

Bamberton blueprint passes hurdle

Old cement plant will give way to small city

By Carla Wilson, Times Colonist - October 23, 2009



An Aerial view of Bamberton in 2007

Photograph by: Russ Heinl, Times Colonist

A Victoria developer's ambitious plan to build a small city on the former Bamberton cement plant site has moved a step forward.

The blueprint for the 630-hectare site facing the Saanich Inlet was unanimously supported at a four-hour meeting of the Cowichan Valley Regional District's advisory planning commission on

Wednesday. It was the commission's fourth session examining the complex plan that would see Three Point Properties develop 3,200 housing units, a hotel and 93,000 square metres of commercial and industrial space.

More than 8,000 people would live at the site, which also has a planned village centre, parks and a web of trails. The developer said the project would be designed to avoid impacting the inlet and Bamberton Provincial Park, which is enclosed within the development site.

"We were very appreciative of the lengths they went through to review the application. It was a monumental task," said Ross Tennant, partner in Three Point Properties.

Twice before developers have failed in attempts to build on the Bamberton site, on the north side of the Malahat.

In the 1990s, Victoria developer David Butterfield and then Greystone Properties of Vancouver each unveiled plans for the property. A combination of factors, including the massive scope of the development, environmental issues, and worries about thousands of additional vehicles on the highway, combined to kill those plans.

This has been a long process to develop a series of proposals that resulted in community consensus, Tennant said yesterday.

But approval to start construction is still a long way off.

Although the seven commission members at the final meeting agreed that the Bamberton project should go ahead, several issues were raised for deliberation in the next stage.

Next on the agenda is a review by the electoral areas services committee in November, said Mike Tippett, the regional district's deputy director of development services. Given the amount of work ahead, he's not sure if the staff's final report will be ready for next month's meeting.

The Advisory Planning Commission favoured rezoning the entire site at the same time, while district staff had suggested phasing it in, Tippett said.

The APC is made up of volunteer members of the community, appointed by the CVRD board. The electoral areas services committee consists of the nine directors, each responsible for a specific area. After deliberating on the proposal, they will make a recommendation to the regional district's board, which votes on whether to send the plan forward to public hearing. At the board level, only the electoral areas directors would vote on Bamberton, Tippett said.

Tennant said it appears the proposal leads to an initial rezoning for the whole site, with a phased development agreement in place. This would ensure that all development requirements were completed in one stage, before work could start on another.

"I think it is a good strategy. I think it makes a lot of sense," Tennant said. "It gives the community the control they desire and it gives us the ability to know that if we do the things that

we have committed ourselves to doing, that we've got some certainty to be able to access future phases, and therefore justify the infrastructure investment."

This is an approach used by the CVRD on other projects and it has worked well, Tennant said.

District staff were also asked to gather further information from local First Nations and provincial government ministries, Tippett said.

If a public hearing is held, that could be sometime in spring 2010, he said. After a hearing, the final stage would be for board members to vote on bylaw changes required to alter zoning.

Close to \$20 million has already been spent on cleaning up and remediating the industrial site, and taking down old infrastructure, Tennant said.

If approved, the first task would be to get the water, sewer and some of the energy systems in place, he added.

Water would come from nearby Oliphant Lake. The holding capacity of the lake needs to be enlarged and repairs carried out on a pipeline nearly 100 years old.

Initial construction would likely see housing go up on the outskirts of the property, with commercial put in later when the population is large enough to make retail and other services viable, Tennant said.

Three Point is a partner in Victoria's Dockside Green project, which is considered a world-class environmentally responsible development. Dockside Green is something of a template for this project, Tennant said.

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