

# REZONING APPROVED AT HILTON HOTEL SITE

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A draft lease agreement for Georgia Park is in the works after city council granted a rezoning bid for a larger, taller waterfront hotel.

Nanaimo city council rezoned Insight Holdings' Front Street properties in a 7-2 vote Monday, giving the company the right to add more height and square footage to its proposed Hilton hotel than previously allowed. It means the project can now tower 35 storeys from the Nanaimo waterfront, a 12-storey increase from original zoning on the largest of the company's two Front Street sites.

The move will prompt the city to work on a lease agreement for Georgia Park, where the hotel developers have proposed a loading dock and amenities like a grand staircase.

According to Coun. Diane Brennan, who opposed the rezoning motion with Coun. Jim Kipp, the process has been very fast and needs to slow down so the city can work with the developer to find something more suitable. In 2007, Insight Holdings had applied to the city for a 25-storey high-rise condo, which Brennan said was tall but narrow and lacked issues around spill out into the park and traffic. While not against a high rise, she calls the current proposal too tall and too bulky for the site.

"This is a really important site. It's what you see when you come in off the water, it's what you see when you are flying in and it's what you see when you come around that corner. I think we have to be a little more thoughtful about it," said Brennan, who recalls the developer inviting council members out for coffee in the summertime. "So that's a very fast order of business; generally these things take a little longer to make right for the site."

Mayor John Ruttan said he approved rezoning because he supports this project, adding when it comes down to fundamentals, it's a question of wanting another hotel or not. He sees quality hotel rooms nearby or adjacent to the conference centre as the reason why there aren't larger conventions.

"The thing is they couldn't move ahead without that approval," he said.

As part of the rezoning process, the city has secured a \$1.187 million contribution for park improvements. It's also working on a draft lease agreement, with a report expected this December. According to a project spokesman, groundbreaking for the hotel is likely a year away.