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**Condos, boutique hotel planned** Tower would be built on downtown site

By Bartley Kives

In a sign of Winnipeg's growing affluence, local developers want to build a 16-storey luxury condominium/boutique hotel complex on a downtown site currently occupied by Restaurant Dubrovnik.

On Thursday, realtors from Royal LePage and Coldwell Banker unveiled plans to build a new Assiniboine Avenue landmark with 40 luxury condos, 40 boutique hotel rooms, a restaurant and retail stores.

The riverfront structure would have 300 trees growing inside a climate-controlled, glass-enclosed courtyard, said project spokesman Dave Spiers, a realtor with Royal LePage.

The energy-efficient design by architect **Ernie Walter** calls for geothermal heating and cooling and other low-impact environmental features.

Condo residents would be served by luxury amenities, such as a 24-hour concierge service. But the key to the project is the boutique hotel, which aims to fill a void in the local high-end hospitality market between Fort Garry Hotel-sized operations and tiny bed-and-breakfast establishments.

"There isn't anything like this in Winnipeg," said Spiers, adding the market for the boutique hotel is being made possible by downtown developments such as the MTS Centre and the forthcoming Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

"I believe that project provides an impetus for a number of developments in Winnipeg," he said of the museum.

Spiers could not attach a dollar figure to the tower and declined to name the proponents behind it.

He and Coldwell Banker realtor Terry O'Rourke held an open house on Thursday evening to give inner-city residents a glimpse of the plan before a formal proposal heads to city council's downtown development committee.

City planners have started encouraging developers to hold such open houses to reduce the potential for conflict with area residents at formal city hearings.

This particular condo/hotel plan would require the demolition or relocation of Restaurant Dubrovnik, a downtown Winnipeg landmark but is not listed as a heritage building. The restaurant's owner declined to comment on the proposal, explaining such talk would be bad for business.

"These are just preliminary discussions," he said.

The project may also require some stickhandling at city hall. Fort Rouge Coun. Jenny Gerbasi, whose ward includes the southern half of downtown Winnipeg, said she is intrigued by the plan but is concerned it might call for a tower that's too tall compared to existing buildings on Assiniboine Avenue.

"They're proposing a really innovative, green structure that has many wonderful features, but I'm not sure if this is the right site," Gerbasi said.

But Spiers said he is confident the design can win over skeptics.

"I think when they finally see the project, it's not too high for the river," he said.

A second open house is planned for Saturday at 10 a.m. at Broadway Disciples United Church, 396 Broadway.

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