



## Developer will listen to community

Holborn Properties head seeks feedback before renovations on social-housing site

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The developer selected to do a massive and potentially controversial makeover of Vancouver's oldest social-housing site says his first priority will be to pay attention to what the community wants for the site.

"If there is going to be a single message I have, it's that we will listen," said Simon Lim of Holborn Properties.

BC Housing will announce today that Holborn is the successful bidder from among more than 20 companies for the Little Mountain site in central Vancouver.

The deal, which the province hopes will be the first of many as it sells off old low-density social housing sites to generate new money for housing, will require Lim to replace the site's existing 224 social-housing units within the market housing he builds there.

Lim also said he wants to make the project as green as possible, learning from other projects around the region.

"I'm looking to improve on what has been done in the past."

Those attitudes were some of the factors, along with the price Holborn agreed to pay for the six-hectare property, that landed him the deal, said BC Housing CEO Shayne Ramsay.

"His proposal had a number of components that were attractive -- the commitment to creating a new chapter for Little Mountain was important."

Ramsay said the price, along with other aspects of the deal, will only be made public once the legal transfer has happened, but observers expect it will be high. The city sold a six-hectare parcel in Southeast False Creek, the site of the Olympic village, for \$193 million to Millennium two years ago.

This sale is the first of what Housing Minister Rich Coleman has said he hopes will be repeated in the province, with its old social-housing sites sold, redeveloped and densified as a way of generating money for new social housing. Current zoning allows 1,000 units on the site, but Coleman had talked at points

about trying for as many as 2,000.

Lim and his team face a long, arduous process, between high expectations from the city, the need to build according to BC Housing requirements, a rezoning to go through in order to get increased density, and a built-in opposition group.

Mayor Sam Sullivan says he wants to see the development become a "model of sustainability and achieve some of the principles of EcoDensity."

A group of Little Mountain residents and housing activists has mounted a campaign over the redevelopment, saying the province shouldn't be selling public land to finance social housing and that BC Housing emptied people out of the units too far in advance of redevelopment.

"We hope the developer would show his commitment to listening by reopening the homes that are empty until construction actually starts," said Kia Salomons, a member of Community Advocates for Little Mountain.

BC Housing has resettled about 170 of the 224 original families in other housing projects and given them the right of first refusal in the rebuilt project.

Ramsay said all the original 224 families will be included in consultations about the redesign.

At least one of them says he'll be waiting to see how things go before he decides whether to move back in.

"Ourselves and the people we know are kind of sitting on the fence," said Gary Cross, who had lived there for 14 years. He and several others have been moved to a social-housing project in southeast Vancouver, which Cross said he chose to go to early because it gave him some certainty rather than scrambling at the last minute.

"There are things that we miss, but I think it will depend on the size of the units and how they're laid out. I guess that's up to the developer."

Actually, BC Housing sets the standards for its buildings, which are typically built to be more durable than private developments.

Lim was a little-known developer five years ago when he emerged as one of the partners in a bid for the Woodward's redevelopment.

He and Concert Properties didn't get the project, but Lim has since gone on to increasingly high-profile projects, including the Arthur Erickson "twisting tower" that will become a Ritz-Carlton on Georgia Street, a 330-unit project at Nanaimo and Kingsway, and a redevelopment of four hectares in the middle of Whistler Village.

He also bought the Bay parkade two years ago, where he is planning to build an office and condo tower, and has developed a couple of small condo projects in the Main Street area.

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