

Getting to the root of Saanich NIMBYs

Amy Dove/Saanich News

Herman Rebneris, a local contractor, is eager to take part in the upcoming development panel. Armed with a camera he has scoured the municipality for examples of what he thinks builders should strive for. Residents can submit their own examples before Nov. 10.

By Amy Dove

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On the cusp of big development in Saanich, industry opts for a proactive approach

Nobody likes to be called a NIMBY.

The "not in my backyard" attitude causes plenty of debates around the Saanich council table. Many of the disagreements are avoidable if affected parties communicate early in the planning stage, said Coun. Judy Brownoff.

"It's not working as far as I am concerned," she said of the current situation.

Developers don't always understand community priorities or values, while residents are often clueless about the development process.

To help smooth out conflicts, builders and developers will meet with residents to discuss good development on Nov. 25.

The Healthy Saanich committee has held similar workshops in the past - with one major difference.

"We have never been able to interest the development industry," said Brownoff, who chairs the committee. "This is the first time ever they have talked to Saanich and the community without a development in front of them."

Local developers agree such dialogue is lacking at times in Saanich and are looking for positive results if enough community and development representation show up. "Sometimes dialogue is focused on a specific development and the various parties have specific goals. It might be useful to engage in a broad discussion about expectations of all parties," said Casey Edge, executive director of the Canadian Home Builders Association in Victoria.

Without vested interests in specific projects the dialogue may be more open and constructive, he noted. "That's not to say there won't be some interesting and hard discussions."

Any discussion on the topic is welcome, said Glen Wilson, president of the Urban Development Institute Victoria chapter.

"I live in Saanich, I work in Saanich - we just need to keep working on our relationship," Wilson said.

Too much time is wasted on misunderstandings, agreed Herman Rebneris, owner of Cottage Grove Contracting. "Let's make a decision and let's move forward on it," he said, adding it's frustrating for everybody when projects drag on.

Rebneris has built affordable housing complexes for 32 years and has never gotten through a project without some community resistance. "We talk about needing to find a solution for the homeless and affordable housing might need to be on your street," he said. Open dialogue about developer's intent and community expectations would make controversial projects move faster and benefit more people.