

Developer to build 500 rental units in south Winnipeg

By: [Joshua Frey-Sam](#): 4:28 PM CST Friday, Nov. 25, 2022

A multi-use giant is on its way to the heart of Bridgwater.

Winnipeg's most rapidly growing community will soon rest in the shadow of the EpiCentre, a six-building, six-to-eight-storey development worth \$200 million, at the corner of Bison Drive and Centre Street.

The sprawling project consists of three sites of two adjoining buildings, which will total 500 apartments and upwards of 30,000 square feet of commercial space on the main levels. One of the development's biggest draws could be that about 50 suites will be affordable, set at a fixed rate of 30 per cent of the tenant's income, while 15 per cent of units will be universally accessible.



The EpiCentre is a six-building, six-to-eight-storey development worth \$200 million, at the corner of Bison Drive and Centre Street. (Supplied)

While the first — and largest — building (which broke ground in October) is expected to be ready by September 2024, Tim Comack, VP of Ventura Developments, said he will aim to have the second and third sites built every two years after that. In all, he anticipates the EpiCentre will be fully functional in 2030.

“I can tell you — categorically — we need more housing,” Comack told the *Free Press* at the project’s unveiling on Friday. “The cost of housing has gone through the roof and the only way to change that dynamic is to increase the supply and availability to bring the prices back down.

“When this is done, you’re gonna have thousands of people living above a bunch of commercial. I joked that this is Winnipeg’s White Avenue (also known as 82 Avenue in Edmonton) or it’s our next Corydon. From the perspective of what this can be ... it really can be one of the few places in Winnipeg that you can live, work and play, and, literally, not own a car, and have that urban lifestyle, ironically, out in (the suburbs).”

The rental units will range from studio to three bedrooms in size, with one-bedrooms coming in at 675 square feet. Comack said Ventura will be “choosy” as to who fills the commercial space, as offices will be welcome, but limited. He explained his vision of a restaurant, some retail stores and a pub.

A 2021 Census shows Winnipeg’s population grew by 44,363 people since 2016. The Waverley West area boasts the biggest increase (11,000) during that time, with many immigrant families choosing to lay roots in the south end of the city. The rising cost of housing and interest rates have, presumably, made life tougher on those new families and the city’s existing prospective first home owners, however, leaving affordable options near the top of much conversation.

Comack explained that while the plan is for 10 per cent of the first two buildings to offer affordable units, the other four blocks could feature more.

“If programs exist as we progress through the project, we will absolutely grab onto those opportunities and expand on that. As the market’s a bit fluid, we will be able to make decisions as we move along,” he said.

Comack was joined by Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson and Coun. Janice Lukes at the unveiling in Bridgwater, where each expressed overwhelming support for the massive project.

“Obviously we’re going to be working together with the federal government, other levels of government toward building more affordable housing in Manitoba, but also working with the private sector,” said Stefanson of the importance of the development’s affordable options. “What’s really exciting about this initiative has been taken by the private sector themselves. We haven’t required them to do anything, they’re taking this initiative on themselves.

“This is a huge development ... and it’s very exciting for the future, the economic opportunities around this are huge for Manitoba.”

The site’s amenities are in abundance, as tenants will have access to indoor and outdoor dog parks, fitness centres, playgrounds for children and car and bike share programs, to name a few. According to Lukes, the development falls in line with the long-term vision of the area.

“The concept of the whole Waverley West area has been developed around Centre Street,” Lukes said. “The gentlemen that were the original planners sat me down and made me promise and swear that I would not derail the project, that I’d keep on track with what the vision was. So we have Centre Street, we knew eventually, over time, products like this would come.



City coun. Janice Lukes (from left), Tim Comack, Ventura Developments VP and Premier Heather Stefanson check out plans for the proposed development. (Ruth Bonneville / Winnipeg Free Press)

“The area was projected to develop over a 25-year period. I think we’re at year 20 and all the lots are sold. Virtually everything is sold here, other than the new development at Bison Run and Prairie Pointe. So this is what was planned, this was the intent and it’s happening at every single lot.”

Lukes added that nearly all the new developments in the Waverley West area that are a private investment are following a similar formula of multi-use with some affordable options that reside on top of commercial space. She noted how older apartment blocks lack three-bedroom suites, but that those are now common in newer developments, as developers cater to the families moving to Winnipeg.

“It’s really important to have the mix of affordability and the different price points,” she said. We have a lot of new Canadians coming, we have lots of families and lots of kids.”

While Comack wants to welcome tenants from all walks of life, he said the younger generation will be vital to his building, adding the site’s amenities “zero in on a younger, active lifestyle.”

“The amenities that we’re providing in buildings one and two were chosen for that young guy, gal, couple that got their first dog — they want to move into an apartment, there’s a fitness facility so they can stay fit, there’s a co-working space so they can do work ... it’s very attractive to them,” he said.

“But also, some of the stuff that we’re focusing on the future amenities: party room, entertainment space ... it does really zero in on the young people, and retaining young people is going to be vital to this. But the housing methodology in our mix, it’s strategically that we’re targeting new Canadians, people with disabilities, people looking for affordable housing ... and then the cohort of downsizers, empty-nesters, divorcees, professionals — they fit in the middle.”