



Connaught owners aim for condos by 2015

The Royal Connaught will be ready to reinhabit as early as 2015, according to the hotel's owners.

Ted Valeri and Rudi Spallacci say the first part of their proposed 700-unit condominium development is expected to be built and ready for occupants within the next three years.

The initial phase of the project is expected to include 135 units constructed behind the original façade of the two existing Connaught buildings. The one- and two-bedroom suites will start “in the high \$100,000s” and range in size from 530 to 1,190 square feet.

“We’re Hamiltonians,” Valeri said in an interview Monday. “We’re proud of Hamilton and we grew up with the Royal Connaught. We want to bring her back.”

But first, they’ll have to see if she can sell — which could be easier said than done in a market where annual condo sales are going down (around 8 per cent in the region last year), and a slew of competing developments are going up.

Valeri and Spallacci say they plan to open a presentation centre in the hotel’s three-storey lobby this summer. The contemporary space will feature a glass staircase and mezzanine, a grand piano and a coffee bar, and will later transition into the building’s main lobby and reception area.

A sales-oriented website, www.royalconnaught.com, has also gone live.

The owners say the proposed development will include more than 35,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor recreation space, including a theatre, gaming room, fitness centre and a rooftop terrace with outdoor fire pits and cabanas.

Their sights are set on “first-time buyers, couples and empty nesters,” Spallacci said.

A later phase of the proposed development is expected to include a 33-storey tower featuring several hundred condo units, parking and more than 13,000 square feet of retail space stretching from King Street along Catharine to Main.

“The idea is to have some cafés, boutique shops, restaurants — so we create traffic there,” Spallacci said.

But that part of the development is still in what Valeri calls the “primary design stage,” meaning it’s too soon to tell when it will be done.

While the owners insist the project is “a sure thing,” it has also suffered its share of false starts.

The most recent came about a year and a half ago, when Mayor Bob Bratina released an early sketch of the development following a meeting with the pair. At the time, he said shovels could be in the ground by fall 2011.

“We had a lot of things that we had to iron out,” Valeri said of the year-and-a-half-long lapse. “We’re at the point that we’re very happy with what we have on the table and now we can go forward and present it to the public.”