

Building

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT ■ CONSTRUCTION ■ ARCHITECTURE

**The Olympics
as catalyst for
development**

**Rapid structure
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the rise**

designing
**SACRED
SPACES**

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the

road to 2010

British Columbia is taking advantage of the upcoming Winter Olympics to expand transit and infrastructural systems and gain vital residential and commercial space by targeting contaminated and underutilized brownfield lands.

Many of us know that the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games will host the world's best athletes in some of the most breathtaking areas of British Columbia. But did you know that, along with the three pillars of Sport, Culture, and Environment traditionally associated with the Olympic Movement, the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) is the first to commit to applying sustainability principles and practices?

Many of the sites chosen as Olympic venues are on the leading edge of sustainable development. In fact, VANOC has pledged that any new Olympic developments will avoid environmentally sensitive and undisturbed natural areas. In some circumstances, this means cleaning up and reusing brownfield sites.

Déjà vu

Twenty-one years ago, British Columbia hosted another international event, the 1986 World Exposition on Transportation and Communication, or simply Expo '86. In many ways, the Province's acquisition and subsequent sale of the Expo lands, 66 hectares situated on the north shore of Vancouver's False Creek, was the original catalyst for modern brownfield redevelopment in BC.

For over a hundred years these downtown lands were used for industrial purposes such as coal gasification, wood treatment, and metal works, resulting in significant soil and groundwater contamination. With increasing public awareness of the risks,

both environmental and financial, associated with contaminated sites in BC in the late 1980s, and the need for remediation criteria and policies to guide the Expo lands clean-up, a growing number of stakeholders were asking for greater clarity on remediation liability, formal government certification of cleanups, and public access to information on sites. The policy development work initiated in connection with the Expo lands led to the province's first outline for managing contaminated sites — numerical and risk-based criteria that eventually led to the creation of one of Canada's most progressive and flexible contaminated sites regulatory frameworks.

Today, the former Expo lands are known as Pacific Place. When this multi-phase remediation and redevelopment project is complete it will have increased downtown Vancouver's residential population by nearly 13,000 people and provided them with extensive waterfront parkland and commercial amenities.

Remediation and redevelopment leading to 2010

There are a number of other contaminated sites (including brownfields) in Vancouver, Whistler, and along the Sea-to-Sky Highway corridor whose redevelopment is being directly or indirectly boosted during the lead up to the 2010 Games:

- The Vancouver Convention Centre Expansion Project, which will serve as the international broadcast centre for the 2010 Games, represents the final remediation and redevelopment project along the City's Coal Harbour waterfront. The project incorporates innovative fish habitat compensation features and is seeking LEED certification.
- Opposite Pacific Place, on the southeast shore of False Creek, the City of Vancouver has assembled a series of former industrial and commercial properties that are presently undergoing clean-up and site preparation for construction of the Vancouver Athlete's Village (see the story on p.24). VANOC will outfit and operate the Olympic Village starting November 1, 2009, and will return it to the City of Vancouver on April 7, 2010.
- Although the Canada Line Rapid Transit Project (linking Richmond and YVR Airport to Vancouver) is not an Olympic project, the scheduled 2009 completion will allow Olympic planners to take advantage of increased transit options. Construction of this above and below-ground light rail system includes several contaminated site remediation sub-projects along the corridor.
- The Sea-to-Sky corridor linking Vancouver to Whistler includes



Previous page and above: Construction is underway at the site of the Olympic and Paralympic Athlete's Village (also called the Legacy Neighbourhood) in Whistler. Photos by David McColm.

two large-scale contaminated site remediation projects that have been underway for some time: Britannia Mine and the former Nexen Chlor-Alkali plant site in Squamish. The 2010 Games will bring attention and opportunity to these communities. Following a four-year, \$40-million clean-up, the Squamish site is poised for redevelopment as part of this community's Smart Growth evolution.

- The Whistler Olympic and Paralympic Athlete's Village is being constructed and will become Whistler's newest residential community following the Games (see Viewpoint). Some remediation work will be undertaken in connection with the nearby, recently-closed landfill site.

From clean-up to community

The remediation and redevelopment of these sites carries significance that will last well beyond the closing ceremonies of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Each site offers an opportunity to provide market and public housing, exhibition and conference space, and better access to land and water properties along the Sea-to-Sky, and overall improves the environmental health of the region. **B**

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Not just a BC thing

The "catalyst effect" on brownfield redevelopment due to world-class events like Vancouver's Expo '86 and the 2010 Winter Olympics is experienced in similar circumstances and locations worldwide. A notable example is the 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in London, England, which will transform 500 acres of the most under-developed lands in the country to a site with restored natural ecology and

new infrastructure, providing the setting for future sustainable communities.

Even cities unsuccessful in bids to host events like the Olympics often centre their bid concepts on the reclamation and revitalization of former industrial lands. The City of New York proposed to accelerate the redevelopment of degenerated riverfront areas close to the city centre to provide more housing, employment,

and recreational facilities. Paris proposed the regeneration of a partly disused inner-city rail yard for its Olympic Village including the creation of new housing opportunities as a lasting legacy. Recently, the City of Toronto considered submitting a bid to host the 2015 World Exposition, a bid that would have centred on plans to revive and transform industrial waterfront land.