

UDI official predicting a more balanced year for development in the Okanagan



Developer and UDI Pacific region chairman David Porte spoke to developers in Kelowna Thursday.
— image credit: Alistair Waters/Capital News

by Alistair Waters - Kelowna Capital News
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A predicted increase in B.C.'s population, lower interest rates and increased buyer confidence is leading the head of the Pacific region of the Urban Development Institute (UDI) to predict 2015 will be a good year for developers in this province.

David Porte, who chairs the UDI Pacific regional board, and who runs a development company in the Lower Mainland, was in Kelowna Thursday to speak to members of the Okanagan UDI chapter.

UDI represents developers across B.C. and has 626 members, 112 of whom are located here in the Okanagan. This month alone, the organization has attracted 13 new development companies as members.

Porte told his audience there are many factors that will influence how the development sector will fare this year, including the current world-wide drop in oil prices.

With plenty of B.C. workers—including many from the Okanagan— working in the Alberta oil patch, that could mean an even bigger influx of people moving to jobs in this province instead of Alberta. And Porte questioned if B.C will have the jobs needed for all those workers.

Oil prices have plummeted in recent weeks and experts are predicting massive layoffs could result. If that's the case, B.C. could see many of those who left this province for high-paying jobs in Alberta return to B.C. looking for work.

If they can find it, that should bode well for the housing market, said Porte, as one of the keys to consumer confidence is steady employment.

Another factors that could affect development here could be a move away from single-family homes and into multi-family buildings.

Porte said some people, especially those in the Vancouver area, are trading in the dream of a yard or garden for a condominium or rental unit that is located somewhere close amenities, culture, recreation and entertainment options.

Andrew Bruce, chairman of the local UDI chapter said while he agrees with Porte when it comes to the provincial picture, locally, the Central Okanagan is different from the Lower Mainland and there is still a strong demand for single-family homes here.

But, he said, one look at downtown Kelowna's growing skyline shows there there is also a demand for condominium living here too.

As a result, he sees a more balanced market developing here this year.

"I think we're in for a fairly solid year this year," said Bruce following Porte's presentation.