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Legion up for redevelopment

Legion in North Burnaby suffered financially in wake of changed laws

Janaya Fuller-Evans / Burnaby Now

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The building that houses Legion Branch No. 148 is up for redevelopment, and if it goes through, could still have room for the Heights Legion.

It was the only option for the beleaguered Legion, according to president Dave Taylor, which has suffered financially due to changes to B.C.'s smoking and drinking laws, and increasing property taxes.

The Legion committee sent out a letter of intent to 10 developers about a project that would allow the Legion to stay on Hastings Street, and chose Epta Properties to partner on the project.

Epta Properties submitted a rezoning application to city hall for the project, which would see the current building replaced by a mixed-use four-storey building.

The branch, which was established in 1937, would get the western portion of the new development, according to the application, with space on the ground floor, which it could lease to a commercial tenant, space for its canteen and club on the second floor, and space on the third and fourth floors for its offices.

"I'm hoping the revenue from the rent should carry the cost of our part of the building," Taylor said, adding the Legion is putting up the land as its part of the deal.

The east and west air parcels would essentially be two separate buildings on the same property, he explained.

The proposal includes plans for a patio, attached to the canteen.

The club and canteen would still be accessible via a ground floor front door leading to the second floor, according to Taylor.

Relocating the canteen and club on the second floor would require it be rezoned according to current bylaws, allowing for a liquor license for up to 100 people.

The current liquor primary license at the branch is for up to 425 people.

"What it means is we'll no longer have a beer garden for Hats Off Days, and our chicken barbecue could be hard to hold," Taylor said. "It's going to be a big difference."

Taylor stated last fall that the Legion would not make it another year without a property tax exemption from the city, or some other financial intervention to keep it afloat.

Taylor repeatedly approached city council for full tax exemption for the branch, but the city would only provide an exemption for the Legion's community space, not its canteen, which is considered competition for local bars.

He also approached the provincial and federal governments, but was not able to secure funding or tax exemptions to keep the Legion going.

Membership dropped years ago from between 600 and 700 to just over 400, according to Taylor, but has not continued to drop off since then.

The Legion's property taxes were about \$41,000 after the city's partial tax exemption.

The eastern portion of the development would be composed of ground level businesses, and three storeys of residential units above.

The application is going to public hearing at 7 p.m. on June 26, in council chambers at city hall, 4949 Canada Way.

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