

City heritage board impressed with idea for restaurant

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Left to Right: Stephen Kopp, Monica Adair, and Morgan Lanigan are redesigning a historic building on 45 Grannan St.
Photo: Colby Rice/Telegraph-Journal

Local architecture firm Acre Architects and entrepreneur Jakob Lutes are one step closer to seeing their idea for a new Uptown restaurant in Saint John come together. The city's heritage development board approved the overall concept for the project Wednesday.

Monica Adair, a partner with Acre Architects, said any project her firm takes on involves building a new identity in the city – but in a way that also celebrates the rich history of Saint John.

“We try to take the existing building and root our projects in a sense of place, but then also ask what’s a new and fresh way of using them,” Adair said. “In terms of the heritage aspect, we’ve rooted ourselves in place but we’re also thinking about moving forward,” Adair said. “We are really lucky to have heritage-stock buildings to work with.”

Adair said her firm picks its projects carefully, and works with clients interested in celebrating the character of the city in a way that injects new life into the urban landscape.

“This project reflects that very much I think, and this is our commitment to creating something that has meaning and purpose.”

Bob Boyce, chairman of the heritage board, confirmed the project is one step closer to getting fully underway.

“I think we approved the overall concept in terms of what was being proposed,” Boyce said. “It’s just the detail and the specific material being used for the windows that the board wanted time to consider, simply because (the proposal) is a departure from past policy and the standards that have been applied for a long time,” Boyce said.

The board wanted to consider the implications for the entire conservation area first, giving them more time to deal with the specifics of Acre’s proposal two weeks before the next heritage board meeting.

The building, located at 45 Grannan Lane at the corner of Germain Street, is located in the Trinity Royal Heritage Conservation Area. Built in 1877 and known as the Patterson building, it has been home to a number of businesses over the years including The Singer Manufacturing Company in the 1930s and 40s, and Patterson’s Radio Shop/Patterson Ltd. Home Appliances from 1932 and into the 1980s.

“It’s always nice to see economic activity within the uptown area, specifically within the conservation area,” Boyce said. “These buildings, if they are to survive for generations, need to be used. If somebody has the enthusiasm, ideas, and the money to take an underused space like that and open it up and add some life to uptown, that’s great.”

Prospective chef-owner Jakob Lutes is currently the manager of the Liquid Gold Tasting Bar in Saint John, and has been planning the layout of the new restaurant for about a year and a half. He’s hoping to open the doors sometime between October and November. The name for his project: Port City Royal.

Diners can expect cuisine that Lutes has coined ‘new east coast’.

“The idea is to take the cultural history of the area as it pertains to food and make it relevant for today,” Lutes said.

He said it's akin to the idea of taking the past and the future and "mashing it all up together."

Lutes has been living in Saint John since November 2012 after spending time working in Ottawa and in Algonquin Park, where he was the executive chef at Bartlett Lodge.

Lutes said although he's not an architect, "I like aesthetics."

"I think it's important because I'm designing the restaurant to be a part of Saint John," Lutes said. "I came to Saint John because of its greatness and because of its historical character. How many places do you see that look like (this)? It's important to me."

Ross Harris, proprietor of Loyalist City Coins on Germain Street right across from the Patterson building, said he's supportive of the project.

"Any business that draws people uptown is going to help everybody," Harris said.

Anne McShane, owner of the Feel Good Store in the same building as the heritage project, said she'd also be happy to see a new restaurant in the area – particularly within the building itself.

"It's a space that traditionally hasn't been well utilized so it's wonderful to see that developed into a great usable space," McShane said. She also said that although she's not traditionally a big fan of heritage projects, she likes the direction the city's heritage board is moving in.

"They've got a great group of progressive heads in there, so I've got great faith in them," McShane said. "Bob Boyce, I feel is one of the most progressive voices on the heritage committee we've seen in years."

"On the flip side, Acre Collective is doing the design work for the restaurant downstairs, and (chief technologist) Morgan Lanigan is involved with that. He's a firecracker, so I have no fears at all those two groups will find consensus because they are smart thinkers and both very progressive."