

## Jail site ruled out; Mayors express surprise over solicitor general's statement jail won't be built on Kelowna site next to Lake Country

Kelowna and Lake Country mayors expressed surprise Tuesday when Solicitor General Rich Coleman announced a provincial jail would not be built in the city next to Lake Country.

In an interview with The Daily Courier, Coleman said he didn't know why they'd be surprised. "I know that I made it very clear last fall when I became the minister that we wanted to have a prison in the Okanagan. When I was asked about the (Kelowna) site, I made it clear that site wasn't on the table right now because of the opposition from the Okanagan Indian band. The requirement for consultation and accommodation would take too long for us to get on the site, and we were looking for a quicker opportunity." Both Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd and Lake Country Mayor James Baker expressed surprise, but from different perspectives.

"That is the very first time we have heard that," said Shepherd.

The Lake Country mayor's response: "I haven't heard anything official, but that's good news." Shepherd noted last fall's jail announcement didn't mention Kelowna already has a zoned site, so she reminded Coleman of that in a letter and forwarded all of the material from a 1996 public hearing and rezoning. City officials were shocked when he responded on Feb. 2 that his ministry had concluded three years ago the site was unsuitable.

"That shocked me. It was a total surprise for us. Where did that ever happen?" said Shepherd, who immediately wrote back asking for the criteria that the site no longer meets and for written documentation the city had been informed of that decision despite ongoing dialogue with three successive ministers.

Coleman still has not answered that letter, but on Friday, Shepherd and city manager Ron Mattiussi had a conference call with the assistant deputy minister of corrections, Brent Merchant. Merchant told them a federal court decision now requires extensive discussions with the Okanagan band, and there wasn't enough time for that to get the jail built and operational by the target date of 2015. However, he left the impression "not at this time, but maybe in the future," said Shepherd.

"I'm only going to build one jail," said Coleman. "The reality is we don't have that site . . . unless all of the issues can be settled in and around it. And that would be up to local governments to accomplish that with the First Nations. If that doesn't (happen), we're not going to waste our time." Shepherd already has organized a Feb. 28 meeting of the three councils -- city, Lake Country and band. However, she will discuss with city councillors on Monday whether they still want to meet with their counterparts. "All three groups need infrastructure improvements in that area -- more sewer connections, more road improvements. My perspective was let's put all of that on the table and is there a win-win?" Baker doesn't know what the city or province can offer Lake Country as an incentive.

"It's not really the jobs. It's not the money. It's the perception that is the biggest issue. We want to do something else with our communities rather than have it as a prison community." Even if the city moved the jail to the south end of Duck Lake in Ellison, "we still wouldn't want a prison there," said Baker.

"We've been very co-operative with all ministries at all times," added Shepherd.

"At the end of the day, I feel very disappointed that there's been discussions going on that we're not being made aware of. All of this effort would have ended many months ago if at the very beginning the minister had put in writing to us and said 'we are not going to move forward with this site because of this and this.' But we've never, ever had that letter."

