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Heritage lodge property targeted for high-end townhomes

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Wilcuma Lodge may be moved as part of a development proposal in the Cherry Point area.

courtesy Alex Robertson

The mastermind behind Western Canada's largest resort development has now set his sights on building luxury townhomes in Cowichan Bay.

Len Barrie, the man who brought the island the Bear Mountain golf resort wants to build more than 70, 1,200- to 2,000-square-foot townhomes at a site near Cherry Point, land that includes the dilapidated Wilcuma Lodge, said realtor Alex Robertson.

Robertson, the former Cowichan Bay regional director, will be spearheading sales of the new homes under the direction of Bear Mountain.

"This is completely different from what Len Barrie has been involved in," he said.

"A \$50-million or \$60-million project such as this is very small compared to what he normally does."

Robertson was referring to Barrie's \$2.4-billion, 1,300-acre Bear Mountain complex that, when finished, is expected to have more than 5,000 homes, a massive commercial area and a pair of Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses.

The Cherry Point area might seem small in comparison, but it's something Barrie said he wants to do and he also wants to win over area residents before he makes a formal pitch.

"Absolutely," said Barrie, who had a brief career in the National Hockey League.

“I think it’s good anytime you can try to give as much information as you can, because a lot of people just like to know what’s going on, especially those who live in the area.”

Barrie said he wasn’t looking for any other projects until Robertson contacted him.

“I went to him as a friend and sold him this property and he takes my advice,” said Robertson, a former television sports reporter.

Barrie ended up paying \$2.5 million for the property where he said he hopes to complete the project in three phases over five years.

Robertson said the area, especially around the 4,000-square-foot lodge, has been in disrepair for some time.

“We’re going to restore the lodge and maybe even move it from where it sits now.”

There are also plans to have a marine element and perhaps a restaurant in the area, Robertson said.

Once the homes are built, they will sell from \$550,000 for the smaller units to about \$2 million for those at the upper end, said Barrie.

The land is currently zoned for recreational use and Robertson said Barrie will be looking to get it rezoned as high-density residential.

But it will be done with the environment in mind, he added.

“It’s going to be green, green, green like you wouldn’t believe,” he said.

“There’s a ravine in the middle of the property and it’s all going to be dedicated parkland with public access to the beach.”

As well, all the parking areas will be put underground, said Robertson.

“Above the parking, it will all be grass.”

The developer has yet to go before the Cowichan Valley Regional District for rezoning, but Cowichan Bay Director Mike Tansley said he’s for the idea.

“The piece of property has been standing there for some time, virtually unused except for a few renters and, if (the development) is done properly, it would benefit the community,” he said.

“It’s one of the better properties here and has a multi-million dollar view and would lend itself to something of this nature.”

But, said Tansley, there will probably be opposition to the planned townhomes.

“(Barrie) might find it difficult because there’s certainly a resentment from local people about rezoning these pieces of property, there are people who don’t want to see any further growth in the area,” he said.

Still, the planned homes are better than the alternative, he said.

“It’s zoned recreational right now and the developer could build a 200-room hotel there and not have to go to anyone for permission to do it.”

Robertson said there will probably be a couple of developer-hosted open houses during the next couple of months before formal public hearings are held.

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