

The year's big stories: Industrial to become residential on river

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A detailed vision of a new waterfront development at Fraser Mills is on its way this year.

And community members will get a chance to comment on what they see during more open houses and, eventually, a public hearing at city hall.

The Beedie Group wants to breathe new life into the historic site on the Fraser River with its development, which is planned to include low-, mid- and high-rise apartment buildings and townhouses, and mixed-use commercial spaces on the 83.4-acre site at the base of King Edward Street in Coquitlam.

"As a complete village, key amenities will draw people of all ages from the city to splash in the waterfront spray park, stroll along the pier, play in the recreational fields, experience festivals at the multi-purpose community centre, and shop in a unique village centre," the project's website says.

And although supporters are excited about the plan to re-connect Coquitlam with its waterfront, opponents say the city should hold off due to noise, smell, flood, traffic and industrial land issues.

Still, in March, council voted 6-2 to change the land's official community plan designation from industrial to waterfront village centre, thereby giving the developer its initial green light to begin more detailed planning.

Coun. Brent Asmundson argued against doing so because too many questions were unanswered while Coun. Fin Donnelly said industrial land is "as precious" as agricultural land and should be protected from further depletion.

But the rest of council — excluding Coun. Neal Nicholson, who had not yet been sworn in to replace retired councillor Louella Hollington — was excited about the plans, which would include some affordable housing units.

A development concept plan open house should happen early this year, followed by a neighbourhood plan open house. City council must pass the neighbourhood plan — and host a public hearing — before required rezoning and development permit applications can proceed.

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