

# Big plans sprouting where grass now grows

## First Nation gearing up for industrial park linked to Deltaport

BY BRIAN LEWIS, THE PROVINCE NOVEMBER 5, 2009 7:38 AM



The Tsawwassen First Nation plans a massive industrial park (the area marked TFN Industrial Land) on about 135 hectares removed from the Agricultural Land Reserve during treaty negotiations.

**Photograph by:** Handout, For The Province

A casual drive through the Tsawwassen First Nation lands in Delta shows that nothing much has changed since the small band finalized its historic treaty with the federal and B.C. governments last spring.

But what a casual drive doesn't disclose is the burst of business activity that has been happening lately within the walls of the TFN's administration centre.

That's where Chief Kim Baird, recently elected to a sixth consecutive term, and others in the TFN's now-municipal-style government have been putting the finishing touches on launching their first major post-treaty economic-development initiative.

Yes, it's substantial and the project is directly tied to the expansion and long-term future of nearby Deltaport, which is owned by Port Metro Vancouver.

Utilizing about 135 hectares of former Agricultural Land Reserve property that was transferred to the TFN under the treaty, the band is developing a massive port-related industrial park that will likely

include a major intermodal rail yard and terminal, warehouses, distribution centres, container storage and other port service-supporting infrastructure.

Construction is estimated to create about 1,000 temporary jobs and, once the complex is completed about 10 years from now, there should be about 1,500 permanent jobs along with an annual payroll of \$110 million.

And to make sure all this happens in an orderly fashion, the band recently completed formation of a new arms-length company.

"The TFN Economic Development Corporation will focus on developing TFN's land assets to generate revenues, as well as creating jobs and business opportunities for TFN members," says Chris Hartman, its new chief executive officer.

Chief Baird and TFN member Diane McElhinney represent the band on the new firm's board of directors, while the other three members bring extensive business expertise: Carolyn Rogers (a banking executive), Pat Hibbitts (vice-president finance, Simon Fraser University) and Norman Stark (former head of the Vancouver Port Corp. and TSI Terminal Systems).

"There's no doubt we'll be a major employer in the region," Baird tells me.

"Already a lot of international port-related companies are showing interest in us because there aren't many sites in North America like this that sit right next to a major port." The band expects to create jobs for other First Nations workers in the Lower Mainland, as well as for the community at large, and it plans to launch skills-training programs related to the shipping sector as part of this project.

However, the chief is well aware of the controversy surrounding transfer of the former ALR property to the TFN and its subsequent use for industrial development.

"But we have to be pragmatic and take advantage of the opportunity that is here so that we can build our tax base for our community's benefit," she says.

"Although we do think the project can actually improve port efficiencies and, by doing more of the container-transfer work at the port with intermodal rail services, we may be able to actually reduce container-truck traffic in the region," Baird adds.

The preliminary site preparation is expected to begin soon and it's being funded by \$3 million from the TFN and \$6 million from the federal and B.C. governments.

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