

LANDMARK

Deal proposed to revive Casa Loma

ELIZABETH CHURCH - CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

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Plans to revamp Casa Loma to include a fine dining restaurant and banquet hall are in the works under a 20-year deal between the city and Liberty Entertainment Group designed to breathe new life into the aging Edwardian mansion.

The proposed deal, to be debated next week by Mayor Rob Ford's executive, is the latest attempt to revive the fortunes of the historic 98-room manor.

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The future of the landmark has been in limbo for more than two years since the city ended a long-time agreement with the Kiwanis Club to operate the site, with the mayor at one point predicting the only solution would be to put it and its surrounding property on the block.

Terms of the agreement will not be disclosed until it is finalized, but a staff report says proceeds from the lease will be set aside to maintain and restore the mansion and its buildings – erected a century ago by Sir Henry Pellatt. The city seized the property for unpaid taxes after the tycoon's fortune collapsed.

Staff predict that under the deal the city will be “better off financially” than it would if it continued to operate the site under the existing public corporation. “The city expects to earn significant participation rents from admission fees and restaurant revenues in excess of current operating revenues,” the report states.

“I'm very pleased,” said Councillor Joe Mihevc, whose ward is adjacent to Casa Loma and who fought to keep the property as a public asset. “At the end of the day, what you will have is a very modern and historically sensitive Casa Loma.”

Mr. Mihevc said under the proposed agreement the main building will continue to be open to the public as an historic site, and a “fine dining room” will be located in the west side of the building. It also will be used as a banquet facility. The stables, coach house and potting shed are not part of the deal, and he hopes those structures will one day be the heart of a new Toronto museum.

Liberty Entertainment CEO Nick Di Donato would not discuss his plans for the site before council approves the deal, but said his firm has put many ideas on the table. “We have a considerable number of plans and obviously city staff is pleased with that because they've recommended us,” he said Wednesday after the staff report was released.

The Toronto-based company operates a number of venues including the Liberty Grand ballroom at Exhibition Place, the Rosewater and the Phoenix concert hall.

If approved by the Mr. Ford's executive committee next week, the agreement will go to council for its November meeting.

With a report from Kaleigh Rogers

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