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Vancouver tech park inches toward development

Quartet of Metro Vancouver post-secondary institutes hoping to create hub to cultivate provincial tech industry

Curt Cherewayko

Great Northern Way Campus administration is hoping to finalize a plan soon for the development of the campus' first major new facility.

Construction on the Centre for Interactive Research on Sustainability – which will focus on sustainable urban development and building practices – is planned for the GNWC's parcel of land southeast from the corner of Main Street and Terminal Avenue.

“If we can get sign-off on that agreement, we believe it will be completed in time for the Olympics,” said GNWC president Dennis Pavlich.

Leading by example, the complex could be one of the world's most sustainable buildings. It will operate as a greenhouse gas neutral and net energy generating facility.

It would be the first major new building development at the campus, which is co-operatively owned by the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia Institute of Technology and the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design.

Meanwhile, the University of Victoria is set to expand its tech hub on Vancouver Island from a single facility, which houses 1,300 staff, to a 3,000-employee tech community with multiple facilities.

The five-phased development plan for the 35-acre Vancouver Island Tech Park was recently approved by Saanich. The project includes blueprints for three 80,000-square-foot buildings and an additional 15,000-square-foot space for retailing.

The VITP now houses 29 high-tech businesses in a 165,000-square-foot building.

According to a UVic study, the tech park contributed \$280 million to the local and provincial economies in 2005. During the same year, the VITP directly employed 995 workers and helped create a total of 2,023 jobs in other industries.

Pavlich said he's followed the VITP's growth since its inception in 2002 and hopes that GNWC can replicate its success. He said the Vancouver campus wants VITP's mix of large tenants and smaller developing businesses.

“[VITP] is able to accommodate very small [businesses] and it's able to accommodate them as they grow.”

Though GNWC's parcel of land is smaller than that of VITP – roughly 20 acres compared with VITP's roughly 35-acre site – the Vancouver campus has 2.5 million square feet of permitted floor space.

UVic's tech park expansion project will add 250,000 square feet of floor space to create a total 415,000 square feet.

Other recent developments at the GNWC, according to Pavlich, include plans to build the corporate headquarters of a high profile B.C. company and an accompanying research facility. Pavlich declined to disclose the company's name.

He added that construction could begin shortly.

Campus representatives are also planning a workshop for early March 2008, at which stakeholders and industry leaders will devise a development plan for the campus' educational facilities and determine how they can attract the high-tech community to the GNWC.

“When this design was put in place, there was no contemplation of higher education being here,” he said. “So that needs to be incorporated.” •

cgc@biv.com