

Plan in place for downtown Retail development plan moving forward on Main Street

By Scott Mitchell/Editor
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Editor's Note: It was originally reported that the development was slated for the former site of the Old Hotel, which was erroneous. The OPUS development is being built across the street at 105 Main Street NW. The Echo apologizes for the error.

Despite concerns over parking and the lack of a residential component, it looks like a vacant downtown site will be redeveloped as early as this year.

After sitting as a vacant lot for over two years, the site at Main Street and Centre Avenue has been approved as a one-story retail development that will house retail shops and medical professionals.

The approval came earlier this year in a roundabout way after Municipal Planning Commission (MPC) rejected the development permit because it wasn't a mixed-use residential/commercial plan, as well as a parking variance that was short nine stalls.

The developer, OPUS Corporation, submitted an appeal to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board after MPC's April 7 ruling.

The appeal board ruled in favour of OPUS in May and the development permit was granted.

"It was a pretty unanimous against," said Ald. Fred Burley, who sits on MPC. "It's not that it's going to hurt the downtown, it just wasn't what we had planned to be there in the future."

Ald. Glenda Alexander, who sits on the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board, said she didn't agree with it as an alderman, but the citizens who sit on the board just wanted to see something built on the vacant lot.

"When it came right down to it, the board's decision was, 'let's waver a little bit just to get some development and get that block filled in,' she said. "I think we're all tired of seeing that empty lot, aren't we?"

OPUS submitted the development permit last year and will now have to secure a building permit in order to break ground.

They expect to break ground in six to eight weeks.

"This will be a great development for the community of Airdrie, as it is growing in population and the need for amenities we have proposed is essential to Airdrie's plan for growth," Hannes Kovac, president and CEO of OPUS Corporation said in a press release. "Not only does the project meet the downtown Airdrie city plan and the city's vision, but it will spark the revitalization of the area and we are excited to attract retailers to this landmark development."

Ald. Murray Buchanan wanted to see a mixed-use development, instead of just retail.

"I think you need the density to go with the retail," he said. "You need either more offices or more people living in that area to support it."

Sean Makowecky, a planner with the City of Airdrie, said the development will not go back to council for final approval and all that is left is a few minor legal details.

"It is a one level building that has a retail component to it, as well as a medical component to it," Makowecky said. "My understanding is that it's more of a diagnostic clinic."

"We think it will be a good addition to the downtown. It's very pedestrian oriented and I know they've done some nice architectural features on the building itself."

He added that the city needed to be realistic in today's market.

"There are market realities that we, as a city, can't ask for residential if it's not realistic for it to happen on the site," Makowecky said.

For more information on OPUS go to opuscorp.ca.

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