

Capital Magazine: Behind legislature, huge project about to take shape

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Capital5 Capital Park will eventually be home to about 1,200 office workers during the day, and 250 to 300 people living in 175 residential units. A library may also be in the mix. Photograph By CONCERT AND JAWL PROPERTIES

For months, a large hole at the corner of Menzies and Superior streets has been a major source of entertainment near the B.C. legislature.

James Bay residents and government employees walking to work often pause to study the massive Capital Park development that will eventually encompass almost an entire city block from Superior to Michigan, and Menzies to the Queen's Printer on Government Street.

Concert Properties and Jawl Development Corp., which partnered to buy the 6.2-acre property behind the legislature from the province for \$34 million, envision an eclectic mix of office and residential buildings, pathways, courtyards, retail shops, a central plaza, a fitness facility and, perhaps, a public library branch.

"It's our hope that we see everything from younger singles and professionals working in the city to retirees and, hopefully, we get families living there as well," said Robert Jawl of Jawl Properties.

"It's really been designed to cater to a diverse array of residents and I think that's reflective of what's in James Bay at the moment. It's a very diverse community that seems to find appeal across a huge swath of age ranges and demographics within Victoria. The hope is that this project can complement that."

The initial phase will focus on the west side of the block where the first of two office buildings will rise on Superior Street.

A second building on Menzies will have retail on the first floor topped by three storeys of residential. The developers remain optimistic that a Greater Victoria Public Library branch will be among the tenants on Menzies.

"From the community consultation that's been completed, it seems like such a facility would be very well received

within the neighborhood,” Jawl said.

The first building is slated for completion in 2017, at which point, government employees will move to their new digs, the older buildings to the east will be demolished and work will begin on the second office building, with completion set for 2019.

Plans call for a central plaza between the two office buildings directly across the street from the legislature.

The developers hope that a restaurant or bistro there will become a destination for MLAs and government workers as well as people that live and work in the neighbourhood.

“We like to think of it as what could be the start of a nice little neighbourhood core,” said Brian McCauley, president of Concert Properties.

In addition to the office and retail space, the project includes three new residential buildings along Michigan Street on the south side of the property.

“We think we’ll be able to accelerate those and build those out at the same time we’re building the second office building,” McCauley said.

Of the five historic houses at the site, two have been moved to a property on Dallas Road and will be refurbished as single-family homes. The other three will be relocated along Michigan, renovated as rental units and designated as heritage structures. That work is expected to be done by 2016.

“It’s a bit of a game of musical chairs on the site right now, because the homes can’t get relocated until some of the buildings get knocked down,” McCauley said. “So there is a bit of an orchestration going on now.”

He said the developers played close attention to the vision for the site that was included in the Victoria Accord 22 years ago.

“We didn’t impose a form of development there that was really foreign to the neighbourhood,” McCauley said. “So the tallest building we have is five storeys.

“We didn’t feel that it was appropriate to push hard on dramatically changing the development scheme that was done several years ago. There was a lot of good community involvement in that process and both the Jawls and ourselves felt it was important to respect that.”

Eventually, Capital Park will be home to about 1,200 office workers during the day, and about 250 to 300 residents in about 175 units.

“Then, it would be our hope that many hundred more visit the site each day,” Jawl said.

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The creators of the Capital Park project behind the B.C. legislature aim to make it a showcase for sustainable development. They hope to achieve a platinum rating for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for the two office buildings, and a gold rating on the residential structures.

To that end, that project is expected to include:

- High efficiency lighting, heating and cooling
- Low-volume water fixtures

- Green spaces on the roofs
- Office fitness facilities
- Showers and change rooms for cyclists and extensive bike storage
- Electric-vehicle charging stations
- Energy Star appliances in apartments and condos
- Building designs that make the most of daylight
- Native plants and rain gardens to manage storm water

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ABOUT THE BUILDINGS

Office

The project features two four- to five-storey office buildings on Superior Street with about 235,000 square feet of office space. Most of the space will be used by the B.C. government. The first building is under construction and is slated for completion in 2017. The second phase will run from 2017 to 2019.

Retail

The project will include about 17,500 square feet of retail space. Most of that will be on the main level of a four-storey building along Menzies Street. The top three floors will be residential. The developers hope to see a Greater Victoria Public Library branch here. A limited amount of retail space will also front a plaza between the two office buildings and directly across the street from the B.C. legislature. The developers envision a restaurant or bistro there catering to MLAs, office workers and James Bay residents.

Residential

In addition to the residential units above the retail on Menzies, the developers plan to build three residential buildings along Michigan on the southern side of the property. The buildings will range in size from three to five storeys. As well, three heritage homes will be moved from their current location on Superior to Michigan and restored as rental units. Two other heritage houses have been relocated to a parcel of land on Dallas Road and renovated for use as single-family homes. In all, there will be about 175 rental units and condominiums on the Capital Park site.