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Brantford's newest favourite son?

A hockey legend's hometown pins renewal hopes on \$500-million mega-complex

BY GREG McMILLAN, BRANTFORD, ONT.

Memories die hard, especially in Brantford, where residents still talk about the devastating economic hit that occurred two decades ago with the loss of three major employers and the thousands of jobs that went with them.

Plant closings of Massey-Ferguson, Harding Carpet and White Farm Equipment threw the city into a nightmarish tailspin, but plans for a \$500-million commercial and industrial mega-complex are making locals forget all the woes of the past.

"We are all hoping this dream becomes a reality," said Dave Levac, MPP for Brantford. "I see this project as being on the edge of some really great things."

Indeed, this city 100 kilometres west of Toronto has been buzzing since Brantford's King & Benton Development Corp. unveiled the proposed development, which will include an industrial park and retail power centre located on a 427-acre parcel of land at Highway 403 and Oak Park Road. The industrial component of the site covers about 300 acres.

One of the largest single land transactions in Canada this year, the project — when up and running — is expected to generate 5,000 jobs. And the size, scope and vision shown by King & Benton has created a stir in Brantford.

If it comes to be, it certainly will be welcome relief for Brantford. By the early 1990s, after the plant closings, and the crippling unemployment that followed, Brantford had become one of the most economically depressed cities in Canada, clinging to the fame of local icons, such as hockey star Wayne Gretzky and telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell, as it tried to maintain a positive identity.

But the completion of the Ancaster to Brantford section of Highway 403 in 1997 sparked a turnaround by providing easier access to Toronto and a seamless route through Southern Ontario between Buffalo and Detroit. As well, a lack of space in Toronto and surrounding areas led to the expansion of commercial and industrial construction to the west. Two years ago, Ferrero Group, an international confectionery giant, and Procter & Gamble Inc. took advantage of the convenient location and established production facilities in Brantford.

The new Oak Park complex is considered part of a giant step forward. Steve Charest, president of King & Benton, said the site will in-



GREG McMILLAN FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

clude 4.7 million square feet of prestige industrial buildings, an 800,000-square-foot commercial component containing several big-box stores and offices, a hotel and "an aesthetically pleasing village setting that will invite shoppers to sit among the trees, browse and shop to their hearts' content."

Mr. Charest will be announcing the project's global partners and initial tenants within the month.

He said the complex, combined with Brantford's Northwest Business Park on the opposite side of Highway 403, will help to create a new economic hub in Southern Ontario. For example, in 2008, a Toyota operation is scheduled to open in Woodstock, 40 kilometres to the west, and the plant will need off-site support.

Mr. Charest is passionate about the viability and potential for the complex, especially since a power centre has been added to the mix.

King & Benton doesn't want to take business away from existing retail stores in Brantford, Mr. Charest said. Just the opposite: "We want to bring new businesses to Brantford that will keep local shopping dollars in the community."

To assess local public opinion, King & Benton polled residents, asking them to name the kinds of stores they would like to see at Oak

Park, so they would not have to travel away from the city to make certain kinds of purchases. Chapters and Costco were the top two responses, followed by Linens 'n Things, IKEA, Old Navy, a cinema complex and a factory outlet.

MPP Mr. Levac, a long-time supporter of King & Benton and its community involvement, said the province has taken steps to ensure upgrading of a Highway 403 interchange will be in place and not serve as an impediment to the project. He pointed out that millions of dollars now leave Brantford and Brant County because of the lack of a power centre. "We could reverse that."

But Mr. Charest explained that keeping shopping dollars in Brantford is only one of the benefits of the proposed complex. He said the creation of jobs would inject \$150-million annually into the local economy, and increased tax revenue from industrial and commercial assessment would also have a big impact.

"We're excited about what it means for the community," he said. "We're excited about what it does for jobs, investment and that it provides an opportunity for Brantford [residents] to stand on the roofs and announce 'we're back.'"

Prior to embracing the Oak Park

project, King & Benton completed a series of brownfield reclamation projects in Brantford, including one that turned an abandoned 350,000-square-foot Harding Carpet factory into a business centre. Another saw the conversion of a former dry cleaning plant into a YM-YWCA family program centre.

"My favourite business development project is definitely going to be Oak Park," Mr. Charest said. "The residents of this community now know that they can contribute, that they have a voice. That's very powerful stuff and with that realization, we can move forward."

The site is being converted from a 427-acre gravel pit. That process includes redeveloping the uneven land, improving the highway interchange and construction of the buildings, which is all expected to commence in the next few months.

King & Benton has also had to carry out negotiations with the city over water and sewer services, as well as the question of development charges.

Stephen Naylor, director of current planning for the City of Brantford, confirmed that some financial matters, including cost-sharing arrangements, "are still under discussion."

Final agreements are expected to be dealt with shortly. There was

By the numbers

Here's how the King & Benton project stacks up:

5,000

new jobs created with an estimated \$150-million in payroll

300

acres industrial, including 4.7 million square feet of buildings

80

acres commercial, including 800,000-square-foot power centre and office buildings

4

acres donated to the SPCA by the developer

SOURCE: KING & BENTON

Developer Steve Charest is planning to build an industrial park and retail power centre on a 427-acre former gravel pit in Brantford, Ont.

some concern from both sides that the process could be delayed if there was shift in power following the recent municipal elections, but those fears were seemingly allayed when Mayor Mike Hancock, who had been dealing with the Oak Park project since its inception, was re-elected in recent municipal elections.

Ron Jansen, associate vice-president for commercial real estate consulting group Colliers International, is a big believer in the positive effect the King & Benton development will have on the Brantford area.

"The province has designated Brantford as a growth area and, in the last five years, the city has had quite a dynamic period," Mr. Jansen said. "There is good momentum buildup and the key to keeping that momentum alive is the King & Benton project. The main positive I see is that it will increase Brantford's diversity. Brantford's accessibility is perfect, both to the GTA and the United States."

And now King & Benton is ready to move ahead.

"This project represents a turning point in Brantford's history," Mr. Charest said. "We can't wait to get going."

Special to The Globe and Mail

REIT stock monitor

Biggest one-week gainers

	Dec. 1 close	Weekly change	Volume '000
InnVest REIT	\$13.17	+ 3.3%	720.4
Melcor Developments	\$21.00	+ 3.3%	36.8

Biggest one-week decliners

Retrocom Mid-Mkt REIT	\$4.95	- 11.0%	710.1
Sterling Centrecorp.	\$0.98	- 2.0%	73.9

REIT watch*

	Dec. 1 close	Weekly change	Y-to-d total return
Alexis Nihon	\$ 14.89	2.7%	19.54%
Allied Properties	20.59	-0.3	28.03
Boardwalk	40.04	2.0	94.49
Calloway	28.00	-2.3	23.60
CAP	18.24	-1.6	19.07
CHIP	14.20	1.4	28.59
Chartwell	13.48	-1.9	-9.64
Cominar	22.76	1.2	23.91
CREIT	30.38	0.4	40.09
Crombie	13.00	0.5	35.53
Dundee	36.47	0.6	49.74
Extendicare	14.77	-2.5	N/A
H&R	24.45	1.5	23.43
Huntingdon	2.29	-0.4	-7.40
InnVest	13.17	3.3	13.25
IPC-US	11.70	-1.3	10.27
IPC-US (S.U.S.)	10.30	-0.5	12.59
Lanesborough	5.77	0.0	19.68
Legacy	9.29	2.0	19.13
Morguard	13.15	2.1	27.05
Northern Property	24.90	-0.8	37.39
Primaris	18.70	2.8	20.84
Retirement Res.	8.25	0.6	0.97
Retrocom Mid-Mkt	4.95	-11.0	-17.85
RioCan	25.20	-2.0	15.79
Royal Host	6.27	-0.2	13.64
Scott's	10.06	0.0	17.18
Summit	29.65	0.2	25.45
Sunrise Senior Living	10.02	-1.3	-19.60
Westfield	15.00	-1.3	18.24
Whiterock	12.75	3.2	23.03

* All REIT unit values and corresponding calculations are on a fully paid basis

S&P/TSX indexes

Index, weekly close, Jan. 1, 2004 = 100



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Sector	Municipality	Address	% Transferred	Price	Unit Price	Parameter
Office	Scarborough	100, 200, 300 Consilium Pl.	100%	\$120,830,000	\$120	per sq. ft.
Retail	Toronto	1029 King St. W.	100%	\$1,800,000	\$321	per sq. ft.
Industrial	Toronto	9 Hanna Ave.	100%	\$30,133,000	\$106	per sq. ft.
Apartment	Toronto	9 Tennis Cres. & 569 Broadview Cres.	100%	\$8,200,000	\$80,392	per unit
ICI Land	Brampton	Hwy. No. 7	100%	\$1,224,308	\$724,872	per acre
Res Land	East Gwillimbury	19419 2nd Concession	100%	\$11,915,055	\$98,552	per acre

CALGARY						
Sector	Section	Address	% Transferred	Price	Unit Price	Parameter
Office	Calgary - NE	4000 19th St. NE	100%	\$4,184,869	\$184	per sq. ft.
Retail	Calgary - SE	9630 & 9640 Macleod Tr. SE	100%	\$24,500,000	\$200	per sq. ft.
Industrial	Calgary - SE	4975 12A St. SE	100%	\$4,525,000	\$74	per sq. ft.
Apartment	Calgary - SW	Bromley Square	100%	\$63,000,000	\$176,471	per unit
ICI Land	Airdrie - SE	King's Heights Shopping Centre	100%	\$19,676,000	\$434,771	per acre

VANCOUVER						
Sector	Municipality	Address	% Transferred	Price	Unit Price	Parameter
Office	Vancouver	433 West Broadway	100%	\$2,750,000	\$284	per sq. ft.
Retail	Mission	6967-6971 Bridge St.	100%	\$649,000	\$108	per sq. ft.
Industrial	Delta	7989 82nd St.	100%	\$2,400,000	\$129	per sq. ft.
Apartment	Vancouver	8628 Hudson St.	100%	\$1,465,000	\$146,500	per unit
ICI Land	Richmond	11380 Burne Way	100%	\$2,224,250	\$776,082	per acre

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