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Developer predicts future growth

Laura Walz , Peak Editor

With thousands of people planning to retire to the West Coast, increased population is set to bring economic changes

A property developer who recently purchased thousands of acres on the Sunshine Coast has no plans for the Powell River area, although he does have a family connection to the community.

Steve Dunton, Columbia National Investments (CNI) CEO, said his father-in-law Harold Rowledge grew up in Powell River and Dunton sold the family's Townsite home about 20 years ago for \$26,000.

While Powell River is "one of the most beautiful places ever," it is a little isolated, Dunton said.

"The Sunshine Coast is a little bit of a stretch for development at this point because of transportation," he said. "Quite frankly, Powell River is too. But there isn't a more beautiful area than the coast, including Powell River, to live."

CNI recently bought 3,286 acres on the Sunshine Coast. The property is located in three different spots, with 2,174 acres close to Sechelt, 803 acres at McNabb Creek and 309 acres at Seaside Park in the Port Mellon area.

The Abbotsford-based company plans on building an environmentally sensitive resort-style residential community at Seaside Park.

The company also plans on creating affordable, family-oriented, environmentally-friendly housing for the other areas it owns.

CNI currently has 10 ongoing projects in Mission, Chilliwack, Cultus Lake, Abbotsford and the Sunshine Coast. With a large owned-land base surrounding Vancouver, CNI and its partners have plans to build 30,000 new homes over the next decade.

Dunton referred to a recent survey conducted in Ontario that found 67 per cent of public sector employees who are going to retire in the next 11 years planned on moving to the West Coast. While planners work towards projections of one million new residents in the Lower Mainland, Dunton said they could easily be out by as much as a million people. "All of BC is going to have to share the gain, share the pain."

Not all new residents will move to larger areas such as the Lower Mainland, Victoria, or Kelowna, Dunton said, adding he thinks the provincial government will step in to relieve some of the pressures and ensure there is connectivity to other, more isolated places. "If you're not having to go to work everyday, I don't think you can get a better place to live than the Sunshine Coast or Powell River, especially if there is road connectivity to the Lower Mainland."

The development curve is going to hit every place of BC, Dunton also said. "You're going to see growth just by what is happening with baby boomers retiring," he said. "We have to as a whole province make sure we don't loose what we have."

-with files from Ian Jacques, Coast Reporter



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