

Terminal plans flying

New home for aviation museum part of Shelter's renovation scheme

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By Kevin Rollason



Phil Hossack/ Winnipeg Free Press
Arni Thorsteinson says plans for terminal include new office and perhaps retail space, and a new home for the Western Canada Aviation Museum.

Shelter Canadian Properties Ltd. has won a competition to overhaul the terminal building at Winnipeg International Airport, saving the structure from the wrecker's ball.

Arni Thorsteinson, president of Shelter, said Monday his plans for the 400,000-square-foot building include new office and perhaps retail space as well as a new home for the Western Canada Aviation Museum.

Winnipeg Airports Authority will vacate the terminal once its new, \$350 million building opens in 2009. The new terminal will be 50 per cent larger than the old one, and together will comprise one million square feet of space at the airport.

Thorsteinson said his Huntington REIT (real estate investment trust) was the successful bidder on last year's proposal call by the WAA for development proposals for the current terminal. The WAA's other option was to tear it down.

Thorsteinson said his successful bid is good news for the Western Canada Aviation Museum, the country's second largest. The museum is housed at the edge of the airport in the original passenger terminal of Trans Canada Airlines, now Air Canada, but the site is in need of renovation.

"A major part of the proposal is relocating the museum into our new development," Thorsteinson said.

"It would use 150,000 square feet, so it would be the lead participant."

Thorsteinson said the museum would be a perfect fit for the terminal, even though it would require an addition to the building to allow for the movement in and out of the museum's collection of aircraft.

"It's a large step for them (the WCAM) to take and requires considerable financial support from the private sector and the government," he said.

But Thorsteinson said if the WCAM isn't able to come up with a feasible business plan, "we have alternative plans" for the site, which he wouldn't divulge.

Thorsteinson wouldn't divulge financial figures for the terminal overhaul.

The airport is spending \$572 million on the new terminal, a parkade, roadways, and other civil site works and infrastructure. The project is being funded through the Airport Improvement Fee.

Last year, Huntington REIT purchased the 18-storey NewPortCenter, at 330 Portage Ave., for \$13 million and the multi-tenant office/industrial property at 80-88 Fennell St., for \$1.2 million.

Barry Rempel, the WAA's president and CEO, said he's pleased with the way things are going.

"Arni has been the most aggressive and he is working with the museum," Rempel said.

"We've been working with him in developing the whole campus. We'll end up with a lot more things for people to do."

Rempel said even under the current plan parts of the terminal will still need to be demolished.

Facts on Winnipeg International Airport

400,000 sq. ft. -- Size of current terminal building

600,000 sq. ft. -- Size of new building, scheduled to open in 2009

1964 -- Existing terminal opened

\$350 million -- Cost of new terminal building. Terminal construction will begin in January with the 1,599 stall parkade to be completed this month.

\$572 million -- Total airport redevelopment cost, including parking, terminal plus roadways, civil site works and infrastructure.

Facts on the Western Canada Aviation Museum:

90,000 sq. ft. -- Size of the existing museum at airport

150,000 sq. ft. -- Museum's proposed size in revamped terminal

1974 -- Year of incorporation. It is one of only six museums in the province to be designated as a theme museum. The numerous aircraft on display include the country's first helicopter, the most complete Vickers Viscount in the world, a replica of an Avrocar flying saucer, and the only Super Fokker Universal remaining in the world.

"He'll (Thorsteinson) develop it using as much as he can."

Shirley Render, the WCAM's executive director, said Monday an announcement on the museum's move is premature because they are still working on a business plan.

But Render said the museum's board of directors are confident they can do it.

"We expect we can show this is going to be a go situation," she said.

"We're following a flight plan... we want to do this right. We are looking to the corporate community and to the public community."

Render said more room would allow the museum to rotate the aircraft it has on exhibit and to have enough space to develop story boards detailing information about each aircraft.

"We want to be telling stories to put the human face behind our machinery," she said.

Sandy Shindleman, president of Shindico Realty, said he would expect that the companies which would take office space inside the terminal would be those that are linked with aviation, as well as those which "host travellers to meetings and conference oriented users.

"With relatively low capital costs, rents could be attractive," he said.

But Shindleman said getting retail tenants would be "a challenge unless it is a destination retailer with anchor drawing power."

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