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## Former downtown legion to become office space

News Aug 11, 2017 01:13 by [Bill Jackson](#) (</waterlooregion-author/bill-jackson/4ff444c2-1fe3-4302-a8eb-27f835dd3917/>) [✉ \(mailto:bjackson@kitchenerpost.ca\)](mailto:bjackson@kitchenerpost.ca) Kitchener Post



*A rendering of what 48 Ontario St. N might look like when construction is complete. - Voisin Capital / SRM Architects*

City council has approved the sale of the former legion at 48 Ontario St. N. for \$1.55 million, and a developer is proposing to turn it into Class A office space.

Voisin Capital's proposal was highest ranked as part of a competitive bidding process to evaluate proposals based on a number of criteria, including plans to preserve heritage aspects of the building that's currently listed on the Municipal Heritage Register.

The redevelopment proposal calls for a modern, light-filled addition to the building in the location of the existing parking lot, as well as two additional storeys to be added to the current, two-story structure, which includes a full basement.

A glass lobby featuring a green living wall will provide access to 2,000 square feet of ground-floor retail and an elevator serving the upper floors.

In a press release issued shortly after a special council meeting on Friday, the developer said the building is "one of the last opportunities for a large employer looking to locate or expand in downtown Kitchener to occupy a free-standing building with remarkable street presence."

As per procurement practice, the city won't be releasing the details of the other four proposals or the bid amounts.

Frank Voisin, president of Voisin Capital, noted that the property is located in the most amenity-rich area of Waterloo Region, with a municipal parking garage immediately across the street for staff and visitors, and three light rail transit stops within 300 meters.

"The location is second-to-none and we have the same standard for the building," Voisin said.

Constructed in 1910 by the Bell Telephone Company, 48 Ontario St. N. served as a branch of the Royal Canadian Legion from 1944 to 2001, when it was purchased by the city. It's sat vacant ever since.

Though the building was recently contemplated as a potential location for an arts hub, an extensive public consultation process led the city to look elsewhere. Council made the decision to put it on the block earlier this year, with up to half the proceeds going toward the establishment of an arts hub in another location. The other half will be funneled into the Make It Kitchener economic development reserve fund, at least for the time being.

"I'm comfortable with where it is now, but I want to be up from and clear with staff that should things change come budget time, this portion of it is something I may question," said Coun. Scott Davey, during a special council meeting Monday.

A majority of councillors say the redevelopment project will be a boon for the downtown, taxpayers and heritage advocates alike.

"I'm looking forward to seeing the rebirth of this property and I think it will be a valuable addition to the downtown and our greater community," said Coun. Bil Ioannidis.

"I also want to thank the five proponents that came forward with idea and interest in the property," said Mayor Berry Vrbanovic. "I think it speaks volumes about the kinds of things that are happening in our community and the beliefs (held by) the local development community.

"Unfortunately, we can't replicate the property five times and make it available."

It's anticipated that construction will begin within the next 12 months.

Voisin Capital has its roots in repositioning suburban retail assets and is noted for identifying value in overlooked properties and contributing to the revival of the urban landscape.

In recent years, Voisin has managed the redevelopment of more than 600,000 square feet of space, including Catalyst 137 on Glasgow Street that's been touted as the world's largest hardware technology innovation hub.

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