

University of Windsor to buy Windsor Star building

By Dave Hall, The Windsor Star

November 23, 2011 5:57 PM



University of Windsor president Dr. Alan Wildeman confirms that the University of Windsor will buy the Star building - the newspaper's home since 1923. The announcement was made by Dr.

Wildeman at the Caboto Club on November 23, 2011.

Photograph by: Jason Kryk, The Windsor Star

WINDSOR, Ont. -- Calling it a decision that will transform the University of Windsor and the city's downtown core, school president Alan Wildeman said Wednesday the U of W plans to move into the Windsor Star building and the former armouries.

The Star in turn will move into the Palace Theatre building at the corner of Ouellette and University avenues.

"The purchase of the Windsor Star property is the first step in the university's plan to transform the landscape of our campus to more firmly anchor our commitment to being a student-centred university," said Wildeman.

Wildeman said the university will move its school of social work and the Centre for Executive and Professional Development into the newspaper building at Ferry and Pitt streets.

In addition, the school's music, visual arts and film production programs will be moved into the former armouries on University Avenue East.

Wildeman said the development ball "is now in the Star's court. When they're ready to vacate their property, we can start renovating it for our use."

David Mady of Mady Development Corp., which owns the Palace complex, said he still had some tenancy issues to deal with and once they're sorted out, construction of The Star's new premises should take eight months.

"I can't say right now when we would begin but obviously we'd like to start as soon as possible," said Mady, whose father developed the theatre complex 25 years ago. "It's exciting to be part of the redevelopment of a building my father built more than two decades ago."

Mady's contract division will handle the renovations and retain ownership of the theatre building with The Star becoming a tenant.

The Star's newsroom, advertising department, business office, reader sales department and information technology department will be housed in 25,000 square feet above the current two floors of retail.

"It was extremely important to us to make a strong statement about staying downtown and I think this project will do that," said Marty Beneteau, The Star's publisher and

editor-in-chief. “Along with everything else in the core, this has the potential to be an added catalyst for more growth.”

Beneteau said The Star has been hidden in plain view one block off Ouellette Avenue for many decades, but in relocating to a high-profile intersection “it will be exciting for all of us.

“We have a chance to create glass where there are now solid walls and that will make us more accessible to the general public,” said Beneteau. “There will be a greater opportunity to interact with the public as well as with the hundreds of students who will be moving into the core.”

Adding the university departments to a downtown core which also includes St. Clair College’s Centre for the Arts and its media program, a new aquatic centre, Caesars Windsor and a combined Art Gallery of Windsor and Windsor Public Library has the potential to revitalize the downtown core, said Mayor Eddie Francis.

“The kind of traffic this will generate has the potential to sustain retail and residential development,” said Francis, “It’s been close to two years in the making and I’m very excited that the university has given it the green light.”

While admitting that parking could be a challenge with the addition of more than 1,000 students, faculty and staff to the core, Francis said: “I’d rather have a parking dilemma than no activity downtown at all.”

The project was made possible when the city donated the armouries to the university and also contributed \$10 million toward the development and the province contributed \$15 million.

Wildeman declined to disclose how much the university will pay for the Star building, saying it would be made public once the deal closes.

“There are still some legal issues to clear up and we’re working through them,” said Wildeman.

It’s expected that the university will also take over the former bus depot site, but Wildeman said that final details are still to be worked out.

“We do see that as an opportunity to add to our capacity downtown,” said Wildeman.

Wildeman said that architectural drawings for the university’s two new buildings would be released in the coming months.