

The Winnipeg Free Press

Editorial Leaders, Wednesday, January 30, 2008, p. A14

EDITORIAL - Yes to good architecture

Good architecture may well be about function, structure and beauty, but the best design always focuses on the big picture, the one that links people, places and communities. Winnipeg architect **Ernie Walter** believes he can accomplish all those goals if the city approves plans to build a luxury condominium-hotel complex at 390 Assiniboine Avenue.

The \$60-million project would feature 27 condos and 40 hotel suites in a stylish, 16-storey riverbank building that would include a restaurant, retail stores and a plastic surgery clinic. It would also contain a "self-storing" parking system for 168 cars, a riverfront plaza and a glass-enclosed courtyard with 300 trees. For these and other reasons, it's a building that people would want to experience.

As a destination, therefore, it could act as a catalyst for more development in the south Broadway area. Walter himself hopes it reignites interest in a pedestrian mall running along Carlton or Edmonton streets, linking the central business district with the river. The concept has been discussed in the past, but like other good ideas, it was never seriously pursued and eventually collapsed from the lack of an advocate or champion.

Walter also sees a connection between his building and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which could begin construction in two years. Visitors to the museum will want to stay at the hotel on the river because the experience will enhance the overall quality of the journey. The result will be an enhanced image of Winnipeg for both tourists and residents.

An opponent of the project has complained that the proposed building will downgrade the residential character of the neighbourhood. On the contrary, it will enhance the vicinity. The south Broadway district already includes apartment towers higher than the one proposed by Walter, so it is curious to assert that a single new project will destroy the neighbourhood. It's true that the view of some apartments in a next-door building will be affected, but views are constantly reshaped by new construction. No one in south Broadway, or anywhere in downtown Winnipeg for that matter, has an unobstructed view of the prairie. The area is already heavily occupied by commercial and retail interests, as well as residential, so the proposed new building is perfectly complementary.

The project has passed a few hurdles at city hall and still has a few more to clear before construction can begin. The city should conduct its due diligence to ensure that what is promised is also what is delivered. But if everything is in order, then let's get the show on the road. The city desperately needs good architecture and good urban planning to create communities that are

designed for the comfort and benefit of people.

Category: Editorial and Opinions **Uniform subject(s):** Real estate industry;
Educational material and tools **Length:** Medium, 368 words

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Doc. : news·20080130·WF·0^Editorial1^Jan30001