

Communities awaiting prison announcement

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What do the HST and the province's proposed correctional facility have to do with one another? Depending on whom you talk to, one might have delayed the other.

Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corp. chief financial officer Brian Titus said he spoke with the ministry about a week and a half ago, when he called to check the status of the band's application to host a correctional facility.

"What they told me is it's still in the minister's office waiting approval," Titus said, adding that he was given the indication that the province had been grappling with the fallout of the HST referendum decision and its budgetary implications.

"The HST referendum, what that resulted in was the province of B.C. estimating a loss of \$3 billion in annual revenue for taxpayers, and those tax dollars would be used for funding projects," he said, adding he wasn't willing to speculate on reasons for the delay.

Titus said he wasn't told any timeline for an announcement, although government officials "told us to remain optimistic. That's all I have to say," he said.

It's been a big year for the province. Nov. 3 is the day former premier Gordon Campbell resigned one year ago as leader of the Liberal Party, in large part due to growing public anger over the way the harmonized sales tax was introduced.

While many in the Liberal ranks dismissed the notion, Campbell would remain on as premier and stressed the business of government would continue while the party sought a new leader, some are pointing to the prison issue as an example of the provincial hiatus on policy and projects.

Summerland Mayor Janice Perrino met with Solicitor General Shirley Bond during the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention held in Vancouver in September.

"I told her I was so frustrated by the lack of correct information, the lack of follow up and a sense of fairness. I was really disappointed with how the province had dealt with this," Perrino said, adding Bond was "very apologetic.

"She was sincerely apologetic. She said she understood completely what the disappointment was about."

Although she pressed Bond for an answer on when a decision was made, Perrino said Summerland walked away with no answers on when a decision would be made - or if ever.

"She doesn't expect it's going to be any time soon," she said.

"I said to her, with this HST decision, has the project been shelved? She said, 'I don't know.'"

Penticton Indian Band Chief Jonathan Kruger said a delegation from his organization met with ministry officials about a month ago.

"It was a very good meeting, but they're not going to be give their answer any time soon for whatever reason," he said.

Lumby Mayor Kevin Acton and his council recently heard from ministry officials that a decision would be made before the municipal election, set for Nov. 19.

"It's already become an election issue, but hopefully if the province makes a decision, then it, in my mind, does take it off the table," he said.

"It'll be interesting to see where we come out in the pile. I know the Osoyoos First Nation has put together a pretty good proposal from what I hear. It'll be really interesting to see where the decision is to put it, and why."