



October 26 2018

Dear Housing Committee

Cortes Community Housing Project Environmental Impact and Opportunities

I am writing to you on behalf of Friends of Cortes Island (FOCI) to respectfully submit the following observations and comments regarding the proposed Community Housing Project, and to clarify FOCI's involvement. We are aware that you are working to address ecological issues and hope that you will find our comments helpful and constructive.

FOCI exists to monitor and protect local ecosystems and wildlife. This includes the protection of forests, lakes, critical watersheds, and the marine environment.

In this context we are keen to ensure that the new housing development fully identifies and evaluates the potential effects of the development on local habitats, species and ecosystems, and takes measures to avoid, reduce, or mitigate negative ecological impacts and their effects.

We also understand that the development is committed to maximizing opportunities to provide ecological enhancement, to address certain legacy problems, particularly regarding hydrology, and that our shared goal is to achieve an overall net benefit for the local environment. Specifically, we understand that the housing project will address hydrology, dysfunctional ditching, and water diversion in an attempt to reduce nutrient flow into the watershed lakes. In this regard, we believe the proposed project has the potential to set a positive environmental precedent for similar projects elsewhere.

We are aware some research and other work has been done on this to date and would welcome clarification from you on what steps have been taken. Ideally, we feel the development should include an ecological impact assessment that fully addresses all the potential impacts and measures set above, including opportunities for ecological enhancement, and need for ongoing monitoring. This should possibly start with some baseline testing, particularly of nutrient flows, from the development region to the lakes. We feel it important that all such work is carried out following recognized methodologies and is undertaken by suitably qualified individuals.

In addition to our concern about the location of the project within the sensitive and highly impacted Hague and Gunflint watershed and the potential for additional harmful impacts on the lakes, other potential impacts exist, including the direct impact of the development footprint on existing habitats and species, and increased people pressure on nearby natural areas. Impacts should also be considered during the construction phase, such as the timing of vegetation clearing to avoid the nesting season, and proper storage of any harmful or toxic materials.



Potential environmental enhancement should include: sensitive landscaping using native species; green buildings; solutions for existing drainage / septic issues; retention of wildlife corridors; and improving nearby habitats for local wildlife. We understand that you share these concerns and beliefs with us and have already made some plans to address these issues.

As an organization FOCI has limited resources and expertise. We are not in the position to carry out ecological assessments, but would welcome the opportunity to comment and advise on these elements of the project. We are also happy to share data and local *knowledge* with you. We recognize there may be future opportunities for our involvement and support of environmental aspects of the project as it develops.

FOCI would also suggest that you consider distributing the total number of proposed housing units to various sites on Cortes Island, rather than concentrating them in one area, particularly in the highly impacted Hague-Gunflint watershed.

It might be helpful, as you proceed to provide information about these ecological issues on your website, and host some public information sessions specifically related to the ecological issues, so that the public and remain informed and feel included in the discussions.

We believe that the housing project, FOCI, and the Cortes community, working together, have the opportunity to achieve something exceptional, whereby we add affordable housing for our community, while simultaneously reducing the impact on our most sensitive and impacted lake watershed. We believe that together, we can achieve this, and that our story will become an example and model for other communities dealing with similar issues.

Thank you for committing to ecological excellence and for so earnestly engaging with FOCI and the community to address these challenges.

Sincerely

Friends of Cortes Island