

CLOSE WINDOW

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Big dreams for Shannon Park

Canada Lands sees modern residential complex sprouting on old military site

By CHRIS LAMBIE Business Editor

IMAGINE THE DAY when you could live in a new environmentally friendly home in Shannon Park where a wine bar was just a short stroll away.

Canada Lands Co. is talking to the Department of National Defence about making that a possibility someday on the 42.5-hectare property on the Dartmouth side of Halifax Harbour.

"We are slated to be receiving the Shannon Park property," said Gordon McIvor, a vice-president of the Crown corporation.

If the arm's-length, self-financing body does acquire Shannon Park, Mr. McIvor said he suspects there will be a lot of interest from developers.

"It's a big, very well-situated property," he said. "It's right next to the Bedford Institute of Oceanography. It's right under the bridge."

He wouldn't put a price tag on the land, but said Canada Lands would likely have to pay DND millions of dollars for the "valuable and complex" property.

"We actually can engage in zoning with the city," Mr. McIvor said. "We've done 13 military base re-conversions across the country. So, obviously, we're very interested in continuing that type of work because we've developed a lot of expertise in it."

Former bases lend themselves to mixed-use development, "with a very heavy accent on residential and green space," he said.

"We've won a lot of environmental awards."

The plan is to develop a master plan, then sell the property to a developer to build.

"Our concept is to reduce the impact of the automobile basically as much as possible," Mr. McIvor said.

"We try and create a property where people potentially could live, work and play in close proximity. So you want to worry about access to public transit. You want to think about, OK, can people on a Friday and Saturday and Sunday night, could they walk to a restaurant or a movie theatre or to wherever they want to go — to a wine bar? You want to get people so that

they're back walking and bicycling and not necessarily taking their car to go everywhere."

Shannon Park is one of the "opportunity sites" identified in Halifax's regional municipal planning strategy. It could accommodate significant future population growth, said Andy Fillmore, the city's urban designer.

"So that's all fantastic. Inside the regional centre means it's accessible by local transit. You can get there on a bicycle. In the future, you could get there on a ferry. You don't necessarily have to own a car if you're going to live there. You're close to all kinds of recreation. You're close to that tremendous view of the harbour. (It would be) a huge lifestyle boon to live in the Shannon Park area — a big draw."

In a telephone interview from Sweden, where he's touring sustainable communities, Mr. Fillmore waxed poetic about the Scandinavian country's sustainable elements. And he stressed the same ideas could be used to rebuild Shannon Park.

"What we're seeing are large-scale new communities close to downtown cores on bike, pedestrian and public transit routes, holding huge amounts of people," Mr. Fillmore said. "We're talking about mid-rise, anywhere from two- to eight-storey buildings, arranged around central common greens with plenty of bicycle parking, plenty of community gardens and daycares."

The Swedish communities use "district heating," he said, "so rather than every building having a huge boiler or every house having a furnace in the basement, there would be one central heating plant with hot water pipes to every unit. It's hugely efficient. You can run the district heating plant on wood pellets."

Shannon Park could also make use of solar and wind power.

"You know the wind just howls up that harbour," Mr. Fillmore said. "Shannon Park is ideal."

At its peak, several thousand military personnel and their families lived and worked in the 113 buildings on the property. But now it's mostly abandoned, save for the arena and a school the military handed over to the Halifax Regional School Board.

Halifax developer Wadih Fares was cautious about the potential for a Shannon Park redevelopment in the near future.

"If they bring it (forward) in the next couple of years, I don't think it will fly. But probably in five years or more than that, it may be something that a lot of us would be interested in," Mr. Fares said.

"I am very optimistic there's a big potential in Halifax. But we've got to take it easy and go slowly. You can't dump everything on the market all at once."

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GORDON McIVOR Canada Lands

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