

Geo-energy to power Parkland?

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For the first major development in Upper Gibsons, significant green space might translate to significant community-owned green energy.

"On greenfield development, geothermal means of creating power we can put back into the community is something we want to explore," said Mayor Barry Janyk. "The intent is to

defray the rapidly increasing costs on local government and the offloading that's taking place onto our backs by the provincial and federal governments."

On April 22, Gibsons council gave first reading to official community plan (OCP) amendment and rezoning bylaws pertaining to developer Blane Hagedorn's 29-acre (11.7 hectare) Parkland subdivision. If council ultimately approves it, the first 45-home phase of the 200-unit

development could become the literal test ground for a neighbourhood geothermal system, something Janyk said could be a new, non-taxpayer source of revenue for the Town.

Last month, municipal planner Chris Marshall explained to council the Town may use its power under the Local Government Act to declare a district energy system. If geothermal heating is confirmed to be a viable option for phase one, the Town will require each house to install a heat pump to connect with the local energy system.

Chief administrative officer Paul Gipps explained the 15 per cent public green space offered in phase one will offer open areas with ideal soil types to support horizontal and vertical ground loops — two common geothermal designs that utilize heat exchange at depth under the soil.

As a former administrator in Houston, B.C., Gipps already has experience starting a district energy system — in that case, to heat a swimming pool. While Gipps emphasized the Town is "still in the early stages of business planning," the high-density, energy-efficient housing types (cluster homes, fourplexes and cottage lots)

proposed for the Parkland subdivision could bode well for the viability of a district energy system.

Gipps was unable to provide an estimate of the long-term financial benefit, but said the Town should have a clearer idea after feasibility studies are conducted by Vancouver-based EBA Engineering Consultants and Compass Resource Management.

The Parkland subdivision will be developed over three or four phases and will provide about 200 housing units between Payne and Park roads in Gibsons. The development will cover about a quarter of the area specified in the Upper Gibsons neighbourhood plan. If geothermal proves successful in phase one, all phases will likely use the same system.

Gibsons residents can weigh in on the bylaw pertaining to the development at a public hearing at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, May 20, prior to council's regular scheduled meeting at 7.

"It's a project that fits the community's personality," said Gipps. "There are some real benefits to us becoming a leader and showing how this can be done."

The Town has no plans to generate any electricity through geothermal means.