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New parking to go inside historic facade

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One day after Manitoba Hydro backed away from a plan to gut three occupied Exchange District buildings, Winnipeg has concluded a deal to preserve the facades of a vacant historic structure at the edge of Old Market Square.

The 112-year-old King Building at the corner of King Street and Bannatyne Avenue will become an 186-stall parkade with 8,000 square feet of commercial space on the main floor, as the city and building owner Bedford Investments have signed off on a plan that was more than 18 months in the making.

In 2007, the city threatened to expropriate the King Building unless Bedford made immediate improvements to the historic structure, which city inspectors deemed structurally unstable.

Before the end of the year, a preliminary deal was reached to save the red-brick facades on the building's north and east sides as part of a new parkade/commercial structure that would extend south over an empty, Bedford-owned lot.

The city spent \$600,000 reinforcing the building, but the \$7.4-million construction project was placed on hold while Bedford explored the possibility of installing an automated parking

system that would have allowed commercial space to be developed above the street level.

The high-tech parking system, which is common in Asian cities such as Dubai, would have been the first of its kind in Winnipeg.

"We spent close to half a year pursuing a system which would have given us even more than the 186 stalls, as well as providing the opportunity to create some type of occupancy on all levels," Bedford vice-president Ken Reiss said.

But the automated parking system's German manufacturer and American intermediary could not provide a reliable cost estimate, due to currency volatility stemming from last year's economic implosion, Reiss said.

According to the plan now on the table, architectural engineers will use digital technology to document the appearance and precise location of every facet of the King Building's north and east facades, said Barry Thorgrimson, the city's economic development manager.

The building will then be dismantled completely to allow the parkade, ramps and commercial space to be built. The facades will then be replaced, using the images and spatial information recorded earlier, Thorgrimson said.

The job will be the first of its kind in Winnipeg, even though a similar process preserved the facades of the Red River College campus on Princess Street, he added.

The city has provided the project with \$1.5 million in heritage grants (the cash includes the stabilization work) and \$800,000 in potential tax credits, while downtown development agency CentreVenture will contribute another \$500,000. Bedford Investments will finance the rest of the project itself.

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