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Public Works makes land bid

Provincially-owned property 'has a huge amount of potential,' councillor says

By Patrick Dare, The Ottawa Citizen January 27, 2009



The federal government has reportedly put in a bid with the province for 30 acres at 530 Tremblay Rd. One Ottawa architect says the site, just south of the Queensway at the St. Laurent exit, is a logical location for more intense urban development and is 'a huge opportunity to do the right thing.'

Photograph by: Ontario Realty Corporation image, The Ottawa Citizen

OTTAWA — The federal government has bid on 30 acres owned by the Ontario government at 530 Tremblay Rd., raising hopes that it will use the land to build a major new employment hub in Ottawa.

Public Works and Government Services Canada is not saying much about the transaction except to

confirm that the government has made a bid for the property, which is at the southwest corner of the intersection of St. Laurent Boulevard and Tremblay Road.

The site is considered a prime location because it is just south of the Queensway at the St. Laurent exit and is only five kilometres from downtown. The St. Laurent Shopping Centre, just north of the Queensway, is beside a transit station.

Public Works won't confirm the big price, but Councillor Peter Hume, the city councillor who represents the area, says he understands the price is \$24 million.

Mr. Hume, chairman of the planning committee, said the site is a tremendous opportunity for the federal government to improve on its weak record for constructing attractive developments in the capital. He said the federal government has done some wonderful national cultural buildings in the capital region, but that its office buildings have been embarrassingly bad in design and function, looking as if they had been slapped together.

"It's a huge piece of property. It has a huge amount of potential," said Mr. Hume. "This takes a commitment to leadership from the federal government that they haven't to this date shown. Traditionally, the federal government builds a box."

Ottawa architect Barry Padolsky said the site is a logical place for more intense urban development that links into the city's transit system. Typically, such developments include buildings of some height.

"It's a huge opportunity to do the right thing," said Mr. Padolsky, noting that the city's official plan calls for more building along transportation corridors such as this one.

Mr. Hume said he doesn't want to see a repeat of the federal government's office complex at Tunney's Pasture, which is a strong location of federal public service jobs, but with virtually no commercial or residential building to create a mix of uses. He said the Tremblay Road development should be a true mixed-use development with strong building design and an attractive landscape buffer with the residential neighbourhood to the west.

The transaction between the Ontario Realty Corporation and the federal government has not closed, which is the main reason the government won't talk about it. Some private developers were also looking at the property.

An older office building on the property had been the site of several Ontario government operations, including citizenship and immigration, health promotion, tourism and transportation. But when the provincial government moved a lot of its Ottawa operations into a new office building on Preston Street last year, the old building became surplus and was offered for sale, said Jeff Giffen, of the Ontario Realty Corporation.

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