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James Bay library branch in city's good books

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An artist's rendering of the proposed James Bay library branch. Photograph By Via City of Victoria

A new library branch apparently will find a prominent home in the new Capital Park development behind the legislature in James Bay.

Victoria councillors are expected Thursday to approve \$1.5 million in capital spending for the 7,500-square-foot branch, inclusion of \$232,000 for lease costs for 2018, and \$110,000 for the city's share of the operating budget.

Mayor Lisa Helps called the development exciting.

"It's something that I think is very, very good from the perspective of Victoria taxpayers. More to the point, it will add a much-needed new library in an area of town that is rapidly densifying," she said.

"I can't wait to see that mezzanine built out and people spilling out into the courtyard with their freshly signed-out library book, walking over to the local café and reading in the sunshine."

City staff are recommending the capital costs be repaid to the Buildings and Infrastructure Reserve with new tax revenue generated by the Capital Park development — estimated at between \$650,000 and \$1.1 million over two or three years — and ongoing operating costs (\$342,000) funded from the new tax revenue beginning in 2018.

Council gave support in principle last November to a new library branch in James Bay.

Locating a library branch in the neighbourhood has been a long time coming, said Coun. Pam Madoff, the city's representative on the Greater Victoria Public Library board.

Madoff said the branch won't be "tucked away" and lost in the development but will help create a real community gathering area.

"You've got probably the most visible part of the property being made available, being right on the corner of Superior and Menzies," Madoff said.

Concert Properties and Jawl Development bought the 6.2-acre property bordered by Superior, Menzies and Michigan streets from the province in October 2013.

The Capital Park development now under construction will see the area transformed into a blend of retail and office space, rental housing and public spaces.

It falls under a 1994 master development agreement known as the Victoria Accord, which envisaged a library as part of the development mix.

Madoff said she was initially concerned that the vision identified in the document would not be taken up by the property's new private-sector owners.

"It was really amazing when Jawl [Development] and Concert Properties took it over, that they honoured all of those commitments — everything from [relocating and preserving] the heritage houses to the library," she said.

"It wasn't something that was required. It said that there was an opportunity. So it was something people could have walked away from."

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