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## Gritty area going downtown?

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CentreVenture wants to bring more homes, restaurants and businesses to South Point Douglas by expanding the definition of downtown to include the gritty, inner-city neighbourhood.

Before this summer, few Winnipeggers had heard of South Point Douglas, a riverfront patchwork of industrial properties, vacant land and a few leafy residential streets populated by artists and other homeowners who relished the neighbourhood's obscurity.

But a short-lived plan to build a new football stadium placed a spotlight on South Point Douglas, which is officially an industrial area but could be reclassified as a mixed-use neighbourhood next year.

Now, the city's downtown development agency wants to incorporate the neighbourhood into its own plans to revitalize the entire northeast quadrant of downtown, from Main Street through the east side of the Exchange District and alongside Waterfront Drive.

Residents, developers and politicians all see tremendous potential in the South Point Douglas, mainly because of its largely undeveloped waterfront, proximity to downtown and an existing collection of artists' studios.

CentreVenture would love to see developments underway on Waterfront Drive connect with new residential and commercial development in South Point Douglas, following the northeast curve of the Red River.

"It's a logical extension of our focus area right now, which is North Main," said Ross McGowan, CentreVenture's president and CEO. "Why wouldn't we finish what we started?"

Point Douglas Coun. Mike Pagtakhan, the newly appointed chair of city council's downtown development committee, has made the redevelopment of South Point Douglas one of his top priorities.

"South Point Douglas is happening," said Pagtakhan, noting both the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and the Exchange District BIZ have been eyeing expansion into the neighbourhood.

Pagtakhan would like to see more bicycle and pedestrian pathways connect downtown to South Point Douglas, which has enough room to support new residential and commercial developments without displacing its small but fiercely proud existing population.

Displacement was a huge concern for South Point residents when businessman David Asper briefly considered building a new home for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in the area.

The death of that plan had a positive side, as Mayor Sam Katz has said "everyone in Winnipeg" is now aware the neighbourhood exists.

But incorporating South Point Douglas into formal downtown-revitalization plans is not a universally popular idea at city hall. CentreVenture's critics have complained the agency already has too many different areas of focus, given the unusually large size of Winnipeg's downtown.

Regardless of what happens, a city plan to get rid of the neighbourhood's industrial designation will likely go

ahead.

A new street-by-street development plan for the area is expected as soon as 2009, when residential property developers will likely be allowed to go to work in what will likely become a mixed-use neighbourhood.

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