Local News

544-apartment 'vertical forest' towers planned for downtown

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Twin 21-storey towers with 544 total apartments, their exteriors covered with thousands of shrubs and other plants, is planned for a long-deserted downtown property on Goyeau Street. PHOTO BY PASSA ARCHITECTS /Windsor Star

Twin 21-storey towers with 544 total apartments, their exteriors covered with thousands of shrubs and other plants, is planned for a long-deserted downtown property on Goyeau Street.

Called the Goyeau Green Twin Tower Apartment Project, the visually stunning project with cascading greenery is intended to be an environmental pacesetter while also delivering a large number of badly needed rental units — with "reasonable rents" — to the core, project architect Joseph Passa said Wednesday.

While this "very major project" is still in the early stages, he said everything so far looks very favourable with respect to it getting built within the next few years. The "vertical forest" concept was pioneered with the iconic Bosco Verticale in Milan, Italy in 2014, featuring a soft green shell of living vegetation on the exterior of two residential towers with a ratio of two trees and 40 shrubs per resident.

The greenery "acts as a buffer between the city and the apartments by absorbing polluting particles, noise and sequestering carbon whilst also producing oxygen and improving air quality," according to the World Green Building Council. It keeps the building cooler in summer and warmer in winter and counters the effects of urban heat islands — when masses of concrete and asphalt absorb heat.

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"To me, this is what we have to do," said Passa, who said vertical forests represent the future of building.

"We have to change our ways of building, we have to make them much more energy-efficient of course, which we have been doing for quite a while, but we also have to make them be energy generators to make them net-positive."

He explained the goal is to make the project produce more energy than it uses, employing such sources as solar and wind, while the greenery will sequester carbon and produce oxygen, "giving lungs to the downtown core."

"If we can continue doing this with many buildings we can actually cool the heat island effect as opposed to a continued heating up."

The Goyeau project will feature a landscaped parking deck, 54 large trees planted around each tower and smaller vegetation on private balconies.

"The vegetation also supports the occupants by producing oxygen and humidity while establishing connections with nature through sensory perception with the natural elements of water, air, light, and greenery," Passa said in a recent Facebook post.

"This helps in creating a more productive and healthier environment with positive effects for the psychological and physiological health of all residents."

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Solar panels will be located on the southwest side of both towers and filtered wastewater will be used to water the greenery. "Thus, the green technology systems will reduce the overall waste and carbon footprint of the towers with the cooling benefit of the facades contributing to reduced temperatures in the vicinity of the building in the urban core of Windsor."

The developer is a group of Toronto-area investors who at this early stage prefer to remain anonymous, Passa said. The location on Goyeau between Tuscarora and Elliot streets is the former home of Central Chrysler before it left downtown about 20 years ago.

Ward 3 Coun. Rino Bortolin said the proposal is "hugely positive" with the potential of bringing many more residents to the core.

"We need people, people, people," he said, to increase density and drive demand for services.

He said he hopes the financials work so the green building being presented is what gets built. "This is a huge win and I think if we can get the building that is represented in the pictures ... it would be fantastic because it would move the needle for development patterns here," Bortolin said.

"Doing something like this would inspire other people to do more green buildings and that would be a great outcome of this."

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The project hopes to tap into the city's community improvement plan for downtown, which in this case could provide big municipal tax rebates equalling the difference between current taxes (on a vacant lot) and taxes on a 544-unit apartment project, for up to 10 years.

Rising real estate prices, rising demand for housing and the Community Improvement Plan have propelled forward several other downtown apartment projects with hundreds of units in the last two years. Passa, who's involved in converting two 10-storey downtown buildings from commercial to residential, said the Goyeau project is just entering into the pre-submission process with the city.

"Our hope is we can be in construction within say a year," he said. Construction will take a couple more years. "By the time it's completed it will be three or four years down the road. These things take time."

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