

A condo project St. Catharines really wants to succeed



A rendered illustration by OneSpace shows the proposed changes to the Lincoln Fabrics building at 63 Lakeport Rd. The owners want to add a two-storey roof-top addition to the building and a nine-storey expansion to the northeast side. Illustration from Port Dalhousie Harbour Club Ltd.

February 23, 2018 by **Doug Herod**

Proof, again, will be offered Thursday evening that size matters in Port Dalhousie.

That's when the new owners of the former Lincoln Fabrics property will unveil at a city-arranged open house their plans for a major residential condo development on site.

The project, which will include some ground-floor commercial use, involves retrofitting the 118-year-old original structure and adding two storeys atop it as well as building a nine-storey condo next to it.

The naïve among us may have thought the new Toronto-based owners, Port Dalhousie Harbour Club Ltd., would have been content to work within the building's existing footprint, restore the structure to its former heritage glory and then market its polished waterfront/industrial chic look to the groovy urban set.

But that was "never, ever" the developer's view, said one of the group's partners Sheldon Rosen.

Given the development costs involved, the project only makes economic sense if a considerable number of residential suites are in play. In this instance, depending how the residential space is ultimately configured in the two buildings, that's about 130 units, said Rosen.

That contention is similar to the one made by Tom Rankin last month at St. Catharines city council when his proposed eight-storey condo on the Port Dalhousie Legion site became an item of interest during a Port secondary plan discussion.

Responding to criticism that his proposed building was too high and could work at six storeys, Rankin fumed he'd walk away from the project if limited to that height.

The problem any developer faces on these harbour lands, said Rankin, is the required, expensive underground work.

"Before I get out of the ground, it's five million bucks. I need those extra two storeys," he said.

Rosen noted similar challenges.

Retrofitting an existing building while paying strict heed to its heritage elements is more expensive than building new. Plus, there is the foundation work required for the new building and two below-grade parking levels. (There will also be one at-grade parking level).

In both instances, foundations will have to go down 60 feet to hit bedrock, said Rosen.

While height and building mass will likely be a source of contention in certain Port circles, the developer will be focusing his message on heritage restoration, compatibility of design and look, and landscape/waterfront access enhancements.

Rosen said changes over the years were made to the factory exterior, notably the blocking or covering of windows and building an addition to the front, which negatively affected its heritage status.

The plan is to open up and restore those windows and tear down the addition, steps that will help return the building to its 1900 look.

As for improving public access to the harbour, that will be achieved — at the city's suggestion, said Rosen — by tearing down the existing Pier 61 restaurant building.

The site will become a parkette with a pedestrian connection to Lakeport Road. In addition, it's envisioned the path behind the legion, the restaurant and the Lincoln Fabrics building will be upgraded and connected to other harbour walkways.

Rosen said talks are also underway with the Pier 61 operators about the restaurant re-opening in the refurbished Lincoln Fabrics building.

These are relatively early days in the development process, but this is the one Port project that the city really, really — and I mean really — wants to work.

Unlike Grandson of Port Tower or Rankin's legion project, it makes considerable use of a high-profile, historical building that stands as a prominent beacon at Port Dalhousie's canal village entry.

This could be the higher-density, residential showcase and example of significant heritage building re-use that city officials have been dreaming about for decades.

Mind you, it remains a concept at this point. Goodness knows, going from paper to mortar and bricks can be a long haul in St. Catharines.

Still, look for considerable city support on the Harbour Club project.

The open house takes place 6 p.m. to 8 p.m at Port Dalhousie Lions Club.

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