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**Luxury condos land permit** Assiniboine project to have plastic-surgery clinic, spa

By Bartley Kives

One facelift may follow another on Assiniboine Avenue as high-end plastic-surgery clinics are slated to be part of the luxury condominium/boutique hotel complex planned for the current site of Restaurant Dubrovnik.

Back in April, realtors from Royal LePage Dynamic and Coldwell Banker unveiled plans to build a new 16-storey landmark on Assiniboine Avenue, featuring 40 luxury condos, 40 boutique hotel rooms, a licensed restaurant and retail stores.

The project, officially known as MSH Assiniboine, now includes space for plastic-surgery clinics and a spa, according to a conditional-use permit granted earlier this month by the City of Winnipeg.

But project spokesman Dave Spiers said other facets of the plan remain unchanged, most notably architect **Ernie Walter's** energy-efficient design, which calls for geothermal heating and 300 trees growing inside a climate-controlled, glass-enclosed courtyard.

"When you say 16 storeys, it sounds rather onerous, but in actual fact it's a glass-encapsulated building with a smaller structure inside," said Spiers.

City planners found the project acceptable because of the building's environmentally friendly design, as well as multiple amenities aimed at bringing more people downtown, said Spiers, noting a building with a spa, boutique hotel and luxury condos serviced by a 24-hour concierge will be unique in Winnipeg.

"It's a very exciting project. We're very optimistic at this point that everything will go forward as planned," he said, declining to attach a dollar figure to the development.

At this point, MSH Assiniboine does not face a public hearing. The project received administrative approval because the proposed use for 390 Assiniboine Ave. is consistent with downtown Winnipeg land-use guidelines, city spokesman Terry Aseltine said.

Feedback from informal public meetings held back in the spring resulted in several changes to the design, most notably some means of providing public access to the riverwalk and skating corridor south of the building, Spiers added.

The project will require the demolition of the 104-year-old building housing Restaurant Dubrovnik, a culinary landmark in Winnipeg for the past 31 years. But the restaurant will not close, as owner Milan Bodiroga -- a partner in the new development -- plans either to relocate somewhere else in the city or move into the new building.

"If this goes ahead, it will be the most contemporary building in Canada," said Bodiroga. He and Spiers promised to divulge more details about the luxury project after it clears more administrative hurdles at City Hall.

Fort Rouge Coun. Jenny Gerbasi, whose ward includes the southern portion of downtown, said she would not be surprised if residents in neighbouring apartment buildings object to a larger structure in their midst. Appeals of the conditional use for 390 Assiniboine Ave. may be filed until the end of next week.

"I'm concerned about the size and the scale of the building and the potential impacts on existing neighbours," said Gerbasi, who nonetheless has no say over the project's approval, as she does not sit on city council's appeals committee until late in 2008.

"Obviously, there are some positives to it, but when you have land of a lot of value, there's a tendency to go big."

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