

Province pledges to help clean up contaminated sites

So-called 'brownfields-to-greenfields' housing projects to be put on fast track

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VICTORIA - The B.C. government pledged Monday to fast-track housing projects that clean up contaminated sites and replace them with livable, eco-friendly communities.

Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell said so-called "brownfields-to-greenfields" projects will move to the front of the line when seeking environmental approval.

"It will be streamlined. It will happen quickly," Bell said. "[The developer] will know he'll be able to get his return on investment in short order."

Bell detailed a broad strategy that includes spending \$10 million over five years to help developers investigate contamination on their properties.

"When companies want to go in and look at a site, determine the extent of the contamination on the site, the province will partner with them," he said.

As well, the government is planning tax incentives to encourage development of contaminated sites and to reduce and share liability for the sites, such as former service stations, dry-cleaning outlets and oil refineries.

Bell made the announcement at Dockside Green on Victoria's Upper Harbour, where developers have reclaimed six hectares of polluted industrial land and are building a self-sufficient community that will treat its own sewage, conserve water, use clean energy, and offer a vehicle-sharing program to residents.

Development manager Joe Van Belleghem praised the government's



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Development manager for Dockside Green Joe Van Belleghem praises the government announcement on contaminated sites.

brownfields strategy, saying it likely would have saved him a year's work on Dockside Green.

"We lost an enormous amount of time going through the processes in the regulations," he said. "This is one huge step in breaking down those barriers. And that's what it should be about: Governments shouldn't get in the way of progress."

Environment Minister Barry Penner said the government is sending a message to developers that it wants more Dockside Greens across the province.

"If there's a significant green component to a proposal ... we think that one should come to the top of the pile," he said.

"It still has to meet all the standards and it will be reviewed accordingly."

NDP environment critic Shane Simpson said that while developing brownfield sites is a good idea, he worries the province is simply downloading responsibility to municipal governments without any additional money. "We're going to have a situation where local governments are clearly going to play a much larger role in dealing with the 'green' application of this budget and the government's initiatives," Simpson said. "But we don't see any resources to support that."

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