

## Burnaby Legion, developers work out a win-win solution

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You couldn't find more unlikely business partners than 37-year-old Angelo Tsakumis and 65-year-old David Taylor. Mr. Tsakumis, head of development for family firm EPTA Properties, wears the latest fashions and drives a luxury SUV, while Taylor, a retired Teamster and current president of Legion 148 on Hastings Street in Burnaby, prefers T-shirts and baseball caps and drives a Harley.

When the two first met at a public consultation for EPTA's mixed use Montage project – a few blocks from the legion in Burnaby Heights – they hardly saw eye to eye. “Dave was the only guy who opposed the rezoning,” recalls Mr. Tsakumis, as he smiles at Mr. Taylor across what was once the dance floor of the soon-to-be-demolished Legion.

But in the end, it was a partnership between the two that saved the flagging fortunes of the Legion – beset by a declining membership and high property taxes – and offered increased density in an up-and-coming area.

A hybrid mixed-use development project, which breaks ground this month and will be completed in 2015, is an intriguing blend of old and new. The Chris Dikeakos-designed four-storey low-rise will fuse a new purpose-built Legion hall with 28 residential units. The Legion will benefit from much-needed revenue producing ground-floor retail and upper-floor office space, and the neighbourhood will be able to keep the local mom and pop vibe that, combined with its easy access to Vancouver via the Hastings corridor, makes it such a popular area.

As Mr. Taylor looks over the boxes of poppies and various military memorabilia he must sort through before demolition begins, he waxes nostalgic. “I used to run the meat draws here every Friday and Saturday night. But I made it lot of fun, telling jokes and getting everyone in a good mood,” he says.

“This building was started by a handful of veterans in 1936, but back then it was just an old shack,” he says. Then in the mid-fifties, the five city lots that currently comprise the existing building and parking lot were fused into a single entity with a large extension. But like so much of the old building stock in the area, maintenance costs, along with higher taxes, strained the resources of the Legion. Anti-smoking laws introduced after 2000 also significantly reduced membership.

For eight years, Mr. Taylor petitioned bureaucrats at all levels of government to help save the Burnaby Heights Legion, but to no avail. Gradually he came to realize the only way to survive was to put out a call for proposals from developers.

“I was at a meeting in late 2011 with Burnaby Mayor Derrick Corrigan,” says Mr. Tsakumis, “when he mentioned that I might want to have a chat with the local Legion president.”

When the two met, Mr. Tsakumis remembered Mr. Taylor immediately as the very vocal opponent of his Montage development.

But a friendship soon formed between the two and over lunch at a local café they sat down and hashed out the details.

“I just listened to what Dave said the Legion needed and worked from there,” Mr. Tsakumis says. The key issues were that the Legion wanted to maintain its independence, its address and prominent Hastings Street frontage. It also needed revenue-generating space.

The design reflects the nature of the conjoined enterprises – housed in a single building with a fire wall separation and separate air-space parcelling – with EPTA managing the 28 units and ground-floor retail on its western end, and the legion occupying a third of the space on the eastern flank.

A separate entrance for the Legion’s retail and office space will feature a private elevator, while a single underground parking garage for all tenants will streamline usage and maximize floor space for retail and residential.

Dikeakos’s design for the Legion includes large-scale vertical and horizontal glazing to maximize north-facing light and create a sense of openness to the Hastings corridor and surrounding neighbourhood. Red brick that delineates the glazing and a flat white roof make reference to the proud Canadian tradition of the Legion.

The housing units feature deep, recessed balconies that create textural variation and differentiate the residential units from the flatter-planed commercial aesthetic of the Legion area. Green roofing along the ledge of the ground-floor retail engages the streetscape and embraces the surrounding community.

“I hate to see this old place come down,” says Mr. Taylor, as he sifts through old Legion bric-a-brac, signage and retro-treasures, some of which will be saved and reincorporated into the new building. “It’s so full of memories.”

But he also hopes new members will be attracted to the Legion, which now competes for clientele with the likes of Cactus Club and Earls as well as the burgeoning Burnaby Heights food and beverage scene.

“We’ve even had a few old-timers inquire about the possibility of buying into the new building,” he says.

Mr. Tsukamis says he is delighted to be able to contribute to the “reinvigoration of a neighbourhood institution.”

In fact, the mixed-use model EPTA has developed has prompted interest from other Legions in B.C., which also hope that a new take on an old tradition will help keep them alive.

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