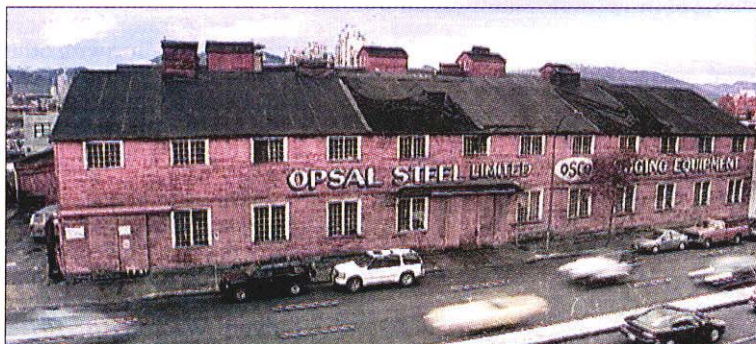


The future of False Creek



DENISE HOWARD/VANCOUVER SUN FILES

The heritage Opsal Steel building (left), will be preserved as part of a development project depicted in an artist's rendering (right).



Olympics project spurs development

BY FRANCES BULA
VANCOUVER SUN

It's the last undeveloped waterfront neighbourhood in downtown Vancouver, the home of some of the city's few remaining historic industrial buildings, and a future environmental dream community.

And the first sign that southeast False Creek is about to come to life has arrived, with an innovative project by Vancouver architect Peter Busby that combines restoring a heritage industrial building with a new residential tower next door, which will be built to the country's highest-level environmental standards.

The Bastion Development project near Main Street also appears to be the first of what is expected to be an Olympics-prompted boom in that area. It will house the athletes' village and is to be turned into social housing after the 2010 Games.

"We looked at this area and decided it was the next neighbourhood that was going to be

transformed," said Kim Maust, Bastion's vice-president, whose company is also developing a live-work project nearby at Second and Yukon. "We're eager to be part of the Olympics excitement."

Busby has come up with a plan to restore the Opsal Steel building by taking the entire structure apart, cleaning the timbers and putting it back together with its original form unobtrusively enhanced by 21st-century engineering improvements.

The building is one of three historic structures left in what was once a thriving district that housed shipbuilding, bridge-making and other industrial operations. Opsal Steel produced steel

See **SOUTHEAST FALSE** B7

City starting to make plans for the False Creek Flats

BY FRANCES BULA
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver is about to launch itself into an ambitious new plan for the industrial land that some have called the city's potential third downtown.

Prompted by the possibilities of a two-million-square-foot hospital complex, a police academy and a 30,000-seat soccer stadium moving into False Creek Flats, along with collapse of the high-tech sector that was expected to boom

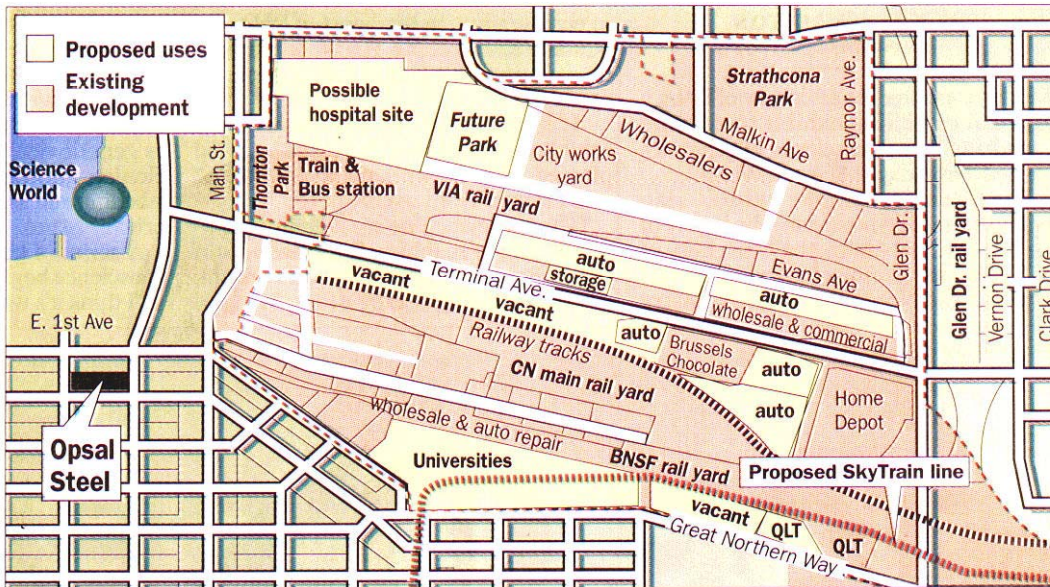
there, city staff are saying it's time to start making new plans.

This time the future of the area will be shaped by two influential players who would like to see the area become a new kind of urban industrial zone that is more diverse and city-oriented than either the rail yards that have existed there or the new suburban business parks.

One of them is Councillor Jim Green, who has become the new Coalition of Progressive Electors

See **ONCE-INDUSTRIAL** B7

False creek flats: Existing and proposed uses



Southeast False Creek to be model for new communities

From B1

parts for the province's lumber mills and tugboat operations.

Many developers looked at the site and decided the only possibility was to pull the heritage building down. Busby persuaded Bastion to try to preserve it.

"This is a significant building that represents a link to B.C.'s past," said Busby, who feels there's a lot of history left in the building, including its original cranes, patterns and other equipment.

Under the planned redevelopment, it will have loft townhouses on top, selling for up to \$500,000 each, with the building's original exposed trusses running through them and little bedrooms built into the cupolas that were origi-

nally designed for ventilation. The ground-floor level will have shops, a restaurant and a pub for what Busby sees as the emerging neighbourhood.

Next door, the 22-storey tower will be designed to what's called the LEEDS gold standard — a measure for environmental sustainability that will mean the tower incorporates everything from energy-efficient lighting to on-site stormwater retention.

City council will have the final say on whether the trade-off — extra space for the tower in exchange for preserving the Opsal Steel building — is worthwhile for the city. Busby is hoping the approval process will be finished by spring and construction can start in late summer.

The building, used occasionally as a set for spooky movies, deteriorates more every winter.

It's the first of what is expected to be a small rush of projects, once council begins the process Oct. 23 of an area-wide rezoning for both the large tract of city-owned land and small parcels of private land. Polygon has a site in the area; the Playhouse is also planning to redevelop its site into a residential project.

The city's plan has been to develop a residential community on its land that is a model for environmental sustainability, a project that has generated international attention and some local friction as people debate the trade-offs between environmental and financial goals for the city.

Once-industrial flats were to be high-tech zone

From B1

council's unofficial minister of development projects.

The other is one-time NDP cabinet minister and current social entrepreneur Bob Williams, who was appointed by the COPE council to the city's planning commission and now heads a sub-committee specifically focused on the future of False Creek Flats.

"We don't disagree that it should be a centre for employment, but we don't think it should be the dumping ground it has been," said Williams. "It really shouldn't be its own kind of ghetto."

For Williams, that means the city has to do more than just designate uses for big tracts of land: hospital in land blob A, biotech in land blob B, light industry in land blob C, and so on. It means developing a more fine-grained plan that makes new development connect to surrounding communities, makes it more urban-feeling, and provides more amenities, from greenways to restored creeks.

In a move that clearly signals a new process for planning at city hall, Williams will make a presentation to councillors next week asking them to amend the staff report on False Creek planning by broadening its mandate. Williams' group also expects to work with city staff on developing a plan for the area.

Whatever happens is sure to provoke debate.

The 308-hectare section, basically the eastern end of False Creek that was filled in at the turn of the last century, has been generating controversy for almost a decade since city planners and the then-Non Partisan Association council started looking at what to do with the valuable chunk of land so close to downtown.

While it is still heavily used by everything from rail companies to food wholesalers to tile manufacturers, it was also the object of interest for many developers.

In the late 1990s, developers in the high-tech sector, in particular, were arguing that definitions of "industrial" should be changed to reflect changing patterns — and to allow high-tech into industrial zones.

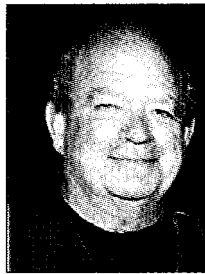
Some planners argued strenuously against that, saying high-tech could easily be accommodated in the city's existing downtown office space. They also argued that False Creek Flats, which represents about one-sixth of all industrial land left in the city, was too important for industries that served the downtown or the port to be hived off for other uses.

Deputy city manager Ted Droettboom, the city's most vocal critic of the plan, was fired in 1999 and the council of the day, with then-councillor Jennifer Clarke leading the charge, went on to rezone parts of the flats to allow high-tech uses.

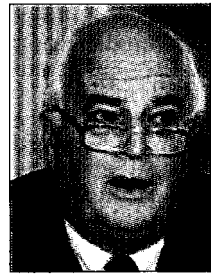
But all of the high-tech development plans collapsed and many of the sites where tech parks had been planned sit vacant.

In the past year, however, other operations have started to look at the area.

In a report going to council Thursday that recommends a new plan for False Creek Flats, senior city planner Ian Smith lists proposals the city may have to deal with:



Jim Green



Bob Williams



Anne Roberts

- Providence Health Care has looked at the large piece of land just north of the train station — once planned as a tech park — as a possible site for consolidating all the acute-care services that are now spread across four hospitals, including St. Paul's and Mount St. Joseph.

- The Vancouver Whitecaps have made inquiries about building a new soccer stadium, with 10,000 to 30,000 seats.

- Vancouver police have been looking at the Flats as a possible location for a new central campus.

- The four post-secondary institutions that were given part of the Finning Land site — UBC, SFU, BCIT and Emily Carr — could be looking at building another million square feet of space.

- Auto dealerships have expressed interest in moving out of the downtown and into the Flats.

- Rocky Mountain Rail Tours plans to build a new rail facility near Home Depot at the eastern end.

That's in addition to what has already happened in the past several years, with major biotech operations like QLT and Discovery Park building in the area.

Smith's report asks council for approval to set a long-term plan for the area in general and, in particular, to decide what it wants to happen in specific parts.

Terminal Avenue, which had primarily been a rail-serving street that cut through the middle of the Flats, could become a more commercial street with auto dealerships. The western edge near Main and the southern edge bor-

dered by Great Northern Way, where the universities and QLT are located, could become more "urban precincts," with a streetcar connection along Main.

"We see a need to consider an area like that part of the downtown," said Smith, who says the job will be to figure out which parts of the Flats absolutely have to be preserved for downtown-serving industries and which parts can be allowed to change.

Said Green: "I think we have to look at this area in an urban manner. This area, along with southeast False Creek, they are the two most important pieces of the future city."

But Councillor Anne Roberts, the most passionate land-use advocate on council, is dubious about rushing into citification.

"What's been done is a push to making this a third urban centre [after downtown and the Broadway corridor]. I think it's coming through the back door and making another downtown. I have a lot of concerns about the direction this seems to be going."

She said people are jumping at the idea of having a hospital, a police academy or whatever in the Flats and all they're thinking about is how to plan well for them — the same kind of thinking that went into rezoning land for high-tech, which allows all kinds of non-industrial uses to move in.

"But why not just say no, no rezonings. There's no reason to consider stadiums or new police academies. Unless we call a halt to this urban development, we're not going to have any industrial land left."