

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2006

SPORTSWORLD CROSSING



ARTIST'S RENDERING FOR THE RECORD

This is an artist's rendering of SportsWorld Crossing, the proposed redevelopment of the SportsWorld site in south Kitchener. Stores and restaurants along King Street East and SportsWorld Drive will face the street. The hockey stick-shaped buildings will contain stores at ground level facing a green space in the centre of the site and second-floor offices that will have entrances behind the buildings. Larger office buildings will be constructed along Highway 8. No. 1 marks the existing arena at the site. No. 2 is the existing Moose Winooski's restaurant. No. 3 is another existing restaurant, The Outback.

\$100M project will convert SportsWorld property into a corporate and retail oasis

BY RON DERUYTER
RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER

The former SportsWorld property in Kitchener will be turned into a large office and retail development that includes a hotel and a park area that harkens back to the site's roots as an amusement park.

The development, called SportsWorld Crossing, will contain 500,000 square feet of space, including 200,000 square feet of retail space and 250,000 square feet of office space.

The project, worth up to \$100 million, will be completed in three phases.

Crews are demolishing what's left of the amusement park and prepar-

ing the site so that construction of the first phase — buildings containing shops on the first floor and offices on the second floor — can start in March. The first tenants are scheduled to move in by Christmas of next year.

The entire project should be finished in three years, said Mark Kindrachuk, president of Intermarket Group, which is overseeing development for GPM Managed Investments, the Toronto firm that bought the 12-hectare site a year ago after SportsWorld filed for court protection from its creditors.

"It took us a year to do the background. Now we are ready to go to the next step," he said.

Intermarket has just started pitching the project to prospective tenants. No one has signed up yet, but interest is strong, Kindrachuk said.

The property is ideally situated, he said. It's in the centre of Waterloo Region, close to Highway 401, which appeals to office users whose employees live across southern Ontario, and near a golf course and growing subdivision of high-end homes.

"It's a strategic location," he said. "That's what drew us here."

SEE CROSSING: PAGE E2



PHILIP WALKER, RECORD STAFF

Mark Kindrachuk of the Intermarket Group describes the redevelopment plan for the former SportsWorld site in Kitchener as the rock climbing centre is taken down behind him. Kindrachuk says Intermarket is negotiating with McDonald's on a plan to move the restaurant so a "gateway" building can be constructed at King Street East and SportsWorld Drive.

Crossing: Project has received thumbs up from area residents

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1

There won't be any big box stores in SportsWorld Crossing. The stores will be 1,000 to 10,000 square feet in size and focus on lifestyle products and fashion.

Stores along King Street and SportsWorld Drive will face the street. Stores on the ground floor of buildings further back on the site will face the centre of the project. Offices above those stores will have entrances behind the buildings.

Office buildings of up to six storeys are planned along Highway 8. Parking for the employees will be provided in a multi-level garage in front of the twin-pad arena already on the site.

A hotel of 100 to 125 rooms is planned for the final phase of the project. It likely will be situated beside Highway 8 or closer to King Street.

Two roads — one for office users and one for retail customers — will cut through the development. Intermarket hopes that one of the roads, an extension of Gateway Park Drive, will be used for bus service.

The existing SportsWorld tenants — Moose Winooski's, Outback Steakhouse, McDonald's restaurant, and the

games arcade — will remain on the site. In fact, the plans call for Moose Winooski's and the adjoining arcade to expand.

Kindrachuk said Intermarket is negotiating with McDonald's regarding a plan to move the restaurant closer to Outback Steakhouse so a "gateway" building can be constructed at King Street and SportsWorld Drive.

A walkway traversing the site will direct pedestrians, including office employees, to the project's focal point, green space at the centre of the site.

The area used to be the picnic grounds at SportsWorld. Intermarket is keeping the trees, as well as the pond and waterfall, and plans to develop a children's playground, fire pit and multi-use area that could include features such as a water-spray pad.

"The thing we are really focusing on is quality of life," said Kindrachuk. "You will see a lot of green space and a focus on pedestrian walkways."

The project has received thumbs up from area residents who feared the site would fill up with big box stores like the ones found on Gateway Park Drive.

"This is an exciting project," said

Bob McColl, an executive member of the Pine Grove Community Association. "We need more of this type of thinking from our developers."

McColl said residents were pleased Kindrachuk talked to them before plans were developed. He also is thrilled that Kindrachuk has made a commitment to try to save an 88-year-old building on King Street that used to house Pine Grove school.

Leslie Hutcheson has an interesting perspective on the project. She was the general manager of SportsWorld from 1988 to 1999 and returned to the post early in 2005 after the park ran into financial difficulty. Today, she coordinates site preparation work and oversees the arena operations.

"I watched a lot of SportsWorld go up and now I'm watching it go down," she said. "I'm excited about the next step. I believe it will be good for the community."

Hutcheson is also pleased Intermarket is retaining the green space at the centre of SportsWorld Crossing.

"I'm happy they are keeping a little bit of the legacy of the original park."

rderuyter@therecord.com