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**Luxury project pushes ahead** Development on Assiniboine survives appeal

By Bartley Kives

A \$60 - million luxury condominium-hotel project featuring a plastic surgery clinic, sushi bar system is one step closer to appearing on the north bank of the Assiniboine River, after city appeal Monday.

Late last year, the city's planning department approved the future placement of a 27-condo on Assiniboine Avenue land currently occupied by Restaurant Dubrovnik.

However, the owner of the neighbouring Bessborough Apartments, a 44-suite building east landmark, launched an appeal on the grounds the new structure would tower over existing buildings. He felt it would degrade the residential character of the South-Broadway Assiniboine neighbourhood.

That appeal died Monday as city council's downtown development committee acknowledged residents' concerns, but noted Winnipeg needs to support bold projects, even when they diverge slightly from zoning norms.

"With the (Canadian) Museum for Human Rights coming, we can probably expect more of these applications. If we can't be more flexible, we'll probably be saying no to a lot of projects," said city councillor Steve Steeves. He and fellow committee members Jenny Gerbasi, Justin Swandel and Russ Wyatt voted in favour of the project, officially known as MSH Assiniboine.

Designed by architect **Ernie Walter**, the 16-storey building is supposed to feature 300 trees, an enclosed courtyard, geothermal heating, an underground parking system capable of "self-storing" cars and public access to a vendor-friendly riverfront plaza.

Factor in a Japanese restaurant and bar, retail stores and a plastic surgery clinic, and the luxury project is estimated somewhere between \$60 million and \$80 million, said Royal LePage Dynamic Realtor Dave Spiers.

The sheer scale of the project -- and its target market -- are ruffling feathers in downtown's residential neighbourhood.

"This is a project driven by engineering ego and money. It's just that simple," Edmonton Street Mayor Clarke said at Monday's appeal hearing. "The people behind this have no interest in this neighbourhood."

Acting on behalf of Bessborough Apartments owner Glendower Investments, architect Mel Moshinsky said a plastic surgery clinic and a sushi bar will do little to enhance a downtown neighbourhood project on modest means.

Acknowledging their concerns, Swandel cautioned Spiers and Walter that the completed project must include the amenities it currently promises -- especially public access to the riverfront.

The project, whose financial backers have not been revealed, still faces wind and riverbank design review and more city scrutiny of detailed structural plans.

The initial approval granted Monday was "a very bold statement by the city," said Walter, who proposed building to a Ferrari sports car.

After the hearing, a dejected Michener said he believes city councillors were won over by the dramatic design and expensive price tag.

"We'll just have to wait and see whether they'll be able to realize all the things they're promising. Insisting the building is simply not the right development for the narrow Assiniboine Avenue

Committee chairman Wyatt, however, said every infill project in the city faces opposition because they're not against development -- just the development in question.

"I'm frankly sick and tired of hearing that argument," he said, calling the proposed tower "a  
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