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# Perspective: All together, now

## Sport Manitoba has a grand plan for its new HQ

Chris Cariou

1/03/2009 1:00 AM | [Comments \(0\)](#)



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The Smart Bag Co. building as envisioned when it is spruced up as the new home for Sports Manitoba.



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CEO Jeff Hnatiuk shows Sports Manitoba staff the plans and the future location. (JOE BRYKSA/WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)

**ORANGE** lines and arrows, architects' directions, are spray-painted on the old, grey floor, stark among support columns and brick walls in the vacant building in Winnipeg's Exchange District.

It's the future home of the Sport for Life Centre, a planned one-stop shop for training, fitness, coaching, wellness, exercise, recreation and Manitoba's sports history and administration that's expected to draw 1,200 people a day.

"There are examples across the country of high performance centres," Sport Manitoba's

CEO, Jeff Hnatiuk, told the *Free Press*.

"There aren't any examples, though, of the combination of the full administration of sport with an activity space, not that I'm aware of. That's unique. And we've got the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame and Museum.

"So we're dealing with heritage and recognition, we're dealing with development and activity, we're dealing with coaching and education, and we're dealing with administration -- all in one spot."

Sport Manitoba and its board -- the overseer of 76 sports throughout the province, from the tiniest of tots in basketball or hockey all the way up to elite provincial-level athletes -- have the vision, but some of their dreams are still concepts.

There's no doubt, the sports administration agency and its staff will move to the Pacific Avenue location by December after the deal for Sport Manitoba to buy the property was signed last week and the funds were deposited this week.

The brain trust of Manitoba's administrators, guides and guardians of sport will be headquartered in the five-storey building -- where renovation work and construction has already begun -- after its lease expires at 200 Main St.

But we also know that after years in a secluded location in the downtown Bay, the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame and Museum will move in and finally have its own prominent ground-floor location.

It's a true union of the young and the old -- today's athletes, grassroots or elite, together with tomorrow's potential Hall of Famers -- merging in a historic setting with the institution that honours those who have gone before.

But the hope is for the centre to be so much more. Some unique concepts will depend on negotiations with the city's historic buildings community about the fate of a warehouse attached to the building and whether it can be transformed into a fieldhouse.

Sport Manitoba says those discussions have gone very well and Coun. Jenny Gerbasi, head of the city's historical buildings committee, said this week that an agreement-in-principle has been reached that would allow the fieldhouse to be built.

Regardless, the fieldhouse -- which will extend west right over top of Martha Street -- depends on government and private funding and Sport Manitoba intends to start a fundraising campaign soon.

Right from the start, Hnatiuk said, even as consultants in search of a property that would suit Sport Manitoba's footprint, the dream was dubbed the Sport for Life Centre.

Sport Manitoba held talks with the National Volleyball Centre, provincial sports organizations, the Canadian Sport Centre/Manitoba, the city's two universities and Red River College. The board decided to remain downtown.

"A centrally located facility, one that was easily accessible with bus routes, accessible for the day-to-day staff but also accessible for the volunteers," Hnatiuk said. "A central location is one that we preferred from the start."

Then the consultants returned with their findings after about a year but didn't identify any locations.

The cost, without factoring in land and taxes? More than \$40 million. As the search for a location began, it became evident that once land costs were factored in, the project was too expensive. The Sport for Life Centre had to be scaled back.

So there's no indoor turf, no swimming pool, no hockey rink, no curling rink. What there is, assuming the fieldhouse proceeds, is a gym space, a running track and fitness and training facilities that all 76 sports can use.

"This location... allowed for the footprint of our concept, it was downtown, centrally located. But we also felt it could have a significant impact and will have a significant impact on the inner city as well as provincewide."

Picture a nerve centre for all amateur sport, with all the top-level administrative, coaching, fitness, biomechanics, health, medicine and wellness minds Manitoba can muster often being under the same roof, at the same time, as well as the province's top young athletes.

The swimmers, divers, water polo players, soccer teams and others can't compete in their sports there, but they can do dryland training, attend clinics, interact with and be treated for sports injuries by experts in their fields.

"We're talking about our provincial team athletes, potentially our Canada Games athletes, there's testing opportunities there, there's training opportunities there," Hnatiuk said. But it's not just for the best. It's for all.

"The types of programs we're looking at running out of here, we believe, are going to cater to grassroot community-type programs right through to our provincial team programs. This isn't a 9-to-5 traditional administrative space. This is a very active space."

U of M Prof. Dean Kriellaars, one of North America's foremost experts on sport medicine, biomechanics, physical fitness and obesity -- and a Sport Manitoba board member -- says there'll be nothing like the Sport for Life Centre, anywhere.

For the first time, if the proposed fieldhouse proceeds, all of Manitoba's provincial teams will have their own place for dryland training, strength and conditioning testing and access to the entire realm of sport medicine in one place.

"That's never happened before," he said. "Here we'll have, for the first time ever, a centre where athletes can have fully integrated services provided to them. From disability to ability."

But the centre could also provide its expertise to the inner-city community to battle childhood obesity and other social trends, in a classroom environment but also, in an integrated, fun

way, through physical activity.

"All of those people there for the care of the athlete... can now also provide their services in a group sort of way in multi-purpose rooms to deliver primary prevention related to obesity, poor nutrition, you name it," Kriellaars said.

"That's very exciting. It's total community access in a group manner, and that's really what you want... parents can be educated there, coaches can be educated there, service providers of any nature, volunteers, everybody can see it as home base."

*Continued*

Please see GRAND PLAN B2

Sport Manitoba has also had discussions with other possible partners, including Red River College, about the potential for its downtown students to use the centre.

And Sport Manitoba also continues to talk with the Canadian Sports Centre Manitoba and its head man, Randy Anderson, who was a part of the initial group of leaders that came up with the concept for the Sport for Life Centre.

Provincial funding for the five-storey building renovation is already in place to house the administration, meeting rooms, resource library and the hall of fame, but a timeline for construction of the fieldhouse depends solely on government and private money.

If it's given the green light by the city's historical buildings committee, work on the 29,000-square-foot fieldhouse -- estimated to cost \$17 million -- could begin as soon as the funds are committed through government programs and private donors.

[chris.cariou@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:chris.cariou@freepress.mb.ca)

Wish list for wellness

Services Sport Manitoba hopes to offer at the Sport Centre for Life (many depend on the planned fieldhouse being approved and funded):

A home for Manitoba's provincial teams for dryland training, fitness testing, physiotherapy, biomechanics, nutrition and all other services under one roof with onsite access to experts in their fields.

Upgraded training programs, meeting rooms, computer access and other resources and facilities for coaches (mentoring), volunteers (fundraising and program delivery), parents and

athletes (leadership, sportsmanship).

Classes and courses on nutrition and childhood obesity for inner-city families and all others, local access to practitioners.

Lifestyle centre, medical clinic to treat sports-related injuries.

The possibility of the centre being open 24 hours a day to have troubled youth involved in sport-based activities rather than potentially being out on the streets.

Sports apparel store, cafeteria, climbing wall, running track above the fieldhouse, looking down on the courts below.

Basketball, volleyball, other kids' leagues would use the fieldhouse for games.

Opening up the centre and the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame and Museum to tours by schoolchildren who already make visits to the Manitoba Museum and other nearby attractions.

"They go and take a nutrition class and they go and do an activity or they're exposed to another sporting activity, then they get on the bus and they go home. That's the kind of big-picture thinking that we see the Sport for Life Centre having." -- Hnatiuk

-- Cariou

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