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CNI talks of broad plans for development

SCRD MEETING

By Christine Wood/Staff Writer

CEO for Columbia National Investments (CNI) Steve Dunton was before the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) planning committee last Thursday to talk about his plans for the 3,286 acres CNI has acquired near Sechelt and the Port Mellon area.

“We appreciate that we are now very large land owners in the Sunshine Coast. We’ve been entrusted with almost 2,200 acres above Sechelt, 3.5 km of waterfront and about 800 acres of McNabb Creek. It’s a very nice portfolio to have acquired and a very, very great responsibility we have to the community when we own land like this. We want you to know we take that responsibility very seriously,” Dunton said.

Although Dunton had no solid plans to present to the board, he talked broadly about the company’s desires for the development.

“One of our biggest concerns is the low tides right about this time of the year, that we are able to save the fish,” he said. “We are very concerned any development we do does not impact the fish. The only way we can do that is put all the information on a graph and figure out where the water is coming from. That’s underway and we are very confident there is water available, but not in Chapman Creek. We think that is close to being tapped out ... we can look at the whole picture and we can afford to do the whole picture without the regional district or anyone else paying for it. The money is there. We’re all over the water issue on the Sunshine Coast right now, because we want to come to the board with a complete proposal.”

Another issue Dunton talked about is that of transportation. He said the Coast is in need of an alternate highway and suggested part of the solution may lie with his company.

“My discussion right now with the Ministry of Transportation is

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to take the road higher out of Langdale, keep it high through our property and carry on through so we have two passages. It's not right to have this many people on the highways, especially in the summer, and have only one way through," Dunton said.

Town of Gibsons representative Gerry Tretick said he appreciated CNI's plans to push for a highway bypass, but noted something has to be done soon. "We're looking at the costs now ... ultimately we want to see if through contribution of some private funds and a contribution of the land whether or not we can put this on the front burner instead of the back," Dunton said.

Another highway plan of CNI is to build a road between the Sunshine Coast and Squamish, though directors weren't so pleased with that idea.

"I am somewhat bemused that you want to drive a road through to Squamish. A full ferry burns a lot less gas than a number of cars travelling via Squamish, and there is also the safety factor of bringing in those cars," director Lorne Lewis said, noting perhaps another ferry would be a better answer.

"That very well may be the answer, but 24 hour access is good at times," Dunton said.

Dunton talked about trying to "minimize the impact" of future CNI developments on the Sunshine Coast, noting developments would contain their own services such as grocery stores, "minimizing the number of trips into town."

Director Lee Turnbull said she was concerned about CNI's impact on existing infrastructure on the Coast.

Dunton said the company would build their own libraries, recreation complexes and sewage treatment plants to lessen the impact.

At the end of his presentation Dunton said CNI is not in any hurry to develop on the Sunshine Coast.

"The speed is not there. We have a lot of other important developments we are working on. It's very important that any time you need information, we try to accommodate you with that information," Dunton said.

"We're not here to run over the community and do what we want. We want and hope for constructive information from the community. We hope this community will do that. Not all communities we've gone into have. We hope to remain open and honest with you. We may not be able to do exactly what you want us to do, but we hope we will be able to hear each

other's explanation why, and ultimately I think this is a great development we have planned.”

He noted the company might be back before the SCRD next year with an overall development plan for the CNI lands.

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