

Inner-city renewal plan nears approval

\$180M project will redevelop Stampede area

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Calgary Herald

A prime patch of inner-city property is poised to become the southern "gateway to downtown," under a plan to develop the long-vacant land along Macleod Trail.

After decades of failed negotiations that have kept the land fallow, developers are hoping to receive approval this week for a \$180-million project that envisions a collection of office towers, condominiums, street-level stores and an upscale hotel built on a gravel parking lot adjacent to the Stampede grounds.

While it has to be endorsed by the Calgary planning commission, community and city hall officials are calling the Stampede Station proposal an attractive addition to Calgary's skyline that will be a major improvement to the Beltline community of Victoria Park.

"This has always been seen as a key piece of developable property that will be important in turning this area around," said Eileen Stan, executive director of the Victoria Crossing Business Revitalization Zone.

"It will transform the trip into downtown by making Macleod Trail much more pedestrian-friendly and will really become the major gateway to downtown."

Construction could begin this summer on the first phase of Stampede Station if the commission on Thursday approves a development permit for a portion of two square blocks of city-owned land bounded by Macleod Trail, 1st Street E., 13th Avenue and 15th Avenue S.E.

Breaking ground on the development has been a long time coming for its proponents, who have spent years trying to bring it to fruition.

"This project is very near and dear to my heart. We've been working on it for two years," said Willard Olauson, president of OPUS Building Corp., which has joined WAM Development Group on the project.

"There's been a lot of planning and re-planning because it's hoped it will set the standard for the area," Olauson said.

"It's going to have a great streetscape. Although it's large, it's not meant to feel too large."

Designed by Gibbs Gage Partnership, the same architects that designed the adjacent Round-Up Centre expansion, the development will begin with nine-storey and 17-storey office towers on the northeast corner of the 1.4-hectare site, with ground-level stores and restaurants, underground parkades and an indoor atrium.

The second phase will eventually see commercial, office and residential space built on the south side of 14th Avenue, along with a 200- to 300-room hotel.



**CREDIT: Photo
Courtesy Gibbs Gage
Architects**

**Artist's conception of
the proposed
Stampede Station
project.**

"We've had some discussions with a large hotel chain that is interested in building something with a western theme," Olauson said.

The development is to be connected to Stampede Park and the Victoria Park LRT station via Plus-15 bridges across Macleod Trail.

Stan, who also sits on the Victoria Park Redevelopment Committee, said the community is pleased the buildings are being designed to fit into the surrounding mix of modern and historic structures and to encourage pedestrian traffic in the area.

"It's really going to help build a continuous relationship between downtown and the Stampede grounds," Stan said.

"Right now, nobody wants to walk down Macleod Trail because there's so much vacant land there. This will really improve that by having shops and restaurants on all sides of the ground level, including through the middle on 14th Avenue."

The Calgary Stampede is also supportive of redeveloping what many refer to

as the "Campeau lands," which have been the subject of numerous unsuccessful plans since the city acquired the property in 1990 from Toronto developer Robert Campeau.

"We see this as complementary to what we're doing here, and there is potential for a lot of joint opportunities, especially with a new hotel," Stampede spokesman Dan

Sullivan said.

"We're always looking at new ways of marketing with partners, especially when it comes to other events outside of the Stampede."

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