

PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.02.08
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A12
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: PETER O'NEIL
WORD COUNT: 300

Treaty worth \$230 million more than announced: MP

The Tsawwassen First Nation treaty initialled by the federal and B.C. governments in December has a value of about \$300 million - more than four times the official \$70-million estimate provided, a Tory MP says.

John Cummins's estimate of the likely market value of the 434 hectares of land the band is getting from the Agricultural Land Reserve was endorsed by Delta, B.C.'s director of community planning. "As far as I know, that's pretty close," said Kip Gaudry.

Cummins said neither the band nor government officials are acknowledging the enormous value of the 207 hectares that will be removed from the land reserve and become open for commercial development.

"They're trying to low-ball the number to make everybody feel good about it," said the MP for Delta-South Richmond riding.

That land, according to evaluations by Colliers International, has a market worth of \$1.1 million per hectare, he said. The 227 other hectares of crown land going to the Tsawwassen, which will remain within the land reserve, are worth about \$106,000 per hectare, he said, bringing the total land value to \$254 million.

With cash transfers valued at \$45.5 million added in, the treaty totals \$300 million, he said.

The deal, if ratified, will set a new benchmark in the B.C. treaty process and result in dozens of other bands seeking a similar "windfall," he warned.

Tim Koepke, chief federal negotiator on the Tsawwassen deal, said the \$70.1-million estimate includes a valuation of \$24.6 million for the two parcels of land reserve property.

The rest - \$45.5 million - is to cover other transfers, as well as money for self-government.

He refused to comment on Cummins's evaluation, noting the land's value depends on what the band does with it. "That will be a matter to be determined by the Tsawwassen," Koepke added.

Chief Kim Baird, who called Cummins's assessment "misleading" and "extreme," said an appraiser hired by the band put the land value at \$66.7 million.

She said the band hasn't yet developed a land use plan, although some land will be zoned for commercial use.