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OTTAWA CITIZEN

Builder floats library/condo complex: 'New Bytown' on Scott Street could spark rejuvenation, become 'cultural hub'

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A developer is offering to build a \$150-million main library for Ottawa that could be the first step in rejuvenating one of the city's older neighbourhoods.

Calling the project the New Bytown, DCR Phoenix Group of Companies is proposing to build a 271,000-square-foot, six- to 10-storey library on a 1.5-hectare site where Scott Street intersects with the commuter rail line. The developer would build 140 condominium units in a tower on top of the library.

The highest part of the development would be 24 or 25 storeys. The complex would include 200 parking spaces for library users who don't take the city's light-rail train service or use the nearby bus transitway to get to the library.

The Tom Brown Arena could be rebuilt on city-owned land across from the library site. It would have two towers of offices, condos or, perhaps, even a hotel. The towers would have pedestrian access through the commuter rail station to the library. The city, which has been trying to acquire a new archives building for years, could also make this project a part of the complex.

On the north side of Scott Street, the federal government could build a new Canada Science and Technology Museum on the western piece of LeBreton Flats, said Mayor Bob Chiarelli. The science museum has been studying a possible move since 2002.

The architect for the proposed city library project, Vincent Colizza, said he envisions the neighbourhood becoming a "cultural hub" to be served by the commuter train service as it is installed over the next few years. Ultimately, he said, people will be able to move easily by train from the new main library to the nearby federal museums on both sides of the Ottawa River, such as the Museum of Civilization and the Canadian War Museum.

Mr. Chiarelli said the library project amounts to "creating a new part of the downtown core" that could include not only a new science and technology museum, but perhaps also a new Library and Archives building on the federal government's LeBreton Flats property.

One idea of the mayor's is to allow light-rail riders to travel free in the core area of the city, as a way to encourage use of the new library, as well as encourage people to leave their cars at home.

There's been talk of a new main library in Ottawa for years because the existing building on Metcalfe Street is considered dysfunctional, cramped and unappealing. Other North American cities, such as Vancouver and Seattle, have large, impressive new libraries.

The proposed Ottawa library would be built on a triangular piece of land bought from the National Capital Commission by developer DCR Phoenix in 2003. The developer wanted to build up to 300 condominiums at the site, but pulled back from that project when it became clear the City of Ottawa wanted to redevelop the whole neighbourhood, including Bayview Yards, into a mix of commercial, residential and public buildings.

The city could have bought the site from the NCC a few years ago, but didn't. The developer values the 1.5 hectares at

IMAGES



Illustration by Vincent P. Colizza Architect Inc.,
 Graphic by Dennis Leung, The Ottawa Citizen
 (See hard copy for graphic.)
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Bruno Schlumberger, The Ottawa Citizen
 Architect Vincent Colizza, left,
 envisions a 'cultural hub' around the
 project. He is joined by supporting
 architect Ashrac Kinawi **(FPinfomart:
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\$6 million.

"I would be the first one to admit that we probably made a mistake not buying that land. But that's water under the bridge," said Mr. Chiarelli.

The proposed project would be an expensive venture for the city, which would lease the building from the developer over 25 or 35 years. The city would pay the developer to manage the property. Net costs are estimated at about \$7.3 million in the first year, then rising in subsequent years.

It's expected the city's current main library building would fetch about \$9 million if sold, and the city would save \$1.3 million in operating costs by dumping the old building.

The project's proponents believe a company would pay the city \$500,000 up front and \$100,000 a year for the privilege of having the library named after the firm. Supporters of the project also believe the city would reap financial benefits from new building in the neighbourhood that would be sparked by the project, including hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in property taxes from condominiums.

The city basically can take the project or leave it. DCR Phoenix, which is headed by president Cuckoo Kochar, wants the city to say yes or no by the end of the year. If the project wins city council approval, the library could move into the new building in July 2009.

Reaction to the proposal was mixed.

"This is all news to me and it's my ward," said Councillor Diane Holmes, stressing that many community meetings would have to be held.

"My initial reaction is that it's really quick. This is a big, major decision that isn't even in our long-range financial plan," said Kanata Councillor Peggy Feltmate, who sits on the city's library board. "It's big decisions to be made very quickly without, I fear, the opportunity to give it the kind of due diligence I think we need."

"Getting the interest of a private developer in a public building is always good news," said Royal Galipeau, vice-chairman of the library board. "This proposal deserves to be studied seriously."

Councillor Rick Chiarelli, chairman of the library board, is keen, and said the proposed project would more than double the size of the main library while generating economic activity for the city.

Mr. Chiarelli said the real discussion the city and council have to undertake in the next few months is whether Ottawa really wants a new library.

If it does, and this central site is wanted, then council will have to quickly seize the opportunity it has been presented, he said.

Illustration:

- Graphic/Diagram: Illustration by Vincent P. Colizza Architect Inc., Graphic by Dennis Leung, The Ottawa Citizen / (See hard copy for graphic.)
- Colour Photo: Bruno Schlumberger, The Ottawa Citizen / Architect Vincent Colizza, left, envisions a 'cultural hub' around the project. He is joined by supporting architect Ashrac Kinawi

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