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Forge industrial reserve using core review, port urges



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Port Metro Vancouver is urging the province to use its ongoing core review to create a new Industrial Land Reserve to preserve strategic land in the Lower Mainland for port and industry expansion.

Port officials have warned for more than a year that a new protected land bank for industry – mirroring the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) – is increasingly urgent, as suitable land is converted by cities into more lucrative condos and stores.

Robin Silvester told a meeting of the Delta Chamber of Commerce Thursday he wants the province to act expeditiously, under the framework of its core review, which is already examining potential reforms to the ALR.

"The problem is getting worse, not better," he said, noting Port Metro Vancouver is set to grow further as Canada's main trade route to Asia, while the region's population climbs by another million residents in the next couple of decades.

"There's no time to waste."

An area of industrial land twice the size of the city of New Westminster – 3,000 hectares – has been converted to other uses over the past 30 years, he said.

As a result, the port and related businesses are increasingly pitted against other land uses – including farming – for access to waterfront or riverfront property.

Pressure on the ALR and the shortage of industrial land are interrelated –speculators have targeted farmland that might be industrialized, driving up its price and making agriculture shakier.

Civic leaders are worried about the port's own purchase of farmland and that new proposals to raid the ALR are brewing,

Despite that discord, Silvester said the ALR offers a good model for a land preserve on the industrial side.

"Something like the core review, where the province does a root and branch analysis of everything it does, is a great opportunity to look at whether there are some new things they can add on in a very efficient way to meet such an economically important requirement as preservation of industrial land," Silvester said in an interview.

Metro Vancouver's regional growth strategy, adopted in 2012, also seeks to protect industrial land.

Silvester called it a start that doesn't go far enough, adding consistent, provincially imposed rules are required.

"The strategy does nothing to undo the damage already done," he said of the regional district's plan. "It doesn't create new industrial land."

Silvester said he believes incentives could reward the redesignation of other lands to protected industrial use in a way that respects the needs of both the economy and the environment.

The province has indicated the core review may contemplate splitting the ALR into two zones, allowing more potential uses in much of the north and Interior.

Silvester urged other business leaders to campaign for an industrial reserve.

He also recognized the recent completion of the South Fraser Perimeter Road and the province's pledge to replace the Massey Tunnel, which could let ships haul larger loads upriver, provided there's increased dredging.

Silvester used epic terms to characterize the nearly complete \$9-billion investment in road, bridge and infrastructure upgrades in the Lower Mainland related to the Pacific Gateway.

"We are in the middle of what nation building looks like," Silvester said, adding the spending by the provincial and federal governments is 50 per cent more than the huge Panama Canal expansion project now underway.

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