amended bylaw a first reading. Bowen residents will have a chance to express their opinions at a public hearing that was proposed to be held on November 7. Councillor Alison Morse expressed concerns about the timing. She said, "With a new council, we might need a new public hearing. We would want assurance that any member of the new council will be fully briefed." She said one way to deal with this issue was to move the public hearing forward so that this council could finish the process. At press time, no date for the public hearing had been announced.

Mayor Bob Turner thanked the Belterra Cohousing team, commending them for "the tremendous amount of thought and passion that went into the project."

Roger McGillivray, founding member of Belterra, commented after the meeting, "We were very pleased that council gave Belterra first reading on September 12 yet disappointed to hear that the public hearing will likely need to be postponed until after the election. The Belterra planning timeline will remain the same however and over the next few months we will be finalizing unit design and unit mix - a very exciting and creative phase of the project. We look forward to working with the new council and remain confident that our timeline of completed homes before the end of 2013 is realistic. Our energies over the next few months will be devoted to design and with a special focus on acquiring new members, especially young families."