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## Office building proposal to get public hearing

### B.C. Ferries rumoured to be the main tenant in structure proposed for downtown site

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A proposed seven-storey office building on Blanshard Street between Yates and Johnson streets has been approved to go to a Victoria city council public hearing.

The midrise project called the Atrium, by Jawl Development Corporation, is widely believed to be the new headquarters for the B.C. Ferry Corporation, although a ferry spokesman declined to comment on the rumour. However, Mark Stefanson, vice-president of public affairs, said the corporation has been looking for a number of years to relocate its head office, now on Fort Street.

The corporation has leased three floors in the former Wang Building at 3795 Carey Rd. for its finance and information technology departments, Stefanson added. The Jawls purchased the long-vacant building in July with plans to renovate it and have it occupied by next spring.

The move will make room for a new operations department to be located in the corporation's Fort Street headquarters.

Developer Mohan Jawl said negotiations with the main tenant of the Atrium building have not been concluded, but a report to council estimated 1,000 people would use the office building. In addition to an anchor tenant, the developer is seeking suitable retail tenants for the location, which Jawl said could be ideal for a bookstore and restaurant.

If approved at a public hearing -- likely in February -- the office building would be among the few commercial properties being developed in the city. While the city's skyline is dotted with construction cranes, most are associated with condominium construction.

Colliers estimates the commercial vacancy rate in the city is less than two per cent and Jawl would like the building to be complete in 2009. A study commissioned by the city earlier this year estimated that up to 1.9 million square feet of new office space will be needed in Victoria over the next 20 years.

The proposed building would have 180,000 square feet of Class A commercial floor space, be certified at a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver level, and include a courtyard atrium, planted green roof and public art. Overhead wiring on a portion of Yates Street would be moved underground. The site is currently occupied by the old Telus Building and a surface parking lot.

Architect Frank D'Ambrosio described the building as organized around a central atrium space that allows daylighting of office areas and creation of an interior landscaped space. The developer has promised to commission publicly accessible artwork for the atrium, which will be under a glass skylight.

The development would have 175 underground parking spaces on two levels for vehicles and 56 bicycle spaces.

This week, city council approved construction of the 15-storey Gateway Green office tower at the corner of Blanshard and Fisgard streets.

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