

Young go-karters stalled in bid to stay at new track

A Closer Look



**JODY
PATERSON**

In this corner, 35 Youbou homeowners and a sympathetic regional director. In the other, 40 or so young go-kart racers. Guess who wins? Hint: It's never the young ones.

Despite a public meeting two months ago that went solidly in its favour, the only kart club on the Island has lost its bid to stay put at an old sawmill site in Youbou. After hemming and hawing for seven months over whether the Capital City Kart Club could race for another year or two on the track it built at the site, the Cowichan Valley Regional District has voted down the extension 5-4.

"I was so, so disgusted that at that moment, I wished I had nothing to do with being a regional director or any part of the process," says CVRD regional director Mike Tansley of last week's vote, which took him by surprise.

Please see GO-KARTS, A2

• From Page A1

“Kids were crying in the hall. God-damn it, we’re quick enough to be on their backs when young people do vandalism. So here’s a group that just wants to race their little karts, and we shut the whole thing down.”

The track’s too noisy, says Youbou regional director Brooke Hodson, who campaigned in the 2002 municipal election on a promise to oust the club. He says residents near the track told him the club made more noise at its weekend practices during the summer than the mill did before TimberWest shut it down three years ago.

Oh, please, says club member Ruth Hawkes. Hodson’s house is fairly close to the track, says Hawkes, but the club couldn’t even pick up a decibel reading when members tried to measure noise levels there one day while racing was on.

The club sank \$40,000 into building a track at the sawmill site two years ago in a deal with TimberWest that included

the option of another two years. The CVRD granted the necessary permits. The theory was that the entire mill site would soon be bought by the district for recreational use, and that the kart club and other motorsports groups would be given permanent homes on the site when that deal went through.

The first thing that went wrong was that Cowichan Tribes, not the CVRD, ended up buying the site last December. Then the regional district got to thinking that Hodson had a point about the club’s original application not “following process,” because a public meeting hadn’t been held. Directors told the club four months ago that it would have to go through the hoops again, this time with a public meeting.

So it did. And only 26 of the 72 people who wrote letters or spoke at the April public meeting had anything bad to say about the track staying on for another two years. But the board voted the application down anyway, in a move that Tansley says was “more about personalities and politics than

anything to do with common sense.”

Hodson said Monday his concerns about process have been addressed, but now it's best to focus on working with the club “to find something more suitable” as a race site. Nothing against kart-racing, says Hodson: “It's a good family event that teaches young people the right attitude toward competition and responsible driving.” Just not in his neighbourhood.

The club isn't sure what to do now. Unless it can be proven that the CVRD vote last week was flawed, members are out of luck. The 12-weekend Island kart season has already lost a month because of CVRD indecision, and drivers' chances of being ready to compete in the nationals at Chilliwack this summer are fading fast. The kids are devastated, and so are the adults — while most of the drivers are young, the club is open to all ages.

“Every time there's something for kids, it gets shut down,” says Hawkes, noting that the kart club lost a previous site four years ago when Cassidy

Speedway closed. “These are a good group of people. This shouldn't have happened.”

The irony is that everyone talks about the need to teach young people better driving skills, but the kart club was actually doing it, says club president Dorothy Alexander.

“I see those crosses on the road every time I drive to Victoria,” says the Maple Bay resident.

The worst of it is that kart-racers were seeking such limited use of the sawmill site, says Tansley.

With the first four weeks lost and no way to make that time up with racers scattered Island-wide, all that was left of the season was eight weekends at the most — 16 days.

“I truly couldn't believe it when we voted it down,” says Tansley.

“We're asked to give a few kids a few days, because that's all it boils down to, and we refuse. I really can't see how we couldn't have made some leeway.”

jpaterson@tc.canwest.com