



N.F., Ont., Expands Proposed Civic Center

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By: James Fink

A sluggish economy has given developers of the planned Niagara Falls Convention and Civic Centre a surprise: a larger-than-anticipated building.

When bids for the \$100 million project came in about 20 percent less than expected, the building's driving forces decided to add nearly 40,000 square feet to the floor plan.

The center is considered a linchpin in the continued growth of the hospitality industry in the Niagara Region and Southern Ontario. It will be the first-ever formal convention center in Niagara Falls, Ont.

"We were extraordinarily fortunate," said Kerry Painter, Niagara Falls Convention & Civic Centre president and general manager. "The slow economy, for us, meant a remarkable time to go to out to bid. We were able to get more building than we originally planned for."

Bids hit the Canadian construction industry in January. They were released at a time when the industry was witnessing its biggest slowdown in more than a decade.

Construction is expected to start in May and the building is slated to host its first event in May 2011.

The building is located on Stanley Avenue, not far from Marineland amusement park and Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort. It was scheduled to be 250,000 square feet, including a 100,000-square-foot meeting hall.

Thanks to some better-than-expected bids, however, Painter said the floor plan was increased to 288,000 square feet. Some of the extra space will remain unfinished for future use, but at least 4,000 square feet will be developed into a private function and pre-event meeting room, she said.



The room will be located to the right of the building's main atrium/lobby and will overlook Stanley Avenue.

“Having a slightly larger lobby and the extra meeting room will be a big selling tool,” Painter said.

Niagara Falls Mayor Ted Salci, meanwhile, said he was pleased on two counts – first, that the bids were less than expected and second, that the convention center is being expanded before the first construction shovel goes into the ground.

“It means greater potential for Niagara Falls,” Salci said. “It also validates what we are doing.”

A convention center is considered one of the few missing pieces in Niagara Falls' hospitality portfolio.

The center is expected to attract more than 514,000 people to Niagara Falls, Ont., on an annual basis, while creating \$93 million in new tourism-related spending in the city each year.

Directly and indirectly, the center is anticipated to create 1,000 new jobs in Niagara Falls.

Painter said the Niagara Falls Convention and Civic Centre already is holding 200 meeting dates for future bookings, a pace that is slightly ahead of the original schedule.

The potential bookings range from meetings for Ontario-based organizations to several private functions that each would attract between 9,000 and 10,000 people to the venue.

“I know we are seeing a lot of economic gloom and doom, yet looking at our potential bookings, it seems to me that a lot of people are sensing some sort of economic comeback to take place sooner rather than later,” Painter said.