

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

More big ideas for downtown

Office buildings, outdoor plaza among plans

By: **Murray McNeill**

Posted: **03/12/2013 1:00 AM** | Comments: **0g** | Last Modified: **03/12/2013 3:48 PM** | **Updates**



JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Doug McKay displays images of the proposed development near the MTS Centre and the Winnipeg Convention Centre.

Developers are beginning to add meat to the bones as they piece together a plan for a major new development that will reshape the future of downtown Winnipeg.

Longboat Development Corporation and Artis Real Estate Investment Trust were given the go-ahead last year to put together plans for redeveloping two large Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation-owned surface parking lots in the heart of the downtown -- one on Graham Avenue and the other on Donald Street.



[Enlarge Image](#)

Parking lot is set for redevelopment.
(WAYNE GLOWACKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS ARCHIVES)

THE PLAN

NOTHING has been finalized, but here are the main components included in the initial redevelopment proposal for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corp.-owned surface parking lot on the south side of Graham Avenue between Carlton and Hargrave streets:

- A large, T-shaped, outdoor plaza surrounded by three buildings/structures. The plaza would serve as the centrepiece of the development and CentreVenture Development Corp.'s downtown Sports, Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED).
- Two of the buildings would be office/retail complexes that could be up to 10 storeys high. The third would be a multi-level parkade with at least 300 stalls that would be built on the south side of the property.
- The two office buildings and the parkade would each have a restaurant

MPI, which obtained the two lots when it purchased the nearby CityPlace office/retail complex, intends to retain ownership of the two properties. But it wants someone else to redevelop them.

The developers emphasized in an interview Monday they're still only about halfway through a one-year feasibility study that will go a long way in determining what will be included in the Graham Avenue development.

But the proposal they presented to MPI last year, the details of which haven't been previously released, called for a mixed-use development that includes a large outdoor plaza surrounded by two mid-sized office buildings and a multi-level parkade.

Both office buildings would face onto the outdoor plaza and would include restaurants and retail shops on the bottom two floors. The parkade would also have restaurant or retail space on the ground floor and maybe a highrise hotel built above it at one end.

"As part of our initial proposal, we've identified the possibility of having a hotel on that site," Longboat president Scott Stephanson said. "There is room for a hotel, but we haven't advanced it beyond that (at this stage)."

He and Doug McKay, who is Longboat's director of commercial development, said they should have a better idea by the end of their study whether a hotel is a feasible option. And if it is, how big it might be.

The developers weren't prepared to put a dollar figure on the likely cost of the Graham Avenue development, which has been given the working name SoPo Square. That's short for South of Portage Square.

However, their 311 Portage Avenue at Centrepont development, which is now under construction on the north side of Portage Avenue between Hargrave and Donald streets, is expected to cost about \$100 million. It includes a 14-storey, 154-room hotel build on top of a five-storey office/retail complex, and a 17-storey, 170-unit condominium complex built on top of a five-storey, 450-stall parkade. The office building and parkade also have restaurant/retail space on the ground floor.

McKay and Scott Craig, Artis's senior property development

with an outdoor patio facing onto the central plaza. The office buildings would also have retail shops -- maybe some financial institutions, clothing stores or coffee shops -- on the second floor. All three buildings would be connected to the downtown skywalk system.

-- There is also room for a highrise hotel to be built above one end of the parkade.

-- sources: *Longboat Development Corporation and Artis Real Estate Investment Trust.*

manager, said what sets the SoPo Square development apart from other downtown developments is the inclusion of a large, T-shaped, outdoor central plaza and three mini plazas around the perimeter of the development.

"The central plaza is the No. 1 thing," Craig said, adding it's expected to serve as the centrepiece for CentreVenture Development Corporation's Sports, Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED), which includes the MTS Centre and the Winnipeg Convention Centre as its two anchors. "This is the thing that's going to connect the MTS Centre to the convention centre."

"I think it will also make a huge difference in terms of (Winnipeggers') perceptions of the downtown," McKay added.

He and Craig said the initial vision for the plaza includes restaurants with outdoor patios on three sides of the plaza, a large portable stage at one end and light/sound towers at each

of the four corners. The types of events that could be held there include outdoor concerts, fashion shows, corporate events and even an outdoor hockey rink.

"The whole intention of the SHED is to create a dynamic, year-round outdoor space," Craig said, referring to earlier CentreVenture announcements. "I think this has the potential to be the new heart of the downtown."

McKay said the plaza feature, coupled with the return of NHL hockey to downtown Winnipeg, seems to have sparked a renewed interest with prospective office and retail tenants. He and Stephanson said preliminary discussions are underway with two potential anchor office tenants and several prospective restaurant tenants.

"These are newly formed or new to Winnipeg operations," Stephanson said the two potential office anchors. "This is not us taking tenants away from existing buildings."

murray.mcneill@freepress.mb.ca

Find this article at:

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/more-big-ideas-for-downtown-197266281.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.