

Wine capital adding wine village

Plan includes condominiums, interpretive and culinary arts centre, conference facilities, spa

By **SCOTT TRUDEAU**
Penticton Herald

OLIVER — One day after thousands of people were mashing grapes and sampling some of the best off the vine at the widely acclaimed Festival of the Grape, the town made a momentous move forward to the developing a riverfront wine village.

On Monday, Co-operators Development Corporation Ltd., Bellstar Developments Inc. and the Town of Oliver jointly announced an agreement for the purchase and sale of a 1.47-hectare parcel of property known as Centennial Park adjacent to the Okanagan River.

Even though it would be premature to get overly excited, Oliver Mayor Ron Hovanes said there's no doubt there will be an enormous economic benefit befitting the town's title as the "Wine Capital of Canada."

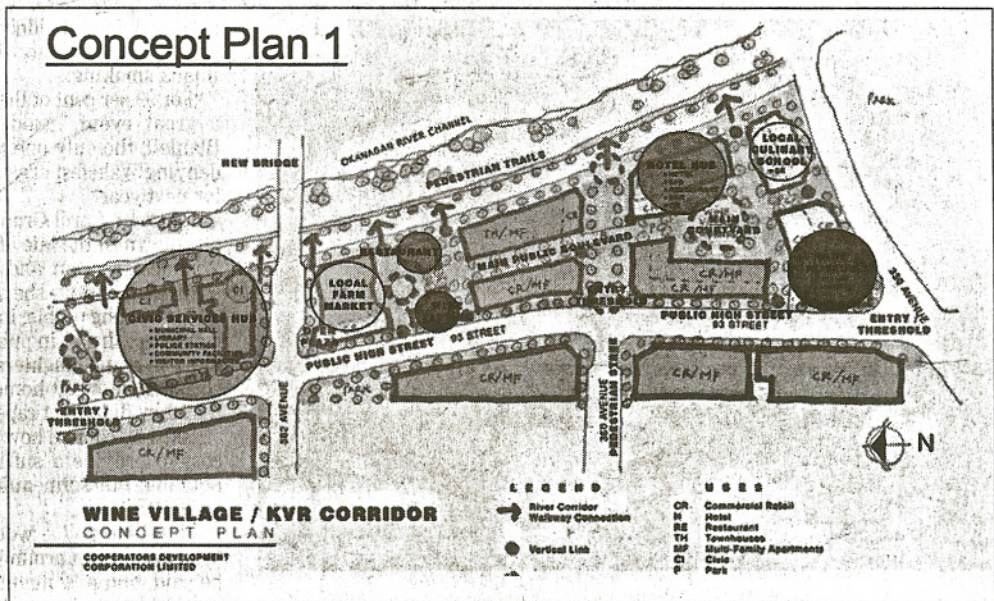
"It's not good enough to call yourself the Wine Capital of Canada and put entrance and exit signs and leave it at that. So there was a real intent to move forward for the benefit of the whole community," Hovanes said Tuesday. "Nobody wants to add anything to the community that's going to take away from (it), but there are amenities that we could use in this community."

While noting a deal wouldn't be finalized until October 2008 and that several conditions must be met by all parties, Co-operators Investment Group — its real estate division — and its partnership with Bellstar represents a commitment to move forward with the project.

"They've put a lot of time and money and effort into this project so far," said Hovanes.

"We're excited about it. We've been waiting and waiting for something a little bit more solid and, honestly, they've (Co-operators) been doing their work and their research, and the town has been working hard to secure those lands from the department of agriculture and lands."

Hovanes said the idea for a wine village came as a result of collaborations involving community members back in 2001.



Artwork submitted
A conceptual drawing shows the potential impact of wine village plans for Oliver's Centennial Park adjacent to the Okanagan River.

At the time, people were exploring what the town and surrounding area was looking for to best accompany its wine capital theme.

Embracing Smart Growth principles, the project will be an experiential community celebrating the culture and heritage of the South Okanagan and its relationship to wine, agriculture and culinary arts. Plans are to create a mixed-use development consisting of residential condominiums, a strata-hotel, conference facilities, spa and restaurant, as well as a wine interpretive and culinary arts centre.

"One of the big things, and I know it's been on the council's agenda for many years, is to try to attract a new hotel to the area," Hovanes said.

"This is huge. If we can get a new hotel . . . I've said for years Oliver has every amenity that a tourist would ever want, but we could really use some new accommodations."

Les Lawther, economic development officer for Oliver and area, said the wine village is certain to

impact the town on a financial and cultural level. "The spinoffs in jobs and taxes will be terrific," said Lawther. "I think it will give us a central focal point of community pride to build for the future."

Lawther said having a boutique hotel in the village would offer first-class accommodations for people while they bask in the many benefits unique to the area.

"We're looking to marry our wonderful wines with good foods used from our local agricultural base, many of which will be organic," he said. "We're looking to create a celebration of food and wine from the area."

Lawther sees a wine village as being integral in helping Oliver achieve its status as an agricultural resort. Town staff has been working with provincial government ministries "to see if we can bring about the first agricultural resort in North America."

For detailed information on the wine village, visit www.oliverwinevillage.com.

Oliver picks up \$25,000 for environmental efforts

Project that reclaims waste water earns prize in Green Cities Awards

By **SCOTT TRUDEAU**
Penticton Herald

OLIVER — In response to a challenge issued by Premier Gordon Campbell during a speech at last year's Union of B.C. Municipalities (UBCM) convention, the town reclaimed waste water for agricultural use and, in turn, received a \$25,000 Green Cities Award.

Oliver was selected over Houston and Gibson in the 1,500-5,000 population category. Nominations were accepted through a self-nomination process. Awards were handed out at last week's UBCM meeting in Vancouver.

The Green City Awards is a \$2.5-million

program that began this year with a commitment to award \$500,000 a year for the next five years. The awards are given to municipalities in six categories based on population. Two additional categories were awarded to regional districts.

Local governments were asked to increase their urban density, reduce building costs and create positive environmental and health outcomes by building smaller, faster and smarter.

The cash awards were offered to encourage a response and achieve an integrated community design, and management encouraging energy conservation and environmental benefits.

"It was a real affirmation for some of the good work that we've been doing," said Oliver Mayor Ron Hovanes.

Hovanes cited two undertakings — its waste-water reclamation and water twinning projects — as being the major reasons it received the award.

Hovanes said the town now reclaims, treats and utilizes 100 per cent of its waste water.

"None of the water is dumped, either back into the river system or dumped on land somewhere," he said.

"Initially, our water was treated and put back in the river, and then we treated it and tried to use as much as we could and then just dumped the rest."

The treated water is sold to a number of users, including Fairview Mountain Golf Course, two local vineyards, the park near South Okanagan Secondary School, the Oliver Cemetery and a large parcel of leased land at the Oliver Airport on which hay is harvested.

The town also designated some purple water hydrants that all use reclaimed water.

"With our water tower, you know, if we had a major fire . . . it's likely we'd only have three or four hours of fire

flow, but by having these purple hydrants there, you've got a vast amount of water you could use if there was ever a disaster," said Hovanes.

Meanwhile, Phase 1 of the town's three-phase water twinning project has been completed. This involved the construction of a 600-cubic-metre reservoir and the installation of a second waterline.

"Up till now, in the summer months, they've (residents) been getting their drinking water out of the ditch — the old, historic, 90-year-old ditch that was put in by First World War settlers," Hovanes said, adding that even though the water is chlorinated, residents were forced to deal with boil-water advisories every year.

The second pipe will be for indoor purposes only. It will supply 100 per cent of Oliver's rural and in-town residential customers with quality groundwater all year round.