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Casa Loma in Toronto

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Liberty Group proposes fine dining at Casa Loma

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TORONTO – At long last, the future of Casa Loma may soon be decided.

The Kiwanis Club ran the landmark for 73 years, but the city scrapped the agreement about two years ago — and Toronto City Hall has been accepting proposals ever since.

Now, officials with the city and Liberty Entertainment Group are discussing a 20-year deal to install a fine dining restaurant and banquet hall in the 98-room Edwardian landmark.

The financial terms of the deal are not yet known, but CityNews has learned at least \$7-million will be invested by Liberty Entertainment Group to renovate the tourist attraction.

The company declined to comment but details released by the city state that Liberty Entertainment “will make a significant capital investment in the interior of the Main House. Further, over twenty years the base rent from the lease will generate income for the City greater than that earned under continued management by Casa Loma Corporation.”

“It’s an excellent agreement that we have in place for both parties to share that cost and make this the wonderful venue that it could’ve been, should’ve been and I believe will be in the future,” said Coun. David Shiner.

“I think that we’re going to be astounded by how well this is going to work out for the city and its residents,” Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly says of Liberty Entertainment.

Under the proposed agreement, a “high-end restaurant” will operate in the west-side of the building, Coun. Joe Mihevc told 680News.

“The rest really will be much the same. It will still be a tourist attraction. There will be banquet facilities as there are now,” he said.

Air conditioning will be installed in several renovations that will be the responsibility of Liberty Entertainment should the proposal be approved by city council, he added.

“I am completely convinced by how accessible Casa Loma will remain to tourists to our city, to students, to all Torontonians,” said Coun. Josh Matlow who represents this ward.

“People will enjoy it, I think, a lot more because the amenities will be upgraded and it will be used more often than it is now,” Mihevc said.

“It is used basically about one-third of the time now and with a new operator that has experience in the restaurant and catering business, we expect that it will be full house more often than not.”

Casa Loma — which cost \$3.5-million to build back in the early 1900s — is the former home of Canadian financier Sir Henry Pellatt. The city seized Casa Loma in 1933 after roughly \$28,000 was owed in back taxes.

Mihevc said, “I think on the financial side it is very attractive to the city it will ensure that Casa Loma has an income for this city for the next 20 years.”

He said the coach house, horses’ stables and potting shed are not part of the proposal but it will allow the city to consider development for the area as the site of a Toronto museum.

“All the great cities of the world have a museum that tell the story of their city. We need one. We can finally start to explore that given that we will have some financial resources that will come out of this deal.”

Click [here](http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.EX35.2) (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.EX35.2>) to read the full proposal.

It will be debated at the executive committee meeting on Oct. 30. Click [here](http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/decisionBodyProfile.do?) (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/decisionBodyProfile.do?>)

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If approved, city council would consider the plan at its meeting on Nov. 13.

“You never know with this council if there will be opposition but I suspect given that there is good financial return for the city, given that Casa Loma will be used more often and become a well-loved place — not just for that one time that people go to it but many more times than has been the case up to now — I think councillors will find this an exciting proposal and will work with it,” Mihevc said.

The Liberty Group operates the Liberty Grand ballroom at Exhibition Place, the Rosewater Supper Club and the Phoenix Concert Theatre.

TIMELINE: A history of Casa Loma

1911: Financier and industrialist Sir Henry Pellatt draws up plans with architect E.J. Lennox to build his dream castle.

1914: Casa Loma is completed after three years, using more than 300 men and \$3.5 million. The private home is filled with artwork from Canada and around the world.

1924: Sir Pellatt and his wife Mary are forced to auction off the contents of Casa Loma due to financial hardship.

1933: The City of Toronto seizes Casa Loma after roughly \$28,000 was owed in back taxes.

1937: After being leased by the city and restored by the Kiwanis Club of Casa Loma, Casa Loma opens as a tourist attraction.

June 2011: After more than seven decades, city council agrees to end management deal between the city and Kiwanis Club and look for long-term strategy for Casa Loma.

October 2012: A request for proposal is issued to find a suitable operator for Casa Loma.

October 2013: City staff recommends that council broker a deal with Liberty Entertainment Group to improve and manage Casa Loma’s main house and grounds.

Timeline courtesy of Casa Loma and City of Toronto