

Coleman shops Okanagan prison plan by Castanet Staff

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B.C.'s Solicitor General is looking to find a home for a new prison in the Okanagan.

On Monday, Solicitor General Rich Coleman announced consultations were underway with most local Okanagan governments as well as the Okanagan Nation Alliance.

Coleman asked local governments to give their feedback and suggestions by April 2011.

The prison, which will house all local remand inmates, is to be centrally located to reduce travel time to the Kelowna Courthouse.

"Any time you travel greater distances it takes more time and resources. If you have a jail somewhere in the Okanagan it will definitely cut down on the travel and costs," says Chair of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union correctional and sheriff services component, Don Purdy.

Presently, the closest remand centre to the Okanagan is situated in Kamloops.

Once a suitable location is determined, the new 360 cell prison is intended to be completed by 2015.

Purdy says he is optimistic that a location will be found, and he says the government has learned from mistakes made two years ago.

In February 2008, former Solicitor General John Les had hoped to plant a prison near Lake Country.

Okanagan Indian Band Chief Fabian Alexis and Lake Country Mayor James Baker both opposed the plan, which was eventually scrapped.

"It went off the rail. There has to be a consultation process with the local government, First Nations and other groups within the community -- and we didn't see that."

Purdy says the prison, which he estimates may bring in 300 full time jobs, will help relieve pressure on other B.C. facilities currently running at 200 per cent above capacity.

Governments being asked to consult their communities for feedback and suggestions include:

- The City of Enderby
- The Township of Spallumcheen

- The City of Armstrong
- The City of Vernon
- The District of Coldstream
- The Village of Lumby
- The District of Lake Country
- The City of Kelowna
- The District of Peachland
- The District of Summerland
- The City of Penticton
- The Regional District of North Okanagan
- The Regional District of Central Okanagan
- The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen
- The Okanagan Nation Alliance