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Downtown buildings part of \$21M residential development plan

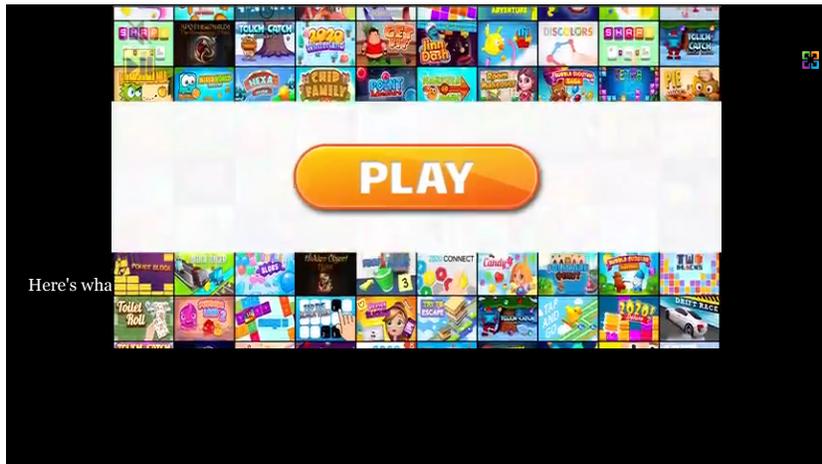
Dave Waddell • Windsor Star
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The Canada Building on Ouellette Avenue is pictured on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. A local developer has plans to for a residential development on the site. PHOTO BY TAYLOR CAMPBELL /Windsor Star

Downtown Windsor’s historic Canada Building and a former Knights of Columbus building that has been vacant for about a decade will be redeveloped to create 106 new apartments in the city’s core.

The combined value of the two projects is about \$21 million.



“Like a lot of other entrepreneurs, we’ve identified there is a demand for downtown living and no place for people to live,” said Rhys Trenhaile, a real estate agent with Manor Realty.

“There are thousands of students going to school downtown. Young professionals want to live and work downtown.

“The majority of these apartments will be two-bedroom, so you will be adding 170-180 people living downtown.”

The 14-storey art deco-styled Canada Building is located at 374 Ouellette Ave., near Park Street. The former Knights of Columbus headquarters is at 703-17 Ouellette Ave., near Tuscarora Street.

The two projects are currently having architectural drawings completed to obtain final approval from the City of Windsor. The Chatham firm of ROA Studio is handling the designs for both buildings.



Real estate agent Rhys Trenhaile, with Manor Realty, is shown Tuesday, July 21, 2020, in the 700 block of Ouellette Avenue in front of the former Knights of Columbus building, which has sat empty for about a decade. Trenhaile is partnering with fellow real estate agent Reed Renaud and Burlington-based Celernus Investment Partners Inc. to redevelop the structure into a mix of retail and residential. PHOTO BY TAYLOR CAMPBELL /Windsor Star

Trenhaile said city administration and elected officials have been excellent in supporting the project to date.

“We have been in constant communication with the various parties at the City of Windsor throughout the process and don’t anticipate any major hurdles,” said Trenhaile, who added downtown zoning is quite flexible.



Young professionals want to live and work downtown

Trenhaile is partnering with fellow Manor Realty agent Reed Renaud on the Canada Building project, but is the sole developer on the former Knights of Columbus building.

Burlington-based Celernus Investment Partners Inc. is an equity partner in both projects.

Trenhaile credited the city’s Community Improvement Plan for the downtown for making the projects viable.

“Municipal government got creative by introducing the community improvement plan and it’s allowed this to happen,” Trenhaile said.

The projects join a growing list of residential or new commercial development in the city core.

Last week, Fairmount Properties was selected by the city to create a multi-use development on the former Grace Hospital site. Two months ago the Security Building downtown was purchased and will be redeveloped into residential units.



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Other residential projects on the go downtown include the Hive project in the former Don Cherry's on Pelissier Street, Valente Construction's 955 On the Avenue condo project on Ouellette and the West Bridge Place condo building being erected at Crawford and Wyandotte.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The redevelopment of several buildings along Chatham Street between Ferry Street and Ouellette — which began with the Rocket Innovation Studio moving into the Old Fish Market — is also continuing.

“The property values have gotten high enough, along with the CIP subsidies, to be able to market the downtown for residential development,” Trenhaile said of the numerous projects underway.

“Between all the different developers, we’re going to exhaust the supply of office buildings that can be turned into residential pretty quickly. Then you’re going to see, in the next five years, new buildings going up.”

Once the final drawings are approved, Trenhaile said the projects would be put out for tender. He plans to proceed simultaneously with both projects.

The former Knights of Columbus building, which has sat empty for about a decade, is pictured Tuesday, July 21, 2020. The building at 703-17 Ouellette Ave. should soon be developed into a mix of commercial and residential units. PHOTO BY TAYLOR CAMPBELL /Windsor Star

He anticipates the Canada Building, which is nearly 89,000 square feet, will take 12 to 18 months to complete.

The nearly 29,000-square-foot Knights of Columbus building will take 12 months to complete.

Currently, about 25 per cent of the Canada Building — home to Mazaar restaurant on the ground floor — is being used for commercial purposes.

“The main floor will remain for retail fronting the street,” Trenhaile said.

“We’re going to give everyone else working in offices in there an opportunity to move into a new office on the second and third floors. We’re not kicking anyone out.”

The remaining floors will be turned into 72 rental apartments with every effort made to take advantage of the architectural details in the 92-year-old building.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“There’s wonderful high-ceilings,” said Trenhaile, who along with Renaud purchased the building from Italy’s AKNO Enterprises in June.

“We’re going with an industrial-chic style that’s so popular in downtowns around the western world.

“They’ll be open-concept with exposed air ducts and use of concrete.”

Trenhaile said the former Knights of Columbus building is a deceptive project that is much bigger than it appears. The two-storey building extends almost all the way back to Pelissier.

Its art deco features are currently covered up behind black boards and purple and pink paint.

The Canada Building on Ouellette Avenue is pictured on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. A local developer has plans to for a residential development on the site. PHOTO BY TAYLOR CAMPBELL /Windsor Star

“I can’t wait to bring it back to the way it’s supposed to be,” said Trenhaile, who lived downtown himself for 16 years.

“We’ve figured out how to bring back its front and back art deco facades of a 100 years ago.”

The plan for the smaller property is to maintain the four retail fronts and create 34 apartments behind.

The back of the building last served as a bingo hall, but was originally a ballroom.

“The apartments will be loft-style,” said Trenhaile, who acquired the property in March. “They’ll be two storeys with a beautiful mezzanine. There’ll also be rooftop apartments with walkout patios.”

He added that keeping retail at street level with residential above in both projects is key to the downtown’s future success.

“It’s good urban planning to have retail on the ground floor to create an excuse for foot traffic,” Trenhaile said.

“You lose that, then there’s less residential.”

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