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Vision for KP site, harbour to be unveiled



By Elliot Ferguson, Kingston Whig-Standard
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View of the Kingston Penitentiary from Portsmouth Olympic Harbour. (Amanda Norris/For The Whig-Standard) Abort Checkout Checkin Save Revision Edit

Citizens are to get their first look at the results of a process of figuring out what to do with Portsmouth Olympic Harbour and the former Kingston Penitentiary.

Federal officials and city staff are to reveal the recommended vision for the two sites at a pair of public open houses are scheduled for 4 an 6:30 p.m. Thursday on the press lounge at Portsmouth Olympic Harbour.

The open house is to include details about the master plan heritage designation, business plan and acquisition strategy.

The recommended plan is the result of a year-long series of workshops, public consultations and surveys.

Ever since the prison was closed in 2013, the future of the site has been a hot issue. Its future use was added to an already planned review of Portsmouth Olympic Harbour.

The three properties total about 20.4 hectares, with about one-quarter of it being water.

Included in the visioning exercise are two hectares of city-owned property, the 7.9-hectare harbour owned by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the 10.5-hectare prison site owned by Correctional Service Canada.

The site also includes 1,300 metres of shoreline, 180 metres of breakwater and 2.2 hectares of built-up area.

The former prison site includes 48,000 square metres of floorspace, with about 44,000 square metres of it having heritage designation.

In 2015, Correctional Service Canada announced it planned to dispose of the former prison site. The process would be handled by Canada Lands Company, the federal Crown corporation that spearheaded the visioning exercise along with city staff.

Since the penitentiary's closure, many ideas have been generated locally for the site, including an elite sail training centre or a prison museum similar to the Alcatraz site near San Francisco.

But through the course of last winter, the visioning group worked eight designs down to four final design options. All of them share common characteristics, including a continuous water's-edge promenade, open spaces, a range of uses that include tourism, culture, commercial, office space, retail and residential apartments.

Among the people pushing their own vision for the site is a group of prominent Kingstonians that includes former mayor Harvey Rosen, George Hood, George Jackson, John Curtis and Michael de la Roche, who are promoting the Hatter's Bay project.

That proposal, which has not received city endorsement, would include Canada's first sailing centre of excellence, as well as a wind research facility, prison museum, condominium development, a hotel similar to the Liberty Hotel in Boston, which retained much of the historic structure of the former Suffolk County Jail, along with shops and outdoor public space.

To back up Hatter's Bay, the group said last year that it had secured \$300 million in financing from the Bank of Nova Scotia.

"Our intention is to generate long-term and ongoing local benefits, rather than a one-time sale to fill federal coffers," Rosen wrote in the Whig-Standard earlier this month. "Our proposal brings decades of jobs and tourists to the community at no cost to the taxpayer, providing public access to the waterfront, restricting building heights, and sensitively reflecting our heritage."

– with files from Postmedia Network

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