

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

Dreaming of a new Point Douglas

Métis federation proposes area development

By: **Murray McNeill**

Posted: **09/26/2011 1:00 AM** | Comments: **0 (including replies)**



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An artist's rendering of the proposed Point Douglas redevelopment. Work could begin as early as February.

A \$35-million-to-\$45-million-plus development project is in the works that would help to change the face

of Winnipeg's historic Point Douglas area.

The economic development arm of the Manitoba Metis Federation -- the Metis Economic Development Organization -- is the driving force behind the proposed development, which could get underway early next year.

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MEDO CEO Blake Russell said the first phase of the three-phase development will be paid for with debt financing that MEDO is close to completing.

"We have our financing partners lined up," he said, adding they include Alberta-based Ledcor CMI Ltd., which will also be the primary contractor for the first phase of the project. Landstar Development Corp. is also a partner in the development.

The financing arrangements for the other two phases are still under discussion, but Russell said the hope is that the costs of the second phase will be divided equally between MEDO and the federal and provincial governments.

"We didn't want to use government dollars for Phase I because we're hoping to have their involvement in Phase II," he said.

The first phase would involve an \$11-million redevelopment of the four-storey MMF building at 150 Henry Ave., as well as a small adjoining parking lot that faces the Disraeli Freeway.

The second phase would see the addition of two more floors and two outside atriums for the MMF building, and construction of a village-style campus on a large, surface parking lot the MMF owns immediately north of its building.

The campus development will include an underground parkade, a central plaza, and more than half a dozen three- or four-storey buildings housing up to 50 small businesses -- many of them Métis or aboriginal-owned -- and an estimated 225 residential units.

Russell said the campus development is expected to cost between \$15 million and \$25 million, while the expansion of the MMF building will likely cost between \$8 million and \$10 million.

He said work on Phase I could get underway as early as next February, and hopefully would be complete by late 2012. Work on Phase II could get underway shortly after the first one is done.

He said the campus development would also include the construction of a residential building on land immediately east of the MMF building. The city owns that land, but Russell said MEDO has first dibs on acquiring it.

The third phase of the project would see MEDO working with neighbourhood groups and developers to redevelop a number of other properties in the Point Douglas area.

The only one that's been identified so far is a multi-storey office building on Sutherland Avenue that Russell and Ryan Paradis, MEDO's manager of planning and development, said the group is already negotiating to purchase.

"We hope to finalize a deal in the next few months," Paradis said, adding the building would be upgraded and leased out to MMF-affiliated tenants as well as possibly some outside groups.

He and Russell said that when the MMF acquired the Henry Avenue building and the parking lots about

a decade ago, president David Chartrand and executive director Don Roulette envisioned using them as a catalyst for other Métis and aboriginal-driven developments in the area.

MEDO's strategy is to move more than 300 community-focused businesses and programs into the neighbourhood.

"This is going to be an economic base for the aboriginal and Métis communities," Russell said.

"This is something the community needs and the MMF needs," Paradis said, "and I think it's going to be hard to keep it from happening."

MEDO has been keeping the City of Winnipeg, which has been working on a new secondary development plan for the Point Douglas area, abreast of its plans. Russell said city officials have been supportive and helpful.

A spokesperson for the city said in an email that because the MEDO development is still in the planning stages, it would be premature to comment on it.

The CEO of The Forks North Portage Partnership said he's also met with Paradis to discuss MEDO's plans. Jim August agreed the area is ready for some new development.

"I think everybody thinks Point Douglas is an opportunity waiting to happen."

He said FNPP and the city are also working on a plan for the redevelopment of the remainder of Waterfront Drive, which includes parts of South Point Douglas.

"It's really a vision document rather than a master plan," he said, adding it will outline the commercial and parkway-development opportunities for the land along the banks of the Red River.

He said their report likely won't be ready until early next year.

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Three-phase plan

Here are the highlights of the proposed three-phase development for Point Douglas:

PHASE I:

An \$11-million redevelopment of the four-storey Manitoba Metis Federation building at 150 Henry Ave., as well as a small adjoining parking lot that faces the Disraeli Freeway.

Work could get underway as early as next February. Could be completed within the year.

Some of the tenants would include MMF-affiliated organizations already leasing space in the building, including the Heritage Canada-funded Louis Riel Institute, as well as Ledcor CMI Ltd.

PHASE II:

The addition of two more floors and two outside atriums for the MMF building. Estimated cost: \$8 million to \$10 million.

Construction of a village-style campus on a surface parking lot the MMF owns immediately north of its building, and on a smaller parcel of land immediately east of the MMF building.

Would include an underground parkade, a central plaza, and more than half a dozen three- or four-storey buildings housing up to 50 small businesses, many of them Métis or aboriginal-owned, and an estimated 225 residential units.

About two-thirds of the residential units would be rental units for students and families, and one third would be condominiums.

Estimated cost: \$15 million to \$25 million.

PHASE III:

Redevelopment of an undetermined number of other properties in the Point Douglas area. First would be a multi-storey office building on Sutherland Avenue that the Metis Economic Development Organization is negotiating to buy.

Other details to be worked out after consultations with area groups and local developers.

-- source: Metis Economic Development Organization

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