

Jail planned for B.C.'s picturesque Okanagan Valley

By Doris Janssen, CHBC News December 7, 2010



This conceptual drawing of a new correctional facility was released by the BC Government in 1996. Discussions are set to resume to see the jail built in the Okanagan by 2015.

Photograph by: CHBC News, File

KELOWNA, B.C. — The B.C. government is again taking a serious look at building a jail in the picturesque Okanagan Valley, a project that's been contemplated since 1996.

Talks with local governments between Enderby and Penticton, including First Nations, are expected to begin soon on planning a 360-cell provincial corrections facility to be completed by 2015.

The most active interest has some from the Lumby, east of Vernon. The provincial government says community support is required before the project goes ahead.

Solicitor General Rich Coleman confirmed the consultation process during a meeting this week with the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union.

"The announcement of a round of consultations is a step in the right direction," said Darryl Walker, the union's president. "Our union has made it clear to the government that the serious overcrowding issues in existing facilities has led to increased tension and violence against correctional officers.

"It would appear that the government has heard our concerns and that we are making some progress. However, there is a long way to go yet."

The Okanagan Valley, which is a major B.C. tourist hub, is known for its beaches, vineyards and skiing.

A plan two years ago to build a provincial jail just north of Kelowna was met with dismay by residents in nearby Lake Country. Mayor James Baker said at the time that residents would prefer the town to be known as "a holiday resort destination — not a prison town."

"We have a lot of people asking for hospitals and care beds, but no one's asking for a prison," he said.

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