

# Hydro denies rates going up due to bad deal

'We have sold 26 of the 104 homes,' spokeswoman says

BY ANDY IVENS, THE PROVINCE DECEMBER 23, 2009

Accusations that B.C. Hydro made a bad deal when it bought out homeowners near a controversial power-line project in Tsawwassen are unfounded, according to a Hydro spokeswoman.

Susan Danard denied reports Tuesday that Hydro rates will rise to cover the cost of the homes.

"We have sold 26 of the 104 homes," said Danard. "We [received] about three per cent less than what they were acquired for, but that's pretty good because we're in an economic downturn."

Danard said the remaining 78 properties, which back onto a Hydro right of way in Tsawwassen Heights, will go on the market in blocks of about 20 to take advantage of the improving real-estate market.

"We're cautiously optimistic that we are going to recover most if not all the cost," she told The Province.

Hydro bought the houses after a long and bitter struggle with many of the homeowners, who protested against upgrades to the overhead power lines. In response, B.C. Hydro raised the height of electrical transmission towers from 17 to 30 metres and hiked power from 138,000 to 230,000 volts.

The Crown-owned utility paid \$62 million to buy the 104 homes and incurred additional costs such as moving expenses and appraisal and surveillance costs.

The first batch of 20 went on sale in September -- at prices listed between \$479,000 and \$709,000-- and sold so quickly that another six were added to the sales inventory, said Danard.

"Right now, there are about 14 to 15 left [on the market]," said Danard, who noted that Hydro's goal is to break even.

Danard said prospective buyers are informed of various health agencies' research on whether there could be any concerns about living so close to power lines -- the issue that caused the original 104 homeowners to worry.

-Danard also said any costs related to heightened security during the Games will be negligible, and won't affect customers' Hydro bills. "We are providing some additional security," she said. "We did it when there was the Commonwealth Games, APEC and going back to Expo 86."

Hydro's total revenue requirement for the current two-year period was \$6.4 billion, of which security costs were only \$7 million spread over the two years, said Danard.