

Shelter set to begin expansion of Exchange District building

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By Geoff Kirbyson



WAYNE GLOWACKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS
Mathieson stands at the site of Shelter's project at the corner of Rorie Street and Bannatyne Avenue.

SHELTER Canadian Properties is set to embark on a two-phased, multi-million dollar expansion in the Exchange District to satisfy growing demand for downtown office space.

Phase one of the Winnipeg-based developer's project at 140 Bannatyne Ave. -- the conversion of the 26,000-square-foot, three-storey building into a 43,000-square-foot, five-storey one -- will begin this week, according to Bob Mathieson, Shelter's vice-president of design and construction.

The second phase -- construction of an eight-storey, 98,000-square-foot addition with a split-level parking facility on what is now a parking lot immediately to

the east -- will begin as soon as "sufficient rental commitment" is found.

"We're not going to build nearly 100,000 square feet on spec," he said in an interview yesterday. "We are currently marketing it very actively and we are optimistic we can start in the very near future.

"The major office users are looking for large floor plate, contiguous space. What we will be providing is basically a 23,000-square-foot floor plate and there is very little vacancy in that kind of space in existing stock."

A recent study by Colliers International predicted the vacancy rate in Winnipeg's office sector would drop from 7.3 per cent to 7.1 per cent by the end of the year. Mathieson noted Shelter already has an agreement with Statistics Canada to take over the third floor of the existing building, which is currently vacant, and a significant portion of the soon-to-be-built fourth floor. The other tenants include the Au Bar nightclub on the first floor and customs broker Cole International Inc. on the second.

Mathieson said Shelter will be meticulous in ensuring the additions don't conflict with the design of the original building.

"We're going to match the red brick and the new windows will replicate the pattern of the existing building. Phase two will be a combination of red brick and some glass curtain wall, a design that complements, but doesn't overpower the existing heritage building," he said.

Lisa Holowchuk, executive director of the Exchange District Business Improvement Zone (BIZ), said she thinks the project will be "great" for the area. Not only will it fit in with the

neighbourhood -- always a key factor in the historic neighbourhood -- but it will also bring more workers downtown, she said.

"It's adding offices and amenities to the area, which is fantastic to see. The more people that work down here and participate in activities like shopping, that's beneficial to the businesses in the area," she said in an interview.

Mathieson added Shelter is following the lead of Mountain Equipment Co-op and Manitoba Hydro in constructing as environmentally friendly a building as possible. Among other things, it will feature underground pipes that act as a geothermal energy source by either heating the building by extracting heat from the soil or cooling it by discharging heat into the soil. Dudley Thompson, the principal of Prairie Architects Inc., which designed the \$12-million to \$14-million project, said the finished product will be a marriage of century-old design and modern environmental amenities.

geoff.kirbyson@freepress.mb.ca