

## **Council approves Beedie's Fraser Mills plan**

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Coquitlam residents may soon be reunited with their waterfront.

It's the primary goal of the Beedie Group in its proposal to breathe new life into the historic Fraser Mills site with mixed-use development that will include residential, commercial, recreational and educational components — and one that was shared by the majority of Coquitlam city councillors Monday night.

They voted 6-2 to give second, third and final readings to an OCP bylaw amendment changing the 83.4-acre land's current designation from industrial to "waterfront village centre" despite concerns regarding the city's ailing stock of industrial land.

"Questions still need to be answered," said Coun. Brent Asmundson, who voted against the plans.

He cited a long list of reasons the city should hold off on the redevelopment plans: its location on a flood plain not protected by a dike; noise from the nearby CP Rail tracks, Catalyst Paper recycling facility and Fraser River Port across the river; and foul smells from nearby Wastech. He said the plans are not supported by the GVRD, TransLink or city staff, and added he's concerned the development would take away from much needed revitalization of the Burquitlam and Austin Heights areas.

"We owe it to the city of Coquitlam to make sure we do the right thing for the future," Asmundson said. "It's great to have a vision but we have to make sure it's a sound vision."

Donnelly, who supported the rezoning application until its public hearing Feb. 21, said he found the arguments against the development "quite compelling."

"This is the wrong location for that concept," he said, calling industrial land "as precious" as agricultural land while noting the site's risky flood plan location.

"Once you make these decisions, they're final, they're in for a very, very long time," he said, calling his decision to oppose the redevelopment the hardest he has had to make as a city councillor.

But the rest of council was excited about the plans, which include 3,700 housing units in varied format of low-rise apartments, 263 townhouses and 12 towers of 18 to 30 storeys each. Environmental components could include daylighting a portion of Como Creek and the use of geothermal heating. A possible BCIT campus there, estimated at 63,000 to 100,000 square feet, would focus on trades training, and environment and sustainability programs.

"This is our piece of the river and our piece of our heritage, and I want people to say, 'Let's go to Coquitlam,'" said Coun. Mae Reid. "I want to see it grow. I think what we've got here is just the beginning."

Coun. Barrie Lynch said the development will give Coquitlam something "unique" and "I think it takes leadership and vision to say this is an excellent concept for Coquitlam."

Coun. Richard Stewart emphasized the community of Maillardville's support for the project. "With this proposal, there are jobs and economic opportunity," he said.

And Mayor Maxine Wilson challenged the developer to work with staff to hone the vision to address some community concerns.

"We are working right now, as a council, to leave a legacy," she said.

The proposal for the site was soundly rejected last year by city planner Jim McIntyre, who in his report to council warned about the city's loss of industrial lands. (The city is in the middle of developing a strategic plan on how to preserve and enhance its industrial properties.)

"Staff is extremely concerned about introducing residential use in such close proximity to major, highly visible industrial operations that generate noise, odour and other impacts that cannot be easily mitigated, and which will negatively affect future residents," McIntyre wrote in his report.

But Beedie argued there are sufficient buffers, including Como Creek, around the waterfront property and the housing market will determine if there's an appetite for residential units in an industrial zone.

The Beedie Group bought the Fraser Mills property from Interfor in 2004 after the mill closed.

The OCP amendment will go before council March 19 for ratification.