

# Fortune Minerals aiming to develop in Alberta after Saskatchewan rejected proposed metals refinery

Lisa Johnson - 1h ago



© Provided by Edmonton Journal Located adjacent to a CN rail line in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, Fortune Minerals plans to buy a former steel processing plant operated by JFSL Field Services and turn it into a cobalt refinery.

A proposed metals refinery rejected by a rural Saskatchewan municipality could be welcomed with open arms in Alberta's Industrial Heartland.

The Fortune Minerals project, [touted last week](#) by Premier Jason Kenney and provincial MLAs as exactly the type of diversifying investment the government hoped to attract, won't be facing the same local rezoning hurdle that tripped up the company's plan to build a similar refinery in Saskatchewan in 2019.

Looking to buy a brownfield site already zoned for heavy industrial use, [Fortune announced an option](#) agreement on Jan. 24 to purchase a former steel fabrication facility in Lamont County for \$5.5 million, a deal it hopes to seal within six months.

The refinery, estimated in 2014 to cost \$250 million, is a prerequisite for Fortune to fully construct its cobalt, bismuth, gold and copper NICO mine in the Northwest Territories, taking advantage of a deposit the company said it first discovered in 1996.

Robin Goad, president and CEO of Fortune, said in an interview with Postmedia despite the Saskatchewan Environment Ministry signing off on its previous refinery plan, the company spent about five years and \$5 million on an environmental assessment going through the permitting process only to see its application to rezone the land from agricultural to industrial use rejected by the municipality.

“We don’t see that happening here,” said Goad, adding the company looked at other international options, but existing zoning in Lamont County and a welcoming government were big draws to Alberta.

“It’s the kind of place that we should be building refineries,” said Goad.

One of [the biggest concerns](#) from locals in the rural municipality of Corman Park in Saskatchewan was that on-site waste storage could contaminate the local aquifer.

For its Alberta proposal, Fortune plans to locally contract an existing Class II landfill to dispose of waste from the refining process, although Goad would not say which company might be contracted or where exactly it is located in the province, citing commercial reasons.

“The major stigma associated with the previous site has been removed,” said Goad, adding that the refinery has already been engineered to be “plug and play,”

or built on any site, although the company will still have to refine the plan, do local public engagements and go through the permitting process.

The global demand for cobalt, used in the manufacturing of rechargeable Lithium-ion batteries, [is likely to grow](#) with the growth of the electric vehicle market.

Goad said the Alberta facility also has future potential to recycle battery materials, along with materials from other industries, including scrap metals.

“A mineral resource has a limited term, but a refinery can go forever,” said Goad.

Lamont County Reeve David Diduck said the refinery is still in the very preliminary stages, but he believes it could be good for the region.

“I am welcoming it with open arms – there’s just a process it has to go through. I think it’s gonna happen, but at this point, it’s not a sure thing. It’s a probable thing,” said Diduck, adding until a final investment decision is made, nothing is definite.

He said the county applied in late 2020 for a water licence to put a “straw” in the North Saskatchewan River to supply water to industrial customers, which could help supply the 50 cubic metres Fortune estimates it will need every hour for its refinery process. Fortune is also looking at other potential water sources.



© Supplied. A rendering of Fortune Minerals' proposed refinery, which will be modified for a site in Lamont County.

Diduck and Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville UCP MLA Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk said they were unfamiliar with the details of Fortune Minerals' efforts to build a refinery in Saskatchewan when speaking with Postmedia.

However, Armstrong-Homeniuk said she's thrilled about the potential boost for the area, with the company's promise it will create 100 permanent good jobs in the region.

"I just know that this is a great opportunity for my constituency to expand," said Armstrong-Homeniuk.

Fortune's announcement comes as the Alberta government [continues work](#) to streamline regulatory processes in the Industrial Heartland under [a pilot project](#) to attract new investments.

Jason Penner, spokesman for Environment and Parks, said in an email several changes for the designated industrial zone will be phased in over the next nine months "to reduce red tape while ensuring environmental outcomes are achieved."

Penner added the government is also working to eliminate its backload of applications under the Water Act, including by reducing application submission times with a new digital system implemented in June.

[lijohnson@postmedia.com](mailto:lijohnson@postmedia.com)