



Friday » October
10 » 2008

Living Green: Sustainability initiatives on Island receive accolades and awards

Vancouver Sun

Friday, October 10, 2008

VANCOUVER - When Ross Tennant and his partner Jack Julseth began Three Point Properties, a Victoria-based development company, they knew they wanted to create responsible development. This didn't necessarily mean green, but socially conscious projects that had community consensus and integrity.

Eighteen months ago, an exercise with their 25 employees revealed that sustainability is considered a key issue for people.

Today, one of the company's latest projects, Bamberton, is hoping to set an example for the world of how development can, and should, be done. The following are just some of the ways the project is helping to define responsible development.

Remember

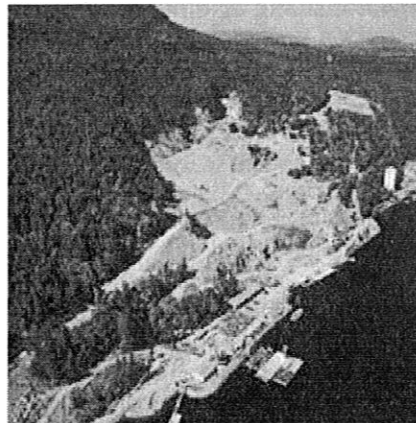
"It is a lot easier to work on a project that has a genuine sense of place, one that is not being fabricated," says Tennant. "It helps people feel like they are moving into a community that had a history, one that they could be a part of."

Bamberton, located on Saanich Inlet near Mill Bay, is on the same limestone vein as the famous Butchart Gardens (and even under the direction of Robert Butchart for a time) and operated for over 75 years as a quarry, cement works, and vibrant company town.

"When we got into doing the deconstruction and remediation [of the Bamberton site], people from the community and those that used to live there came out and started telling us about what it was like to grow up there," says Tennant. "Where they had the toboggan runs, and different social things that had happened. It became a bit of a daunting responsibility.

"You realize that you've been entrusted with people's history. We felt we owed it to the community to preserve this history and tell the story of the site."

So compelled was Tennant by this sense of obligation that when the company decided to produce a short documentary about the site's heritage, he sold his truck to cover production costs. In addition to preserving key remnants of the site's industrial past, including an old cement kiln and a historic residential area, the project plans to work with first nations to develop neighbourhood signage that illustrates and explains first nations history and traditions on the land.



CREDIT:

The Bamberton site, located on the Saanich Inlet, has undergone a huge reclamation.

Remedy

"Given we are a province so based on [resource] industry, it is important to acknowledge that we can clean up these sites and that they can have a second life," says Tennant.

Bamberton, which was responsible for the production of millions of tonnes of Portland cement used in projects around the world, has a past with not only a rich social history, but also a legacy of derelict buildings, contaminated soil, and a scarred landscape.

Three Point Properties purchased the property in 2005, nearly 25 years after the closure of the plant. Feeling it was important to build trust with the surrounding community and demonstrate its integrity as a company, it decided to begin an ambitious deconstruction and remediation program before submitting a development plan to the Capital Regional District for a multi-phase residential and commercial development. The undertaking, which Tennant says was a "white knuckle process" at times, due to its many challenges, became one of the largest private remediation projects ever done in B.C.

Over a period of 16 months, approximately 110,000 dump trucks of contaminated material - 520,000 tonnes - were excavated and relocated to a specially engineered soil storage facility inside the former limestone quarry on site. Around 2,800 tonnes of steel were reclaimed and recycled, and some 40 tonnes of asbestos-containing insulation were removed, by hand, from the site's industrial piping.

The final engineered facility was capped with a clay cap and seeded to create an 11-acre green space in what will hopefully be a comprehensive development. The undertaking not only pleased many in the community, it also garnered the company several awards and recognition for outstanding reclamation, technological innovation, and site revitalization.

Redefine

"I think what people are going to come to expect over time is a base level of responsibility in the ways communities are developed," says Tennant. "I think traditional development is going to be a dying industry, and that if you don't have a base level of environmental standards that your community is built around it just won't be successful."

Though a merger with Dockside Green manager and partner, Joe Van Belleghem, Three Points Properties is hoping to transform one of Vancouver Island's most environmentally damaged sites into one of the most progressive new communities in the world.

While the plans for Bamberton, like Dockside, include a wide range of innovative environmental initiatives - biomass heating, on-site sewage treatment, aggressive water and energy conservation -Tennant feels that ultimately what will draw people to the project are the things that traditionally appeal to them: the location and what kind of community it offers their family.

"I don't think we will be able to market a community based on its environmental initiatives alone," says Tennant. "It is like buying a car nowadays; people just expect it to have air bags, anti-lock breaks and seat belts. They are not selling features any more, they are expectations. We hope that people will come to Bamberton, not because it has all that underlying technology, but because it will be a place where you can raise your family in a healthy environment, where you can walk to the store, and where you can meet your neighbours."

For more information, visit bamberton.com

Kim Davis is a Vancouver sustainable-design consultant. E-mail her at redkimwrites@gmail.com