

Fraser Mills site could be used for Gateway project

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Coquitlam's vacant Fraser Mills site may temporarily transform into a centre of industrial activity for the Port Mann Gateway project over the next five years.

Pending approval, the plan would see the Beedie Group lease a portion of the 36-hectare (89-acre) Fraser Mills site to Kiewit, the company contracted by the province for the Port Mann project.

Kiewit would use up to 14 hectares (35 acres) to manufacture and store concrete pre-cast parts for the new bridge. The location would also provide space for assembly, maintenance and fabrication, plus a potential concrete batch plant. This influx of industry would create about 120 on-site jobs, with \$20 million paid in wages over the course of the project. Local businesses would see another \$30 million in spin-off opportunities including accommodations, food and beverage services and maintenance.

At Monday night's council meeting, Coun. Mae Reid said she supports letting Kiewit temporarily use the land since it would otherwise sit vacant.

"I personally want this to go through as quickly as possible. Gateway is going to be built. The province has said so, so it's a fait accompli. For those who don't like Gateway, I understand them opposing this. For me, it makes common sense," she said.

"I think this is a good thing for Coquitlam."

For plans to go forward, the province must first extend the temporary land use permit to five years from the maximum four-year period for Kiewit to complete its work.

Kiewit would set up as soon as possible, with operations slated to start in October. Pre-casting is scheduled to be complete by the summer of 2012, and the site would be fully vacated by mid-2014.

The temporary industrial project will not interfere with Beedie's plans to build a residential and commercial waterfront development, which will likely not begin before 2010.

That development, which called for 3,700 units of housing, drew criticism from TransLink, the City of New Westminster and others when it was proposed because of the isolated nature of the site.

Monday, Coun. Fin Donnelly expressed concerns about increased traffic with the Kiewit plan, since about 40 heavy trucks would travel to and from the site each day, along with another 400 employee trips.

"I can't support this request. I think this is highly unorthodox," Donnelly said of the last-minute agenda item.

However, Coun. Linda Reimer disagreed, stating that traffic would be spread out from early morning to late night.

"I think it's a win-win situation for the Beedie Group, for Kiewit and for the citizens of Coquitlam," she said. "I think that getting these two parties together to come up with this sort of a deal is a wonderful opportunity and I'm pleased to support it."

Another supporter, Mayor Richard Stewart, described the project as an entrepreneurial solution that is outside the box.

"This is an industrial site that's going to be lying vacant for five years or it's an industrial site that will be used to create jobs and help build a major piece of infrastructure here in Coquitlam," he said.

Coquitlam residents will have a chance to provide input through an upcoming public consultation process.

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