

Bamberton Reborn

Waterfront village will become the heart of the new development

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If Ross Tennant is nervous, he's not showing it.

On the eve of unveiling to the public a massive and ambitious development project for the 1,500-acre Bamberton site, you could forgive the managing partner of Three Point Properties for quivering a little.

Tennant is unfazed.

But he is animated, excited and more than happy to lead a tour of what was once cement works and limestone quarries, eagerly painting a picture of the new vision for the site overlooking Saanich Inlet.

He talks of a waterfront village centre at the heart of the development, buildings echoing the past with architecture paying homage to an industrial heritage, a boardwalk, mixed housing development north and south of the village and all of it linked with more than 20 kilometres of trails.

According to Gwyn Symmons of City Spaces Consulting which specializes in community planning, the vision is for a unique destination with character that will act as a gateway to the Cowichan Valley.

There will be housing for seniors, affordable housing for those who work in the area and those who will commute to the Cowichan Valley and Victoria. There are plans for businesses and services for those who live there and those who come to visit, and even a proposal to move the Mill Bay ferry terminal to Bamberton.

"I'm very confident that we've really got it dialed in," said Tennant, noting the company has spent the last 18 months trying to understand the concerns raised by the community the last time someone eyed the real estate for development.

The conclusion reached -- any development must weave into the existing fabric of the community and its scale cannot dominate the area.

"We came out here saying we wanted to be good neighbours, we want to get to know the people and find out what they want this community to become," he said. "It's been so divisive in the past, we thought we need to come up with something that resonated with people, so they see we're making a positive addition to the community and are not competing with Mill Bay's merchants."

In the 1990s Victoria developer David Butterfield, and then Vancouver's Greystone Properties, proposed to reinvent the area as a hillside town of 12,000 people.



CREDIT: Darren Stone, Times Colonist

BEFORE: The Quarry and waterfront area of the remediation project in the Bamberton Lands.

Those plans died amid concerns of increased traffic on the Malahat section of the Trans -anada Highway, environmental impact, water supply and sheer size.

Tennant believes the new proposal addresses those concerns with an accessible village, with plenty of green space, and a ceiling of 3,200 homes built out over 20-25 years.

As a sign of the company's belief in the project, Three Point undertook a \$10-million remediation project, now in its final phases, to clean up the industrial site with no guarantee they'd get approval to start construction.

"It's a risk, but a calculated risk in the sense we thought we needed to do some things right out of the gate that the community could agree upon and be enthusiastic about, like taking down the old derelict structures and cleaning up contaminants," he said, noting they removed and salvaged 2,800 tonnes of steel, and removed 40 tonnes of asbestos.

"It helps us generate credibility, showing them we did what we said we were going to do."

The next step is winning over public favour and earning rezoning from industrial/forest to residential/commercial from the Cowichan Valley Regional District.

If that goes well it could take up to a year before work would begin on water lines, electrical lines, roads and the like.

At least one CVRD director likes what he's seen thus far.

"So far I'm impressed. I'm pleased with the way they have been handling the project and being out in the community talking to stakeholders and giving presentations," said Mike Walker, CVRD director for Mill Bay-Malahat.

Walker said they have come in and accommodated concerns rather than dictating terms.

"And that's what happened in the past, it was dictated," he said, noting he's also been floored by a developer remediating property before rezoning. "I've never even heard of that happening before, they're spending millions with no guarantee."

Three Point will likely know if they made a wise move today when they unveil the plans during an open house from 2-8 p.m. at Brentwood College School in Mill Bay.

"It's a big day said Symmons. "Big for us because we want to share this with them, we're trying to alleviate some anxieties and trying to excite some people too."