

## Downtown projects in works

Expansion of TD office tower among Halifax building plans

By CHRIS LAMBIE Business Editor

Barrington Street is on the cusp of several major construction projects that could transform it from what sometimes seems like a ghost town into a bustling city centre.

The owner of the TD building plans to double the size of the downtown office complex, Halifax Mayor Peter Kelly said Monday.

"I think it would be great," Mr. Kelly said.

"It would be class A space. And there is an increased demand for the space, especially with the financial service sector that's been increasing here. It will certainly bode well for that niche."

The 18-storey building is located on Barrington at the north corner of George Street. The 73-metre building is owned by TDB Halifax Holdings Ltd. The company's president, Farhad Vladi, is a well-known broker who deals in renting and selling islands worldwide. He has offices in Halifax and Germany. Calls to both offices went unreturned Monday.

The TD building now only occupies half the block between Barrington and Granville streets, said Andy Fillmore, the city's urban designer.

The east side of the building doesn't have any windows, he said.

"It's just a sort of blank, unappealing wall," Mr. Fillmore said. "It was built that way for fire code reasons on the speculation that eventually somebody would eventually build something above the other half of the block."

The owner is going to take advantage of the fact that the glass curtain walls on the existing TD building are at the end of their useful life and need to be replaced, he said.

"They're going to basically build the other half of the building. So it's essentially doubling the size of each floor plate," Mr. Fillmore said.

"All that mirrored glass will be replaced by clear glass."

The project will re-create the historic façade of the Kelly luggage building demolished about 18 months ago, he said.

"They're going to keep the façade of the currently existing flower shop that's just to the north of the vacant lot, and then they're going to build behind and above those. In other words, they're going to be maintaining and even re-creating the historic feel of Granville Street in that area, and then the upper storeys will step back from that."

There's also whispering that the former NFB building that's now a facade being held up by steel girders could soon be undergoing construction.

In other downtown development news, the mayor said Lou Reznick is looking at installing a boutique hotel in one of his Barrington Street properties. Mr. Reznick's company, Starfish Properties, owns the Sam the Record Man buildings, as well as the former Granite Brewery building next door.

"I never comment on tenants; we just want to get our permits approved and get on with construction," Mr. Reznick said in an interview from Toronto.

The work on the three buildings, which Starfish dubs East Space, is moving forward under the new HRM by Design guidelines.

"We should be in front of the design review committee by January or February," Mr. Reznick said.

Chris Galea, a St. Francis Xavier business professor who heads a group of private investors from Ontario, said he has approached Mr. Reznick about the idea of opening a micro boutique hotel in one of his Barrington Street properties.

"As a business model and a place to go, it would be a fantastic spot," Mr. Galea said, noting he's also looked at other downtown properties for the project.

"It's a growing phenomenon in Europe where hotels are springing up that are very high-end, but they've got very small rooms," Mr. Galea said in a telephone interview from Antigonish.

"Think more like a cabin on a high-end sailboat as opposed to a big, sprawling room. What you save on space costs, both in capital costs and in running the hotel, you end up putting into very good quality in the rooms. But you're able to offer the rooms at a much more reasonable rate than rooms in a similar location with the same level of amenities."

The standard North American hotel room is around 320 square feet, he said. "We're talking about rooms of around 100 or 125 square feet," said Mr. Galea, who runs his own hospitality company, South Side Vacations Inc., which rents vacation properties.

The size of the hotel could be adjusted to fit into an existing building, he said.

"Anywhere from a 50- to a 100-room hotel would certainly fit into our business projections," Mr. Galea said.

Mr. Reznick will capitalize on the new heritage grants and incentive program to renovate the

facades of the three buildings, said the city's urban designer.

"He's tapping in substantially to the new grants program as part of the Barrington Street heritage conservation district," Mr. Fillmore said. "He's going to be like the poster child for the efficacy of the conservation district."

Two rooftop storeys will be squeezed on to the three existing buildings, he said.

"Those are going to be stepped back significantly and they're going to be contemporary in design."

Starfish is also planning to tear down the Roy building and re-create the Barrington facade with a 17-storey tower behind it on Granville, Mr. Fillmore said.

( [clambie@herald.ca](mailto:clambie@herald.ca) )

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