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An aerial view of the Bamberton site along the Saanich Inlet. The residential portion is being cut, leaving commercial and industrial options. MIKE SAGES

Bamberton plan slashed back

District rejects housing proposal, says not enough amenities offered

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Times Colonist

Cowichan Valley Regional District politicians have cut plans for more than 3,000 homes out of the massive Bamberton proposal, leaving only industrial and business park use on the table for what was once a \$1.5-billion venture.

Concerns about a lack of infrastructure to support a much larger population were cited by the politicians.

The region's electoral area services committee has decided to proceed on the commercial and industrial portions of Three Point Properties' 630 hectares along Saanich Inlet on the north side of the Malahat.

"It is a tough pill to swallow," Ross Tennant, development manager for Three Point, said Tuesday.

The company said it has already spent \$35 million on the former cement plant site, including \$25 million to remove industrial contaminants.

Brian Harrison, a regional director for the Mill Bay-Malahat area, said there was a difference

between the expectations of the community and the Cowichan Valley Regional District, and what Three Point was able to provide.

"It's just that the gap was getting wider and not closer as the project was unfolding here," he said.

The district needs certainty about outcomes if it is to approve rezoning to allow housing, Harrison said.

"We wanted to make sure we got this right because once approval is given you have changed your community forever."

Given that the housing might have brought in 10,000 residents and that the South Cowichan area has a population of 18,000, more amenities needed to be offered, Harrison said. But "it's just not there."

The newcomers would put pressure on the recreational centres, for example. The developer's offer of \$4.5 million for amenities over 30 years was "pretty minimal," Harrison said.

Another key issue was the phasing of the development, he said. Rather than the seaside area being developed early on, the plan



was to build on the upland area first, which made the project more of a traditional subdivision rather than unique, Harrison said.

In nearby Mill Bay, there are 750 lots already zoned or in the process of going through a rezoning process, Harrison said. "I guess the question then becomes, does the community need another conventional subdivision?"

Plans to relocate some of the residential development to the west side of the highway was "in itself a wee bit contentious because it really creates what you

would consider a normal traditional subdivision, when you move it away from the water side."

Under the new scenario, about 24 hectares would be devoted to industrial use along the waterfront, where Three Point already has some tenants.

Three Point will go to the marketplace to see what kinds of uses might fit in the area, Tennant said.

A 16-hectare business park would be located, as planned, on the west side of the Trans-Canada Highway. A detailed plan has to be

submitted to the regional district.

Light industrial and commercial business space would suit this area where Tennant expects demand to be "pretty good."

Bamberton was the site of a cement plant from the early 1900s until it closed three decades ago.

Three Point is the third developer to try to develop this site, originally aiming to build out over 25 years. The company followed Victoria developer David Butterfield and Vancouver's Greystone Properties; they were thwarted by the sheer size of the undertaking and other issues such as environmental impact and projected effects on traffic on the Malahat.

Three Point is hoping to see residential uses included for the site in the next official community plan, now under review.

The company plans to hold onto the land, Tennant said.

However, any potential residential proposal would not return in the short term, but is more likely in the distant future, Tennant said.

Currently, about 50 people work at Bamberton, with the potential to rise to the hundreds once the industrial and business areas are developed, he said. cjb@timescolonist.com