

Empty Safeway gets a makeover

Local investors add buildings to West End site

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Posted: 01/17/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 0
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Cambrian Credit Union CEO Tom Bryk stands at the Ellice Avenue and Wall Street site of the company's new branch beside the abandoned Safeway that will be redeveloped.

A group of local investors is breathing new life into the former Canada Safeway store on Ellice Avenue.

The investors are spending several million dollars to redevelop the property, which is on the corner of Ellice and Wall Street. The 22,000-square-foot building has been vacant since December 2008 when a new 48,000-square-foot Safeway opened in the Madison Square Shopping Plaza near Polo Park.

A spokesman for the investors, Derrick Chartier, president of the Winnipeg office of CB Richard Ellis, said they looked at a number of different redevelopment options in the past year before settling on this one.

It calls for construction of two smaller, free-standing commercial buildings at the front of the property facing on Ellice. Cambrian Credit Union will be leasing one of them, a 4,000-square-foot building going up on the corner of Ellice and Wall, and an undisclosed tenant has tentatively agreed to lease the other one.

"We'll know within 30 days (if the second deal is a go)," Chartier said. "We're waiting for their board's approval."

He said the former Safeway building will be undergoing extensive renovations. The front portion of the building will be torn down and a new facade and roofline will be built to emulate the architectural style of the two new buildings. "So it will look like one integrated development."

The redesigned building will be about 8,200 square feet smaller than the original store and will be designed to accommodate either a single tenant or several, depending on demand.

"We're working with a number of prospective tenants," Chartier said. "It will likely be more retail-oriented, although we have had interest from some office-related tenants as well."

The renovation work won't begin until this spring and will take a couple of months to complete. The credit union building should be done by June.

Chartier couldn't say exactly how much the investors are spending on the redevelopment, but he agreed it's a multimillion-dollar project.

Cambrian chief executive officer Tom Bryk said the new branch will replace the one just a few doors south on Wall Street.

"We're certainly doing very well in that area," added chief operating officer Jim Grapentine. "The housing stock in the immediate area is being rejuvenated and we're able to build off that, and our client base also continues to grow."

They said the new branch will be about 1,000 square feet bigger than the old one and will be designed with less front-counter space and more office space and space for meeting with customers.

Bryk said the credit union's members do more banking online and less over-the-counter these days. When they come into the branch, it's usually to meet with a staff member to discuss lending or investment matters, and the new branch is designed to make it more comfortable for them to do that.

It will feature a drive-through lane with an ATM machine for added customer convenience, he and Grapentine said.

The Ellice Avenue branch is one of two new branches Cambrian will be moving into this year. The other is on Bison Drive near the University of Manitoba. It will replace Cambrian's branch on the corner of Pembina Highway and Markham Road.

Grapentine said Cambrian is building the Bison Drive branch itself on a 2.5-hectare parcel of land it purchased from the owners of the neighbouring Real Canadian Superstore.

The new branch, which is nearly completed, only required about half a hectare of the land. The other two hectares have been tentatively sold to someone else, but the deal isn't scheduled to close until the end of the month. Grapentine declined to reveal the name of the buyer until then.

He said the 6,000-square-foot Bison Drive branch is nearly twice as big as the Pembina Highway one and will also feature a drive-through lane. It's scheduled to open on Feb. 14.

Cambrian is Winnipeg's third-largest credit union in terms of assets under management (about \$2.2 billion). It has 11 branches -- 10 in Winnipeg and one in Selkirk.

Know of any newsworthy or interesting trends or developments in the local office, retail, or industrial real estate sectors? Let real estate reporter Murray McNeill know at the e-mail address below, or at 697-7254.
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New developments

Here are a few other developments that have been launched or completed within the last few years in the city's West End:

-- A newly constructed 4,400-square-foot office building that Royal Canadian Properties built on the site of a former Domo gas bar and the Omand's Creek Ice Cream parlor on the northwest corner of Portage Avenue and Strathcona Street. It's now home to MIG Insurance.

-- Several new additions to the University of Winnipeg's west campus. They include a \$37.5-million science complex and Richardson College of the Environment being built on the former Galaxy roller-rink site on Portage between Langside and Furby streets. It's expected to be completed sometime this year. The McFeetors Hall student residence and a new university daycare opened in 2009 on a site immediately north of the science complex.

-- A three-storey office building that opened in late 2008 on the north side of Portage Avenue between Toronto and Victor streets. The anchor tenant is the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's Downtown West community health office.