

Nfld. & Labrador

## Controversial wharf development in C.B.S. to proceed, after unanimous council decision

Ocean Choice International's proposal had drawn criticism over environmental impacts

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A view of the harbour in Long Pond where OCI wants to build a new wharf and cold storage facility. (Adam Walsh/CBC)

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St. John's-based Ocean Choice International's contentious proposal to build a cold storage and vessel offloading facility in Long Pond Harbour has won unanimous approval from Conception Bay South's town council.

The approval came after a controversial process, which saw the seafood company alter its proposal after area residents expressed concerns about environmental impact, boat traffic flow, noise levels and other complaints.

"It's an exciting time for Conception Bay South. We're very, very pleased with it," said Coun. Rex Hillier in an interview with the *St. John's Morning Show*. Council voted on the project at its meeting Tuesday evening.

OCI plans to spend \$15 million to \$20 million on the project, which the company says will generate 30 to 40 new jobs and millions in spinoff revenue.

According to an OCI statement, the development will see approximately 1.7 hectares of new land including a 90 metre-long finger pier, a laydown and parking area, in addition to the cold storage building for frozen seafood.

Although the plan still calls for a partial infill of Long Pond Harbour, the revised plan places the facility closer to the industrial side of the harbour, which OCI says will give more room to recreational and commercial boats, and maintain the openness of the harbour.

- [\*\*C.B.S. to appeal board decision that put brakes on controversial wharf complex proposal\*\*](#)
- [\*\*C.B.S. wharf development plan tweaked, but not enough for some residents\*\*](#)

In February, the Eastern Regional Appeal Board ruled that the town of C.B.S did not have the authority to approve the development, but in Tuesday's meeting, Coun. Kirk Youden said council has taken steps to affirm its planning authority.



Coun. Rex Hillier says that both OCI and the town of Conception Bay South have done their due diligence. (CBC)

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During that meeting, multiple town councillors cited commercial tax as one of the prime benefits of developments like the Long Pond project. Coun. Gerard Tilley said that commercial tax allows the town to enhance infrastructure and amenities.

"Attracting businesses like OCI is how we get the necessary business tax to offset these enormous costs," Tilley said.

## **Due diligence**

Geoff Budden is a lawyer representing Advocates for the Responsible Development of Long Pond, a group of residents with concerns about the project. In an interview, Budden said

council's decision surprised and disappointed his clients.

He said the group isn't opposed to commercial development, but merely wants to see it done the right way.

"They believe it has to be responsible and their position is that this development is not environmentally or otherwise a responsible one," Budden said.

Budden says that the group has evidence that the body of water is an estuary, which is an ecologically-rich area where salt water meets fresh water.

"They think that this development will be harmful to the environment that they know and love," Budden said.

Budden said the group is currently reviewing the decision to see if the town has complied with its legal obligations.

Since the development is under five hectares of land, the provincial government did not require OCI to get an environmental assessment.

Hillier said that process is out of the town's jurisdiction, but he also insists that the company has taken environmental impact into consideration.

"This is not a free-for-all for OCI to go down and start throwing rocks in the river," Hillier said.

Hillier said that he understands why residents are concerned, but believes that OCI and the council have made sufficient efforts to mitigate negative impacts.

"In the end, you've got to make a decision, and that's the decision that we've made," he said.

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