

Ontario developer eyes Royal Bay site in Colwood

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VICTORIA - A major Ontario development company is considering buying the 185-hectare Royal Bay gravel site in Colwood owned by a multinational corporation based in Germany.

Christopher Bratty, one of the family members in the Remington Group, flew here a couple of weeks ago with an urban planner and other staff to meet with Colwood Mayor Jody Twa and municipal officials about the possibility of developing the property, where sand and gravel have been mined for a century. Operations at the Westshore pit are wrapping up to open the way for a massive mixed use development built out over several years.

Twa said yesterday that while the sale has not closed, Remington, a privately owned Toronto-area company, has some kind of agreement with the owner for the property. "They told us they had the ability to start working with the city (of Colwood)."

Last year, Twa met with four groups interested in developing the property and fielded calls from others as well. Of the four he met, one was Remington, another was from outside Canada, and the remaining two were Canadian.

Royal Bay, featuring views of the Pacific Ocean and Olympic Mountains, is one of the region's premier zoned development properties. The waterfront site is designated for a new community with more than 2,000 homes, a population of 7,300, a high school, and shopping area. It is owned by Lehigh Inland Cement Ltd., a major supplier of construction materials in North America. Lehigh Inland is owned by Germany's HeidelbergCement which operates in 50 countries and it one of the world's biggest suppliers of construction materials.

James Derkatch, Lehigh Inland Cement Ltd. president, said from Edmonton that Remington is doing its due diligence on Royal Bay.

Geoff Morgan, of Maverick Public Relations representing Remington, said from Toronto yesterday, "I can definitely confirm that Remington is investigating some opportunities in Victoria."

"They don't have anything done yet in terms of a deal so there is not too much they can talk about at this point." Christopher Bratty was not available, he said.

Developers eyeing Royal Bay have questioned whether changes to the site plan, developed several years ago, would be possible, Twa said.

"Ten years ago, the zoning was probably considered very dynamic." Twa added that Royal Bay is zoned for about 2,400 units while the more recently planned West Hills project is half the size and has zoning for 6,000 units.

He referred to Smart Growth ideas for community and transportation planning, which support higher density and less sprawl, suggesting a possible increase in the amount of multi-family housing and head-office space at Royal Bay.

Remington's portfolio, particularly as builder of the Downtown Markham Ontario project, is "exciting," Twa said. The Markham plan is a progressive mixed-use development with hallmarks such as energy-efficiency, recycling, a pedestrian-friendly environment, and buildings scaled to suit the area. The aim is for the 4,000 condo units, 750,000 square feet of retail, and 4.5 million square feet of offices to all qualify for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) ratings.

Meanwhile, because the old gravel pit no longer mines gravel or sends product via water, local operators are having to search elsewhere for aggregate, said Don Cameron, president of the Island Equipment Owners Association. He's also wondering where fill will be accepted now. "We have been using Royal Bay for years to take fill material."

Operators are having to go further afield, north of the Malahat in the Cowichan region, for sand. This incurs extra costs for trucking, as well as the cost of a bigger carbon footprint, he said. Companies are also turning to local quarries which drill and blast bedrock and then crush it for aggregate. A number of quarries operate in the Millstream area.

Increasing numbers of trucks and trailers with more rear axles are appearing around the community because they are needed to haul in these heavy loads of aggregate, Cameron said.

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