

Victoria Crossing building on potential

Marketing campaign taps into city's 'soul'

By Murdoch Macleod

Business Edge

Downtown has much of the brainpower, but the vibrant heart of Calgary is the Beltline just south of the central business district.

It's the Calgarian's Calgary.

And now a new marketing campaign for the nearby Victoria Crossing area is tapping into the theme, "the soul of Calgary."

In a couple of years, Victoria Crossing will have an interesting mix of residential, retail and commercial uses, says Eileen Stan, executive director of the Victoria Crossing Business Revitalization Zone.



Opus Building Corporation illustration

Stampede Station will be part of the Beltline's redevelopment.

The BRZ's boundaries overlap the area of the Connaught-West Victoria Special Study conducted by the city planning department and the Beltline communities of Connaught and Victoria. Proposed design guidelines from the public consultation will go to the planning commission this month.

The community study area is bounded by 12th and 17th Avenues S., 14th Street W. and 1st Street E.

Planning study results were presented last month at open houses at the Memorial Park library and the Carl Safran Centre. Those open houses followed earlier sessions in March and June of last year.

Lesley Beale, a partner at Sturgess Architects, says she has worked on similar projects before and has never seen such a positive reaction.

City planner Don Schultz agrees the Beltline community wants to maintain its diversity. On density issues, the clear message is to keep high-rise development to a minimum.

Heritage is also valued, with landmark areas considered opportunities. The corner of 17th Avenue and 8th Street S.W., for example, is one of the city's most recognizable intersections. Others, such as 17th Avenue and Centre Street S., are potential landmarks, Schultz says.

Case studies by Sturgess Architects show six different blocks in the area that could be redeveloped over the next several years with different building types with higher densities. The varied building types included three-storey townhouses with an apartment tower above, five-storey apartment buildings, lane-facing apartments and live-work townhouses.

The guideline proposals show 17th Avenue S.W. continuing as a citywide destination shopping area and 8th Street S.W. as a main street. Eleventh Street S.W. and 1st Street S.W. are seen as "village streets" with pubs, restaurants and stores serving local customers.

Beale also suggested some redistribution of green space in the neighbourhoods. Some parks need to be strengthened, with better definition or more "eyes on the park" in terms of street doors and windows across the street or lane. Such changes can be incremental.

Connaught and West Victoria are currently zoned mostly for apartment buildings up to 17 storeys.

Eileen Stan at the BRZ says some redevelopment changes are already happening.

The BRZ includes a diverse community of about 300 new and established businesses in an area including 6th Street S.E. to 2nd Street S.W., and 10th Avenue to 17th Avenue S.

"It really speaks to what this area is about," says Stan.

"We really want to encourage density," she adds. "A critical mass of people living and working here is what's going to ensure the long-term viability of this community."

The area may be below requirement on green space, and still needs appropriate public spaces and pleasant streetscapes and retail.

The population of Victoria Crossing was up six per cent in the 2001 census. It's mostly people aged 20 to 45 and the median household income is comparable to other areas such as Connaught and downtown. There is some lower-income housing but the area is shifting to a wider range of income levels.

Among the redevelopments in the Beltline are the new Co-op midtown market and the Stampede Station project.

Opus Building Corp. and WAM Development Group have applied for a development permit for the first phase of Stampede Station, says Hannes Kovac, marketing director for Opus.

Stampede Station will eventually include a 250- to 300-room hotel (which could be combined with a casino), two residential towers totalling 500 units and 850,000 sq. ft. of office space in four office structures. There will be 100,000 sq. ft. of retail space on the main level.

The project has been redesigned since it was first announced.

"We opened it up to accommodate street level retail and make the whole thing more community and pedestrian friendly," says Kovac.

The site is just across from the Roundup Centre in Stampede Park on the former Campeau lands between the two halves of Macleod Trail S.E.

Parking will eventually total 2,100 stalls, partially underground on the whole site and partly in a three-storey structure along the north side of the development above ground. The above-ground parking structure will resemble the city's Centennial Parkade downtown on 9th Avenue S.W.

Marriott is the candidate for the hotel and the project developers are talking to residential developers about the apartment towers, says Kovac.

If the development permit is approved, construction could begin in the summer.

Blocks away to the west, the Calgary Co-op plans to start building its Midtown Market Centre in the late spring.

The 45,000-sq.-ft. centre will include surface parking and will take up the west half of the lot at 11th Avenue and 11th Street S.W.

The centre will also include a cafe with outdoor patio. The eastern part of the site has been sold to a group planning an apartment tower. The main floor of the apartment complex will include a Co-op liquor store with wine boutique.