

## Lake Country unwilling to embrace correctional facility

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There are growing calls for a jail in the Okanagan, but one community still isn't interested.

The B.C. Government and Service Employees Union wants the government to proceed with a regional correctional centre, and points out that land for such a use is already owned near Lake Country.

"It's been a union push from the get-go and I'm not sure why. Maybe they want more members here?" said James Baker, Lake Country mayor.

The government purchased part of the former Hiram Walker distillery site in north Kelowna - right on the border with Lake Country - many years ago, with the intent of constructing a prison.

However, numerous concerns arose from Lake Country and the Okanagan Indian Band and a press conference expected to officially announce the project was cancelled in January 2008.

Baker insists his council and community are still opposed to having inmates living next door.

"I haven't seen any demonstrated need for a facility except that the Kelowna courthouse has to pull people over from Kamloops (correctional centre)," he said.

Baker says that while the Hiram Walker site is in Kelowna, it is his community that could face negative impacts regarding traffic and public safety.

"There are issues with optics. We could become a prison town and that's not what we want to be," he said.

**BCGEU** officials say an Okanagan facility must be a priority because other B. C. facilities are full.

"The government should have some ongoing planning to build a facility in the Okanagan," said **Darryl Walker**, union president.

"Our jails are operating at 180 per cent above capacity and the government's own public safety ministry service plan says it has reached critical capacity. The government already owns the land in Winfield and needs to be more pro- active on this file."

In the Legislature Tuesday, Solicitor General Mike de Jong stated that demand on the correctional system in B.C. is growing and a new facility is being constructed in Surrey.

"And we are, of course, continuing to explore and move ahead with the provision of additional facilities elsewhere in the province," he said.

The Village of Lumby has shown interest in becoming the site of a correctional facility, and Baker believes that could be an option for the Okanagan.

"I hope the government takes advantage of that," said Baker.

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