

## Ottawa antes up for CenterBeam Place project

The federal government has agreed to contribute up to \$542,248 toward the rehabilitation of six heritage buildings that are part of the CenterBeam Place office complex uptown.

Saint John MP Paul Zed made the announcement Friday morning on behalf of Minister of Environment and Minister responsible for Parks Canada Stéphane Dion.

"These buildings have contributed in a very real way to the economic prosperity and the sustainability of our community. They were the cornerstone in the development of old Saint John and I believe "... these are the cornerstone of the development of new Saint John," he told about 60 people gathered in the lobby of CentreBeam at 14 King St.

The funding will be provided through the Commercial Heritage Properties Incentive Fund (CHPIF), which was established in 2003 to encourage taxable corporations to conserve their historic buildings and put them to new commercial uses.

Commercial Properties Ltd. is rehabilitating the six buildings, located in the Trinity Royal District. The Irving-owned company will lease office space on the upper floors and continue to lease retail space at ground level.

Mr. Zed commended company president John Irving and his father, Jack Irving, for their vision, leadership and commitment to the project.

"They're breathing life into these fine old buildings in a way that will create employment, it will foster the renewal of Saint John, it will enhance the vitality of the city, it will encourage growth, it will add economic security to the uptown core" and increase the tax base.

John Irving said the federal funding will go toward Phase 1 of the project, which is close to completion. "It's going to be wonderful when people are going to be working on floors that have been empty for 50 years," he told reporters after the press conference.

Phase 2 will start "soon" and be done by next Christmas, he said, noting the company plans to submit another application under the heritage fund on Monday.

The rehabilitation project encompasses an entire city block, four floors and nearly 90,000 square feet. Interior renovations have included major structural, mechanical and electrical upgrades, leaving original brick walls and wooden ceiling beams exposed.

Mr. Irving thanked Parks Canada staff for their invaluable advice on how to restore the buildings, preserving all of their important architectural character. He also thanked local architect Tom Johnson for his "guidance, creativity and insight" as well as the hundreds of local craftsmen and artisans who have worked on the project over the past 18 months for creating "truly magnificent, outstanding work."

And he thanked his father for making it all possible. "My father has always believed in the importance of the downtown core of cities, particularly in Saint John," he said.

The six buildings were originally occupied by a bank, two dry goods businesses, a hardware store and a variety of mercantile businesses.

They are significant as a collection of Italianate and Second Empire style commercial buildings, all built between 1877 and 1881 after two-thirds of the city was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1877.

CHPIF is a \$30-million national program launched by the federal government in November 2003 as part of the Historic Places Initiative - a federal, provincial and territorial partnership to preserve Canada's built heritage.

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