

NANAIMO COUNCILLORS CALL REVAMPED HILTON HOTEL AGREEMENT A 'WIN-WIN'

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NANAIMO NEWS BULLETIN, APRIL 24, 2015

An alternative deal that will see Hilton hotel developers invest \$1.5 million into changes at Georgia Park is a win-win, Nanaimo city councillors say.

Council gave the go-ahead at an open meeting Monday for an expanded statutory right-of-way agreement for the developers of the Hilton hotel. It also scrapped approval-in-principle for a Georgia Park lease developers no longer need.

Insight Holdings Ltd., which is looking to create a multimillion-dollar skyscraper hotel, proposed leasing 28 per cent of Georgia Park last year for a loading dock, restaurant patio and staircase. It's since tweaked plans after "considerable opposition" to the leasing of the parkland.

Now the city and developers will work on an expanded right of way agreement that will include park improvements as part of a public thoroughfare through the hotel to the waterfront promenade. Insight Holdings will invest the same \$1.5 million into amenities as it would have under a lease and will be responsible for maintenance, but improvements will belong to the city.

Additions will also take up 10 per cent less park than an earlier proposal.

"This really good news," said Coun. Ian Thorpe. "It works that the city maintains control of the park, we get improvements made to the park, we get maintained access to the waterfront for our citizens. It seems like a win-win for me."

He isn't the only politician who likes the change.

Coun. Wendy Pratt also called it a win-win and said she's pleased developers heard the concerns of the community and hopes the hotel goes ahead.

"I think it'll be a huge improvement to our waterfront," she said.

Coun. Gord Fuller called it "great" while Coun. Dianne Brennan congratulated the developer and staff for making a new agreement that satisfies the issue the community had around leasing the park.

City staff members will now work with developers on the expanded agreement. Improvements are tied to a building permit, which is anticipated before this fall.