



NEWS photo Cindy Goodman
KERRY Kukucha, manager of real estate development for Pinnacle International, stands on the site of the former Versatile Pacific Shipyards that will be redeveloped into the \$400 million Pier project. Work has already started on public amenities on the site.

Residential replaces industrial

Jane Seyd

jseyd@nsnews.com

This is the second in a two-part series concerning development around the foot of Lonsdale Avenue.

Down at the foot of Lonsdale Avenue and Esplanade, behind a chain-link fence, the bones of the old Versatile Pacific Shipyard buildings are a stark reminder of the past.

Above the site, the stern end of the victory ship Cape Breton protrudes from one of the sheds. Beyond that, shredded tarps and plastic blow from the old buildings.

It doesn't look like much yet, but Pinnacle Developments has big plans for this land.

Besides the property being sold by North Vancouver City on both sides of Lonsdale Avenue, another huge piece of Lower Lonsdale redevelopment is the Pier project planned by Pinnacle for the former Versatile site.

Unlike the city lands that were sold, the Pier site is right on the waterfront, next to the Lonsdale Quay.

Plans include a hotel and conference centre, plus a mix of commercial, public amenities and up to 1,000 units of residential development that will add up to more than one million square feet over the 12.9-acre site.

The total value of the development is expected to be in the ball park of \$400 million.

"Certainly we would hope to have the majority of the site developed by the time the Olympics roll around," said Kerry Kukucha, manager of real estate development for Pinnacle International. "It's one of the most fantastic properties in the Lower Mainland in terms of its waterfront orientation."

So far, Pinnacle has been granted development approvals for three buildings on the site, including an office building and a highrise residential tower more than 200 feet tall on the north side of Esplanade, plus a 10-storey hotel-conference centre, and residential development on the south side of the street.

One of the trade-offs involved in the Pier development was approval of one of the tallest new highrises in Lower Lonsdale in exchange for retaining some of the heritage buildings on the site and inclusion of public walkways and plazas.

Perhaps for that reason, public hearings on the Pier site have been less acrimonious than those about projects on former city land, despite changes such as the addition of three storeys to

original plans for the hotel building.

Before any development can start, however, Pinnacle must complete several of the public amenities that will be included in the site, such as refurbishing the large pier to include a pedestrian promenade complete with interpretive signs, plus building an outdoor patio and a waterfront walkway on the site.

Work has already started on those projects, to be completed this summer.

North Vancouver City Mayor Barbara Sharp said those public amenities are key to giving the public more access to the waterfront and creating an exciting place to be in Lower Lonsdale.

One of the largest heritage buildings on the site, known as the Machine Shop will also eventually be turned over to the city, as the future home of the museum and archives. How much of the building will be given to the museum and what other uses might be included hasn't been decided.

The large stern of the Cape Breton, saved when the rest of the vessel was scuttled as an artificial reef, will be placed on the end of the Machine Shop as a historical point of interest.

Inside one of the old shipyard buildings, other relics of the past have also been preserved - an old boiler, transformers, bits of overhead cranes - with the thought they may also become part of the public art or historical detail of the site.

Like other developments in Lower Lonsdale, however, the Pier when it is completed will still be overwhelmingly residential.

A waterfront sales centre with a stunning view of Burrard Inlet, architectural drawings of the first residential tower on Esplanade and floor plans for various condominium units is set to open soon.

Development of the residential units that will be built closest to the water is still a number of years away, but "those are the units people always want," Kukucha acknowledges. "They're not on the market yet."

Despite the other residential projects taking shape in Lower Lonsdale, Pinnacle isn't anticipating a problem selling its share when the time comes. "Given the Pier's location, it should do very well under any circumstance," said Kukucha. "A lot of people have expressed interest in the site."

Pinnacle certainly won't be the first developer to convert a former waterfront industrial site into a high-end residential project.

That process also hasn't gone unnoticed by those who still make their livings in the industrial setting.

"They've started building an awful lot of houses next to the industrial lands," said Malcolm McLaren, president of Allied Shipyards, who is also president of the North Shore Waterfront Industries Association.

Industry is aware it can create pressures, said McLaren, particularly when developers look for new highly-desirable areas to develop.

"What we run into, there is a school of thought that says 'Nasty industry. Why don't we turn the whole waterfront into Lonsdale Quay?'" he said.

"There seems to be this clamour 'We have to have access to the waterfront.' It's a bit like a dog chasing a car. What happens when you get there?"

The Vancouver Port Authority still owns most of the industrial waterfront land in North Vancouver, and has tight controls on the kinds of uses they allow on their property.

But the change from industrial to residential land is underway in other parts of the city, such as on the 68-acre site of former Fullerton sawmill lands, where the auto mall was built. Back when

the original plan for the Harbourside Business Park was drawn up, the waterfront land on the site was slated for light industrial and office development that planners hoped would appeal to businesses ranging from restaurants to high-tech companies. But developers Concert Properties Ltd. found industrial and commercial customers weren't interested in the higher costs of locating in North Vancouver.

"For an industrial user, they're not going to see a huge benefit to being on the North Shore," said Francis Caouette, North Vancouver City's manager of special projects.

Residential development is a whole different story.

In March, Concert Properties came to the city with a plan to switch the use on that land to residential, with a proposal for a project that could include 900,000 square feet of space in 830 new housing units. As was the case in the Versatile lands, Concert is proposing a variety of public amenities to sweeten the deal.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about the trend towards greater residential development on the waterfront.

"Is that the future of North Vancouver?" asked McLaren. "Business is very nice, we'll go somewhere else to do it. . . ."

"Who knows, maybe the grain silos will go one day and be replaced with something," he said.

"I guess the real issue is is it going to be replaced with industry or is it going to be replaced with coffee bars?"

Sharp points the finger elsewhere: at lack of support from federal and provincial levels when it comes to modern development like cruise ship and container terminals on North Vancouver's industrial port lands, that could see bigger spinoff benefits for the region.

"We're constantly trying to seek those," she said. "We just get left out."

A few blocks up from the waterfront, these days, the city has moved its own development emphasis from the west side of Lonsdale Avenue, where highrises are already going up, to municipally-owned property on the east side of the street.

Today, much of site 10 is a parking lot. A sign listing bargain rates of \$1.25 for two hours blows in the breeze. On a sunny afternoon, the lot is half full. Nearby, plants have gone to seed in the site of a former community garden.

The plan for much of the past 10 years has been to sell these parcels for development.

But last November, planners and council encountered more opposition than they'd bargained for when they held a public hearing on site 10. Issues about view corridors, adequacy of public parking and the impact of construction were some concerns cited.

Even some members of council suggested slowing down the pace of development and taking another look at the plans. The majority, however, felt it would be better to proceed, albeit cautiously.

Ivan Leonard, a member of the Lonsdale Citizens Association, is one of those who wish the city would slow down. Since the plan was first drawn up, "Everything has changed," said Leonard.

"Maybe we should be doing something different on site 10."

He questions whether more residential development is needed so soon.

Among a group of guys he meets for coffee, most "perceive it as a cash grab - the city selling off the real estate while the market is high," he said.

Sharp said the city is willing to look at making changes to the plan to accommodate concerns like having enough parking.

But it doesn't mean development will stop, she said.

"It doesn't mean you haven't listened because you don't change it," she said. "We don't want to find ourselves in a situation that we don't do anything with the east side of Lonsdale.

Most groups that have looked at the plan, including the city's advisory planning commission, think the development of Lower Lonsdale is on the right track, she said.

"You can keep bringing things back and studying it to death and you would never do anything," said Sharp.

Meanwhile, people who live in Lower Lonsdale wonder what their new neighbourhood will eventually be like. Leonard doubts many of the people buying condos will live in North Vancouver themselves.

"They're buying them on spec as an investment and renting them out," he said. Some of the condos have been resold before they're even built.

Jim Ramsay, another member of the citizens group, said the units also haven't been designed with a wide variety of residents in mind. "They're either high-end empty nesters or young professionals with no kids," he said.

No one expected Lonsdale to stay the way it was, said citizens group member Andrea Lebowitz - a slightly rundown place with a brand of seedy charm.

"But in its place, we hoped we'd have another kind of community," she said.

"Our fear is we're not going to have a community at all. If you have a nice view you can look out your window. That doesn't make for a whole life."

One thing both Lebowitz and Sharp agree on: while the city took years to come up with its Lonsdale development plan, people tend not to notice until the sites under discussion are those in their own backyard.

Said Lebowitz, "A lot of people don't think about it until it's happened."