

Mayor says Star-University deal just the beginning of downtown transformation

By Beatrice Fantoni, The Windsor Star

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David Mady, left, president of Mady Development Corp. meets with Marty Beneteau, Windsor Star publisher and editor-in-chief in front of The Palace at 300 Ouellette Avenue Wednesday November 23, 2011. The Palace theatre will be transformed into an ultra-modern office complex for The Star.

Photograph by: Nick Brancaccio, The Windsor Star

WINDSOR, Ont. -- With the official announcement that the university will open a satellite campus downtown and The Windsor Star will move its newsroom, Mayor Eddie Francis said the city is working on more plans to build on the current stream of downtown revitalization projects.

“Every time a piece falls into place, it opens up an opportunity for another piece to fall into place,” Francis said.

He said the city is “working on a couple of things that build on these announcements” but he could not disclose any further details.

The satellite campus, which will serve more than 1,000 students, falls into place alongside the St. Clair Centre for the Arts, the planned aquatic centre, the Caesars expansion and even the new library, all of which give Windsorites a variety of activities within a walkable distance, Francis said.

“Business will follow,” he said, adding that the influx of students will increase daytime activity and add permanent residents in the city centre.

Francis said the downtown core is evolving since the 1990s, when it was composed primarily of “kiddie bars.” Francis said.

Jennifer Jones, the chairwoman of the Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said the university’s move is “vital” to the transformation of the downtown core.

“We’ve been plagued by a sagging economy. We haven’t had the necessary confidence from companies to make that move,” Jones said, referring to the reluctance of businesses and other organizations to open up shop in the city centre.

Now, with the prospect of more than 1,000 university students, as well as faculty, milling around the armouries and Windsor Star buildings, demand for housing will go up, Jones said, and public transit might even see increased ridership.

“It will be a boon for restaurants,” she added.

Virginia Cosco-Pizzuti, who chairs the Downtown Windsor Business Improvement Association, said the two moves will change the downtown dynamic.

“This is our opportunity,” Cosco-Pizzuti said.

She alluded to cities such as Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge where colleges and universities opened up in the core, bringing students and staff with them.

St. Clair College has already helped with this in Windsor, she said.

As well, Cosco-Pizzuti said, The Star's choice to stay downtown instead of moving out to a suburban location shows that the downtown is a place where people want to conduct business.

While the downtown has traditionally been reticent to change, she said, these two major changes will change the dynamic in "a great way."

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