

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Environment decision removes barrier to downtown development

Water rules changed for Terminal Avenue area

Summary

A partnership between the City of Nanaimo, downtown property owners and Planning Design and Development Nanaimo (PDDN) has led to a change in regulations that make it easier to develop properties downtown, opening the door for a thriving and prosperous city centre.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (MOECCS) has determined that properties in the Terminal Avenue area from Comox Road to Esplanade are not included in regulations that assess groundwater quality during site investigations, simplifying the regulatory framework for individual property owners.

The change reduces a big obstacle to developing any of the more than 145 properties in the downtown core, cutting costs and reducing timelines for development.

The Terminal Avenue area from Comox Road to Esplanade is a former tidal inlet. More than 100 years ago, it was filled with tailings from the city's coal mines. Today these lands contain numerous active light industrial and office buildings.

Beginning in 2011, the PDDN and the former Downtown Nanaimo Business Improvement Area began raising money for an environmental study to show why the area should receive special consideration from the ministry of environment. The City of Nanaimo joined the effort and collaborated on a study and application to MOECCS in 2016.

The study was funded by private property owners working with PDDN, a BC Brownfield grant, and a contribution from the City of Nanaimo.

Previous environmental studies in the area have confirmed the widespread infilling and reclamation work. Together with the City and PDDN study, the environmental work resulted in MOECCS issuing an Area Wide Determination in 2014 that reduced the requirement for potential developments to show the effects of the presence of historical fill materials.

The new MOECCS determination builds upon this, acknowledging the long industrial history and unique subsurface and hydrological conditions in the study area. This determination means that drinking water standards do not apply for assessing groundwater quality during the site investigation steps that are required when a property is redeveloped.

Strategic Link: Prosperous Nanaimo: Revitalize the Downtown core and the waterfront (C5.1.4) and Enhance and promote a vibrant and diverse downtown (C5.5.1)

Key Points

- An environmental study and an application to MOECCS, funded through a partnership between the City, downtown property owners and Planning Design and Development Nanaimo provided information to the

Ministry that acknowledges that ground water in this area of downtown is tidal in nature and subject to historical filling.

- The Terminal Avenue area of downtown has tremendous development potential given its proximity to Commercial Street, the waterfront and the proposed downtown transit exchange.
- Individual property owners in the Terminal Trench area who want to redevelop will save time and money because they are no longer subject to drinking water standards.

Quotes

"The industrial practices of the 19th century laid the very ground we walk on downtown, but in the 21st century the mine tailings that underlie the Terminal Avenue area have made it very difficult to revitalize the heart of our city.

The Ministry of Environment decision to exempt more than 145 properties from drinking water regulations opens the door to building the thriving and prosperous city centre so many of us, including Council, have worked hard to achieve."

Leonard Krog
Mayor
City of Nanaimo

"This project is a great example of how courageous and collaborative effort between the City, volunteers and stakeholders can accomplish meaningful change that would be almost impossible to achieve by any single party. Nanaimo is at a wonderful time in its growth...let's actively work together to steer our city in a direction we want to live in."

Darren Moss
Chair
Planning, Design and Development Nanaimo

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Contact:

For media enquiries, please contact
Communications
City of Nanaimo
Media.Requests@nanaimo.ca
250-754-4251



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