

Pumping station under glass?

'Finishing touches' on ambitious plan to redevelop one of the city's most historically significant buildings



By: Murray McNeill

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The pumping station was originally built to draw water from the Red River to fight fires.

It appears some white knights have finally been found to breathe new life into one of the East Exchange District's most historically significant but development-challenged buildings — the James Avenue Pumping Station.

Development-industry sources confirmed Monday a consortium consisting of developers Rick Hofer and Bryce Alston, and prominent Winnipeg architecture firm 5468796 Architecture Inc., are working with CentreVenture Development Corporation on a new redevelopment plan for the 110-year-old heritage building.

CentreVenture president and CEO Angela Mathieson confirmed Monday the team is putting "the finishing touches" on a development plan that has been about a year in the making. She wouldn't reveal who is involved in the project, saying that information and other details will be made public July 5, when the matter comes before the city's

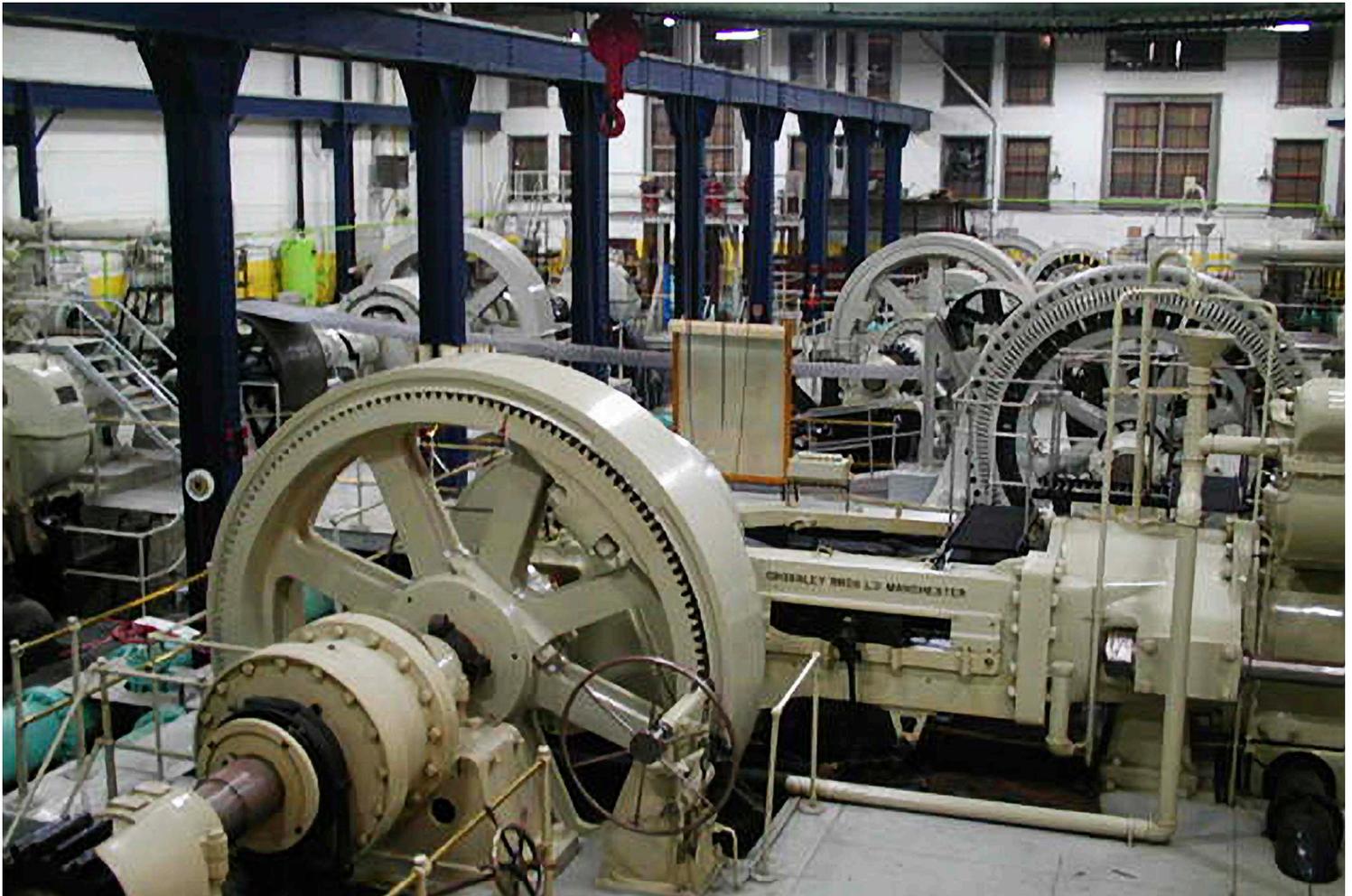
property, heritage and downtown-development committee.

Alston and 5468796 Architecture co-founder Johanna Hurme also refused comment.

Mathieson said the new plan calls for the original building and all of the pumping equipment inside it to be preserved, with new windows and other glass installed so the equipment is visible to both the building's tenants and anyone passing by on the front sidewalk.

It also calls for a new floor and possibly a mezzanine level to be added to the inside of the building, and for new four-storey and six-storey additions to be added on the east and west sides of the structure respectively. CentreVenture owns the building and the parking lot on the west side and has an option to purchase the land on the east side from the city.

Mathieson said the new space inside the building would likely be developed as office space, and the two additions would feature a combination of office, residential and street-level retail space.



Photos by Brent Bellamy / Winnipeg Free Press files

After years of failed attempts to find someone to redevelop the historic James Avenue Pumping Station, it appears a consortium of developers will reveal details of their plans for the 110-year-old building early in July.

Although there have been 13 failed attempts since 2000 to redevelop the pumping station, Mathieson sounded confident this proposal could work. She noted a lot of due diligence has already gone into the planning of it, and the members of the development team have done other heritage-building conversions and have "a very strong track record."

Rick Hofer and his brother Mark, have completed three heritage redevelopment projects — a warehouse building at 315 Pacific Ave. that was converted into office, another warehouse at 230 Princess St. that was converted into an

apartment/retail complex, and the conversion of former Avenue and Hample office buildings on downtown Portage Avenue into a 75-unit apartment complex with main-floor office space.

5468796 Architects also worked with the Hofers on the Avenue building project. The Alston family's Victoria, B.C.,-based construction and development firm — Alston Properties — has redeveloped a number of downtown heritage buildings in Western Canada, including the six-storey former Galpern Building at 165 McDermot Ave., which is being converted into 30 one-bedroom rental apartments and four two-bedroom townhouse units.

Heritage Winnipeg executive director Cindy Tugwell said she's "thrilled" a solution may finally have been found for the long-standing dilemma of how to redevelop the pumping station while still preserving the original building and the equipment inside.

Although she hasn't seen the details, what she's heard sounds intriguing.

"I want to see what it looks like. I think all of us are waiting with baited breath."

She said she's especially pleased the proposal calls for the building and pumping equipment to be preserved, and for passersby to be able to see into the lower level where it's housed.

"I would say it's one of the most important buildings in the Exchange when we talk about the Exchange's growth," she said, noting it was built so the fledgling city could draw water from the nearby Red River to fight downtown fires.

"So you've got an architecturally significant building and you've got, from a social/historical perspective, an immensely important building," she added.

Mathieson said CentreVenture was also seeking city approval to reduce James Avenue from four lanes to three along the block between Waterfront Drive and Amy Street. That will enable it to install new sidewalks, boulevards and trees and make the street more pedestrian-friendly.

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Read more by Murray McNeill.