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River Landing proposal 'wonderful'

Most SP readers find urban village idea to their liking

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The latest proposal for development of Parcel Y at River Landing has attracted overwhelmingly positive feedback from Saskatonians since it was officially unveiled to the public on Wednesday.

Calgary-based Lake Placid Developments hopes to build an "urban village," made up of a 20-storey condo tower, a four-level office and retail building and an eight-storey boutique hotel clustered around a public plaza with an all-season water feature between Second and Third avenues, by 2011.

The proposal is awaiting final approval by city council and the Meewasin Valley Authority.

The MVA board had a preliminary discussion about the development plan at its regular meeting Friday, but will need to take a closer look at its technical aspects before a final decision is made, MVA president and CEO Susan Lamb said.

"At first glance, the proposal appears to incorporate many of the elements that our development controls require and that we were hoping to see, and that includes terracing from the riverbank back to 19th Street . . . (and) the fact that it's mixed-use. . . . There's some public open space, it appears to be the appropriate density . . . and there's underground parking, which is really important."

Lake Placid's vision for the site even includes some extras that aren't required by zoning or other guidelines, Lamb noted.

"They are going to attempt to look at the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standard for sustainability. And although they don't make any promises, they intend to evaluate their project against LEED, which is really very positive and exciting, so it will be highly sustainable building."

Acquaintances in the hotel industry have told her they don't consider the proposed boutique hotel as a competitive threat because it's "unlikely to flood the market with too many rooms. It could be a nice addition and they don't see it as a problem," Lamb added.

StarPhoenix readers delivered a flood of responses after the newspaper asked for citizens' opinions of the Lake Placid proposal this week. With some exceptions, most people expressed a liking for it.

"The Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority (SREDA) Inc. is very excited about the impact that the latest River Landing vision will have on our economy and commends Lake Placid Investments for taking an interest in improving the design of our downtown core," SREDA spokesperson Dara Hrytzak wrote.

"The River Landing is one of the many features that will contribute to the attraction

and overall enhancement of the region. This project is a significant bonus to Saskatoon's landscape and economy, and SREDA looks forward to watching the riverbank evolve through the next phases."

From Saskatoon to Calgary, Wakaw to Dubai, responses flooded in after we asked for thoughts on the River Landing proposal. While all responses can be seen in the Sound Off! section of our website -- www.thestarphoenix.com -- here's a sampling:

"This development is great news and exactly what Saskatoon needs more of. It's upscale and will certainly add some sophistication to the downtown. More of these kinds of projects will help people want to stay in this city and entice others to move here, creating a more diverse and exciting place to live. I'm glad to see this project and hope the gradual attitude shift towards pro-development and embracing opportunities continues."

-- Colin

"Oh yay. More condos. That is all that we need with the housing shortage in Saskatoon now!"

-- Marie

"Looks beautiful: It's a sleek, modern showpiece for the developing jewel in the centre of the city. For all the false starts, we should jump on the opportunity. Not only that, but it's currently our only option."

-- James

"A wonderful design. Has a creative blending of natural rock, stone and water features. A permanent winter skating rink is better than pouring water on the grass at Kinsmen Park every winter. Very modern design reflecting most recent style of modern European architecture. Affordable housing goes where it makes sense: As part of residential areas, not here."

-- Karl

"I think it's a great idea, but is Saskatoon ready for something like this? Don't get me wrong, Saskatoon is not behind the times. It just seems that something of this nature is a little too big for Saskatoon. But it would also be a beautiful site downtown."

-- Barry

"Great view from the hotel: Homeless smokers hanging out in front of the Salvation Hostel; look close and you might get to watch a mugging in the hood or a free-food hand-out day in Victoria Park. Wonderful entertainment. Overlooking homes that are worth \$50,000 max, now selling for \$350,000. Thanks Alberta."

-- Murray

"This is excellent. Let's hope citizens against everything don't get in the way."

-- Steve

"We should have an IMAX theatre or a science centre, but I do not think that we should have low-income housing downtown. I also agree that the market should be filled with local vendors as well. I am not sure how often I will go to the riverfront, as it does not seem particularly family friendly, but I do say to go ahead with this plan

so you can then concentrate on other parts of the city that need attention."

-- Lindsay

"Finally a real condo building with class and style. To make Saskatoon a recognizable, well-known, cosmopolitan city, it needs some great architecture and high-end dwellings like this. This can only boost Saskatoon."

-- Kelly

"I really thought this was supposed to be a place designed for the whole community. Expensive hotel, condo and shops doesn't really seem to go with that. I mean, how much of our city is really going to use this?"

-- Cathy

"Unfortunately, some people can't be satisfied no matter what. This prime real estate is not the solution to our affordable housing problem. Why would a private developer pay \$4.5 million for a parcel of land to develop an affordable housing project?"

-- Mike

"This will bring more jobs, more tax revenue, make our city look more modern and maybe encourage even more investment in our downtown. The fact that the project is upscale is a positive, not a negative. Low-cost housing is a must for Saskatoon, but in a different location. I myself could never afford to live downtown, but that shouldn't stop other people that want to."

-- Ruslan

"I was actually hoping for some kind of interactive theme park, like West Edmonton Mall; something fun and entertaining, something we could all spend our money on, especially with the long, cold winters here. Just more condos for the elite. Boring!"

-- Brenda

"We lost the hockey rink to the nether regions. We lost the casino to the boonies. Let's not lose this amazing project."

-- Norm

"As hard as some people try to keep Saskatoon the little town on the prairie, I congratulate those with the vision and energy to continue the growth and development of the city into a booming cosmopolitan."

-- Craig

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