

Friday » September
29 » 2006

Developer targets Sunshine Coast

Vision of residential, resort and industrial projects would bring in thousands of residents

Randy Shore

Vancouver Sun

Friday, September 29, 2006

To listen to story, click the [VoicePrint link](#)

An Abbotsford-based developer has plans for the Sunshine Coast that would bring thousands of new residents and a Whistler-style resort to the area.

Columbia National Investments CEO Steve Dunton unveiled a plan to Sunshine Coast Regional District directors to build a large residential community on the benchland above Sechelt.

He also proposed an upscale resort with up to three marinas and up to 1,000 time shares and condos at Seaside Park, a 10-minute drive north of Langdale.

Dunton's vision for the resort, a 125-hectare parcel near Port Mellon, is to have dwellings clustered to leave most of the property in its natural state. He noted it has 3.5 km of waterfront and is zoned to allow four-hectare parcels with four dwellings apiece.

Vacation property prices in Whistler are all the evidence Dunton needs that Vancouverites are desperate for getaways within easy driving distance.

"If you time it perfectly you can be in downtown Vancouver in about an hour and 10 minutes," said Dunton.

Regarding the residential proposal for the 879-hectare property near Sechelt, Dunton envisions a self-contained community with parkland, community centre and commercial and retail development. He would not be pinned down on the number of dwellings CNI plans to build.

"My biggest concern is that we don't go in there and change what they have -- we can do that with great planning," he said

The property has been logged by previous owners and is adjacent to an existing gravel operation, leaving CNI with a host of environmental issues to tackle.

Chapman Creek runs through the area and there is concern that water levels are already too low to support spawning fish. "We need to find a way to take water that will not compromise the local creeks," Dunton said.

Sunshine Coast NDP MLA Nicholas Simons said the speed at which development is occurring in the area is "overwhelming" to the locals.

"There are more houses planned for Sechelt than Sechelt already has," Simons observed, noting that outstanding concerns about the water supply and protection of

the watershed would have to be resolved before a large-scale development could begin.

The company has a third 325-hectare property at McNabb Creek. It's a more remote industrial site with good deep-water access for ships and barges that could be developed as a gravel mine and could eventually become a petroleum and shipping port or the site of an oil refinery, Dunton said.

CNI's proposals for new residential and resort developments raised the issue of the safety of the winding narrow highway that runs from Port Mellon, near CNI's proposed resort community, and Sechelt, which is home to the larger proposed residential development.

Regional district officials were interested when Dunton suggested that CNI could help build an inland highway. CNI owns about eight km of land along a possible route for that road.

"A bypass [between Langdale and Sechelt] away from Gibsons is strong on the local political agenda," said John France, chief administrative officer of the regional district.

"With so many people coming here and the number of accidents and deaths on the coastal highway, people would really like to see a road like the Inland Island Highway on Vancouver Island."

Regional district chairman John Rees agreed that a new highway is a prerequisite for any development that would add thousands of more people to the Sechelt area, now home to about 9,000.

"This summer we have had a raft of accidents and some fatalities," he said. "People are very concerned that the road is not adequate now."

CNI bought all three of the Sunshine Coast properties for \$32 million from AJB Investments, part of the Surespan Construction group based in West Vancouver.

AJB did some logging on the properties and has made applications for gravel mining permits at McNabb Creek and a site on the Sechelt property. If successful, those permits can be transferred to CNI or another buyer, according to Anthony Bing, director of operations for AJB.

Meanwhile, CNI is involved in three major projects in Abbotsford. Falcon Ridge is underway, with 90 homes built and another 145 homes and up to 120 condos to be constructed on the south slope of Sumas Mountain.

In central Abbotsford, the Duntons are building a 943-unit seven-building residential complex on Gladwin Road. And on the eastern edge of the city, CNI is planning a massive \$1-billion agglomeration of 2,200 residential units, 2.2 million sq. ft. of commercial and office space, 14 hectares of green space, and possibly a convention centre.

rshore@png.canwest.com

© The Vancouver Sun 2006

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2006 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.