

Civil servants move into 1st phase of giant project near legislature

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Construction crews work on the Capital Park site that covers almost one city block from Superior to Michigan, and Menzies Street to the Queen's Printer on Government Street.

Photograph By DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

The first phase of the massive Capital Park commercial and residential development behind the B.C. legislature in James Bay is nearing completion.

A new five-storey office building on Superior Street now houses 765 provincial government employees in the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Around the corner on Menzies Street, residential tenants have moved into the 53 rental apartments on the upper floors of a four-storey building.

And, on the ground floor, crews are putting the finishing touches on a new Greater Victoria Public Library branch and a specialty market store.

Meanwhile, back on Superior, Phase 2 of the project is underway with preparation beginning on a second five-storey office building slated for completion in 2019.

The provincial government said it expects the second building will house about 340 employees in the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development.

The entire project covers almost one city block from Superior to Michigan, and Menzies to the Queen's Printer on Government Street.

Robert Jawl of Jawl Development Corp., which partnered with Concert Properties to buy the 6.2-acre property from the province for \$34 million, said the second phase will take about two years to complete.

The developers have also applied to the City of Victoria to build three townhouse and condominium buildings along Michigan as a final component of the project, Jawl said. "Presuming things proceed smoothly, it is our current intention to begin construction on that final phase sometime in the spring of 2018."

Jawl said the development has mostly stayed on schedule despite a construction boom in the region and the high demand for tradespeople.

"Against that backdrop, we're really, really pleased and impressed with the effort put forth by Campbell Construction and the subtrades on the job," he said. "They not only finished the project generally on time, but we're also very pleased with the quality of workmanship."

If work continues as expected, the Greater Victoria Public Library intends to open its new branch in early 2018.

Lynne Jordon, deputy chief executive officer of the Greater Victoria Public Library, said the branch will cover 7,150 square feet at the corner of Menzies and Superior Streets. It will include special areas for children and teens, meeting rooms, and a number of modern amenities such as outdoor reading space with WiFi, a laptop bar and charging station.

It's the second branch in Victoria and the 12th in the region's expanding library system.

"Generally speaking, when you build a branch they will come," Jordon said. "It's very convenient for people in their neighbourhood. It will be well-used. We know there's a dense population base in James Bay."

The City of Victoria is soliciting potential names for the new branch. The deadline for submissions is midnight Sunday and the branch name will be announced in December.

Red Barn Market anticipates opening a deli and grocery outlet in the same building in January.

Russ Benwell, one of the chain's owners, said the store will be similar in size to Red Barn Markets in Esquimalt and Oak Bay at 6,100 square feet. The company expects to employ 60 to 70 full- and part-time staff at the new location.

"We will definitely look to have a large deli in that store," he said. "We'll have a full sandwich bar, ice cream bar, all of our smokehouse products. We're looking to round it out with the produce and the groceries."

Benwell said the store's hours of operation are uncertain at this point, but it will likely be open from about 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week, to start. "I think the community's excited to have us and we're very excited to service that community."

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