

Y E A R I N R E V I E W

Three Point approach to Bamberton looks exciting

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WILL ACCEPT: Controversial property's new owners demonstrating commitment to doing things correctly

The dominant political story of the '90s in the Valley was the massive Bamberton development — essentially a new town springing up south of Mill Bay.

Earlier this year, that property was purchased by Three Point Properties.

News Leader columnist Pat Hrushowy—who was involved in the failed '90s proposal—muses on what the new ownership group could mean.

In what must be one of the most important unnoticed events of 2005, the Bamberton lands changed hands and the new owners are quietly putting their money where their mouth is — and plenty of it.

Three Point Properties, acting for a small group of investors, is taking a decidedly low-key approach to preparing the controversial site for what they expect will be a long-term phased development — significantly smaller than the 5,000 or 6,000 units proposed by the previous owners. Bamberton, a decade ago, dominated local government politics.

Right now crews in heavy equipment are crawling all over the former cement plant grounds, taking down the old concrete structures to make the area safe. All the smashed concrete will be further processed and crushed for use as road bed on the site.

Even more significantly, the owners have opted for a more expensive way of dealing with contaminated soils remaining on the site from the days of the cement plant operation.

Instead of simply covering the contamination and planting the surface with various shrubs and trees (as already approved by the Ministry of Environment) the new owners have opted to move hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of the con-

taminated materials into one of the old limestone open pits and seal them there with an expensive engineered system that will keep ground water away and therefore prevent the contamination from migrating into Saanich Inlet.

All the steel from the demolished cement plant will be barged away for recycling.

This isn't the normal way for developers to do business. In almost every case we can usually expect a developer to first try to gain community approval for zoning changes that will allow the development company to make a profit on its investment.

Only after such approval is obtained will the normal developer begin to invest significant funds. Sometimes developers don't even purchase their development prospects outright; they enter into a conditional purchase agreement that is subject to necessary zoning approvals being obtained.

Meanwhile, Three Point development

community generally expresses the opinion that the previous Bamberton proposals were too large — they want something less dense developed on the site.

The community also wants high levels of sewage treatment, and they don't want the effluent dumped into Saanich Inlet — no matter how clean.

They also want to see tourism-type features built into development proposals that will offer both locals and visitors an interesting range of activity options. And, they don't want visual pollution when the development is viewed from the water.

All of this contrasts sharply with the experience more than a decade ago with the previous development managers. In those days Bamberton was touted as one of the most environmentally sensitive and sensible developments in the world and it won international awards to prove it.

The project even had amongst its core advisory group Guy Dauncey, Victoria's internationally known environmental visionary. The truth is the development proposal deserved the awards. The principles incorporated into that plan are now largely accepted as the way to do things all over the world.

What was different then was a much more aggressive public stance led by some of the strongest personalities in the business. What came to pass was one of the most bitter and persistent struggles against a development proposal ever experienced in B.C.

Even the Mike Harcourt NDP government of the day fled from having to make a hard decision about the development after the rezoning application had been approved by the CVRD. Remember, this was a union pension fund sponsored proj-



Peter Rusland/file

The derelict buildings at the old Bamberton complex are falling as a new owner ponders how the once-controversial site will be developed.

ect that had every right to expect at least a measure of favourable consideration from an NDP government.

That Bamberton proposal died a sad and lingering death under a sustained and withering attack from opponents; a couple of whom launched political careers on the backs of the anti-Bamberton movement.

It remains to be seen if the new owners will gain acceptance for development pro-

posals and successfully build a project that the community will embrace. One thing is certain, however.

Three Point Properties is already clearly demonstrating its commitment to doing things correctly.

If that counts, and I think it does, we may yet see an exciting development on the hillside above Saanich Inlet.

— Pat Hrushowy

2005
in review



PAT
HRUSHOWY

manager Ross Tennant is quietly working with the community to discover what elements of a development proposal that would be acceptable.

What he has found so far is that the