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Site updated Wednesday, October 04, 2006 04:25 PM

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NEWS



The city's newest island will only be accessible on foot at low tide. Photo-Dan Toulgoet

City adds island sanctuary to Southeast False Creek project

By Mike Howell-Staff writer

An island the size of a football field is being built in Southeast False Creek for public use and to attract marine and bird life.

But it will not in any way duplicate Granville Island with shops and restaurants, said Jody Andrews, project manager for the Southeast False Creek development and Olympic Village.

"It won't be set up as an urban experience," Andrews said. "It'll be a sense of discovery. So, there's no bridge, there's no foot path [to the island]. You go out at low tide, you come back at low tide."

The island's location is just east of the Cambie Bridge on the south shore of the creek. A would-be explorer will have to walk 20 to 30 metres from shore to reach it. Even with the tide in, Andrews said the channel will be quite shallow.

Andrews said the city is still deciding which types of plants and trees will be planted. But, he said, they will "harken back to the mid-1800s" before the industrialization of False Creek.

"Some of the things that used to exist in the area might surprise people-crab apples. We used to have crab apples along there."

News of an island comes as a surprise since it wasn't in the original plans for the Southeast False Creek development.

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Construction crews have begun preparing the grounds for what will include the Olympic Village for the 2010 Winter Olympics. The first phase of the project includes restoring and rehabilitating the shore line. When crews came upon "old intertidal land" under some dilapidated decking, the city and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans decided the area would be perfect for an island.

"It was just really one of those ideas that came to be," Andrews said. "It was a process that was really very organic. This project has been over a decade in the planning and a lot of the public input was around recreating some natural section."

To build the island, crews are using boulders from the construction site and dumping sand and gravel dredged from the Fraser River. Crews will continue to pile gravel, sand and dirt until it is high enough to cover it with a rich top soil. Andrews said the island will be built in the shape of an egg.

To attract birds, fish and frogs and other animals, crews are working to make the water cleaner. Removing contaminated soil along the banks is one solution.

The other, Andrews said, is the city's crackdown on boat squatters who dump their bilges in the waterway and likely create high fecal coliform counts in Southeast False Creek.

The island will probably be finished before the end of the year. But the public will not be able to visit it until the shore line restoration is completed sometime next year.

"It'll be a place to go if you're finding the urban world around you to be too much. You can step out on to this island and likely there'll be a heron, some seagulls and some seals paddling by."

The cost of building the island is about \$2 million.

With its proximity to the shore, Andrews said concerns were raised in the planning of the island that homeless people might choose to live there.

"That's a possibility anywhere in the city, but we didn't want to let a concern hold us back from recreating some of the habitat that needs to be there. And that was seen as more important than some concerns that we might have to deal with in the future."

The island doesn't have a name, but NPA Coun. Elizabeth Ball successfully moved a motion at a council meeting last week to have it named "in such a way as to honour the culture and history of the Coast Salish people."

published on 10/04/2006

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