

40% of lots sold in eco-park

By **ASHLEY CREWE**
Today staff

With 40 per cent of the 26 commercial lots sold and all the underground work completed, the highly anticipated eco-industrial park, Taiga Nova, is well on its way to becoming a reality in Wood Buffalo.

At Tuesday night's council meeting, councillors unanimously passed a bylaw allowing a temporary government road, within the boundaries of the Highway 63 eco-industrial park, to be closed. That land will now be transferred over to Wood Buffalo Housing Development Corp. to add to the adjacent eco-industrial lots. Dennis Peck, general manager of planning and development for the municipality, said the road closure was always in the plan but the bylaw required approval from council.

"It's just tying up some loose ends," said Peck after the meeting.

The eco-industrial park, a plan that has been in the works since 2006, is on the track for completion.

"Construction of the underground and roads is 90 per cent finished," explained Brian Lutes, Wood Buffalo Housing president. "The major road down the middle is paved and all the rest are built, just not paved ... by this summer it should be ready to start occupying."

With that work completed, Lutes said the next step is to sell the remaining lots to businesses interested in moving into the eco-friendly commercial zone.

"All of the developments will have to be eco-friendly because of the way zoning bylaw is written," said Lutes. "We have looked at the possibility of alternative energy sources and they are still a future possibility — like a district energy system or sharing waste heat off of the waste water treatment plant. But those have not come to fruition as this point. They could be a possibility in the future."

Some of Taiga Nova's green initiatives include alternative storm water management, businesses have to be committed to buying at least 10 per cent green power, and creating LEED-certified (leadership in energy and environmental design) buildings.

Originally, the eco-friendly park was being designed by the municipality however, council opted to transfer the property to Wood Buffalo Housing after the municipality's land manager, Steve Cook, resigned from his position.

"The municipality came to us and said, 'Would you be willing to take this on and continue with the eco-friendly concept that we've started?' ... It's a benefit to the whole community. We've worked to get local businesses in here and any profits that we make will go back into affordable housing," he explained. "Our shareholders are the municipality and because they can't take any dividends from us, it has to go back into meeting our mandate which is creating more affordable housing, so it's really a win-win."

To learn more about the eco-industrial park visit www.taiganova.com.