

Price tag rising for park at fort

Friends need to raise another \$1 million

By: Bartley Kives



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Upper Fort Garry

The cost of building a heritage park at the site of Winnipeg's birthplace is now expected to tally \$14.5 million, as the Friends of Upper Fort Garry need to raise at least another \$1 million to decontaminate a former Petro-Canada gas station and complete the purchase and demolition of the Grain Exchange Curling Club.

Within the next two weeks, a former City of Winnipeg office building at 100 Main St. will be demolished to make way for the future park and interpretive centre, with construction slated to begin in earnest in 2010 and be completed by June 1, 2014.

While the Friends, a non-profit charity, have already raised more than \$10 million, the cost of the park is rising due to the expanding scope of a project originally pegged at \$12.5 million and later adjusted up to \$13.5 million, said Jerry Gray, chairman of the organization's new board.

The decontamination of the former Petro-Canada station at Main Street and Broadway will cost about \$300,000, according to the province and Winnipeg environmental firms, while the Friends must also raise funds to complete the \$750,000 purchase of the Grain Exchange Curling Club and demolish the Fort Street structure.

"We have four years to do all this, so it's not a critical thing to do right now, but we have to pay attention to this. These are two major expenses we didn't expect to have in our plan," Gray said.

The Friends of Upper Fort Garry, which spent a year battling the city for the right to purchase two parcels of surplus city land north of Assiniboine Avenue, originally intended to build a heritage park and interpretive centre commemorating fur trade-era Upper Fort Garry solely where the Main Street office building now stands as well as above a Fort Street parking lot once promised to an apartment developer.

A deal signed with the city in 2008 required the Friends to buy the curling club, which sits above part of the fort's former footprint. The province then spent \$1 million this year to purchase the Petro-Canada station on behalf of the Friends.

Petro-Canada, which pegged the value of its Main Street gas station at \$2.35 million, wrote off the remaining \$1.35 million as a donation to the project, company spokeswoman Sneh Seetal said from Calgary.

Petro-Canada is not paying for the environmental remediation, the cost of which will not be known until the Friends determine precisely what form of structure will stand above the former gas station. The province may come through with additional funds if the remediation costs greatly exceed \$300,000, a spokesman for the Doer government added.

"It depends how deep you have to dig. It will be a function of what's going to be on the surface," Gray said.

Architects and designers are still working on the site plans, which should be made public before the end of the year, he added. The general idea calls for a park with exterior elements and an interpretive centre that encloses both artifacts and displays.

Upper Fort Garry was built in 1835 and served as the administrative headquarters for the Red River Settlement before it was dismantled in stages between 1881 and 1888. The site was later used as a lacrosse club, an athletic stadium, the regional headquarters for Imperial Oil, Metro Winnipeg's pre-Unicity headquarters and a city public works building before it was declared surplus in 2006.

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