

## Old refinery lands await a new life

Imperial Oil's plan for housing development raises concerns about traffic and cleanup of toxins

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The high rise apartments sprouting up at Port Moody's new city centre are just four kilometres away from the massive tracts of land at Loco that Imperial Oil wants to redevelop for some kind of housing.

Imperial doesn't face a cash-flow crisis: The company reported more than \$3 billion in net earnings or profits last year, when gas pump prices climbed. Its parent company, Texas-based ExxonMobil, made more than \$40 billion US in profits last year.

But 13 years have passed since Imperial closed its old oil refinery at Loco and trimmed its operations down to a distribution terminal for things like fuel for freighters and cruise ships. That 20-employee operation covers a much smaller footprint of land than the oil refinery once did -- probably far less than half of the 263 hectares of industrial-zoned land and forest that Imperial owns in Anmore and Port Moody.

Pius Rolheiser, a Calgary-based public affairs associate with Imperial Oil, says the company's Loco-area property had an assessed value of \$17 million this year.

Asked for an estimate of the land's value if it were developed for housing, Rolheiser says the market would establish that value at the time the land is sold.

Rolheiser said Imperial hired developer Michael Geller last fall to look at redevelopment options for its Loco lands, such as residential, commercial and recreation-oriented developments.

"At this point, we don't have any specific development plans," he stressed.

Asked what Imperial wanted to tell neighbours who may be concerned about a



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The abandoned Loco Groceteria sits at old Loco townsite, land Imperial Oil wants to develop for housing.

future development, Rolheiser replied: "Obviously, from a purely selfish perspective, we'd like to maximize the value of that asset to the corporation and its shareholders. But, at the same time, our intent would be that future land use would be consistent with and complementary to existing land use."

People who live along the two-lane Ioco Road, the most direct route between Port Moody's new city centre and Ioco, don't want traffic to get worse.

Pleasantside, a suburban neighbourhood with a south-facing views of the inlet and Burnaby Mountain, is not as quiet and pleasant as it was a few decades ago. The closest station on the proposed Evergreen Rapid Transit line might be at Port Moody's new city centre and Newport Village, if the northwest route is chosen.

Ioco Road resident Ray Gaucher said he realizes that Imperial will want to develop its land for housing, but the city of Port Moody should make the company share the costs of extending David Road, an arterial route that would bypass Ioco Road.

Gaucher says Ioco Road is in a "shambles" and in need of repair because traffic volumes are so heavy. The number of cars heading past his home peaks in the summer, when thousands of swimmers, hikers and boaters head to Sasamat Lake, Buntzen Lake and Belcarra Beach to cool off or go boating in Indian Arm.

He hopes Port Moody and Anmore will require Imperial to clean up or remove the hydrocarbon-polluted soils on its former refinery site and develop a long-range plan for all of its property instead of allowing Imperial to sell off chunks of land at different times.

"If there's an overall plan, then it will be incumbent on them to clean the whole thing up before they get going," says Gaucher, a pharmacist who initiated a successful referendum that set aside Bert Flynn Park. "I think it also gives the city a better opportunity to determine density, zoning and everything if they can look at the whole plan."

Imperial began refining crude oil at Ioco in 1915 -- many decades before governments prohibited toxic discharges into the ocean and required industrial facilities not to pollute the land.

An Environment Canada study in the 1990s found that bottom-dwelling fish in Burrard Inlet and Port Moody Arm had rates of precancerous liver lesions and tumours that were many times higher than the same species caught in clean, unpolluted waters.

Almost 60 per of the English sole caught in Port Moody Arm had tumours and lesions -- the highest percentage in Burrard Inlet.

"The numbers are significant when you realize the natural occurrence of liver lesions is less than one per cent in wild fish," a federal government researcher, Darcy Goyette, said at the time.

Canwest News Service science writer Margaret Munro, at the time a Vancouver Sun reporter, wrote that the researchers believed the probable cause of those

lesions were the high levels petroleum hydrocarbons, lead and chromium found on the harbour bed.

Officials later decided it was better not to disturb the contaminated sediments on the ocean bottom.

About 60 hectares of Imperial's land lies within Anmore. The other 200 hectares are in Port Moody.

Anmore Mayor Hal Weinberg said the Imperial-owned property in Anmore is now zoned to have a maximum of one house per acre, but Anmore permits cluster housing if the density is an average of one dwelling per acre and allows smaller lots if parks are set aside.

Geller said he will present "various development scenarios" for the Anmore lands at tonight's meeting.

Asked for specifics, he replied by noting that planning exercises in the past have included ideas to revitalize the old Loco townsite and build residential, commercial and perhaps light industrial developments in other areas. There could also be a "recreational component" on the waterfront.

Port Moody planning director Tim Savoie says the official community plan adopted in 2000 states that the city should require an in-depth study and development plan that addresses things such as environmental impact and a new access route -- likely the David Avenue extension.

"What we heard from the community in 2000 was that we'd want to have the site developed with an innovative mix of uses," Savoie says. "There could be some single-family [housing], some multi-family at different densities, and some mixed-use commercial as well."

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