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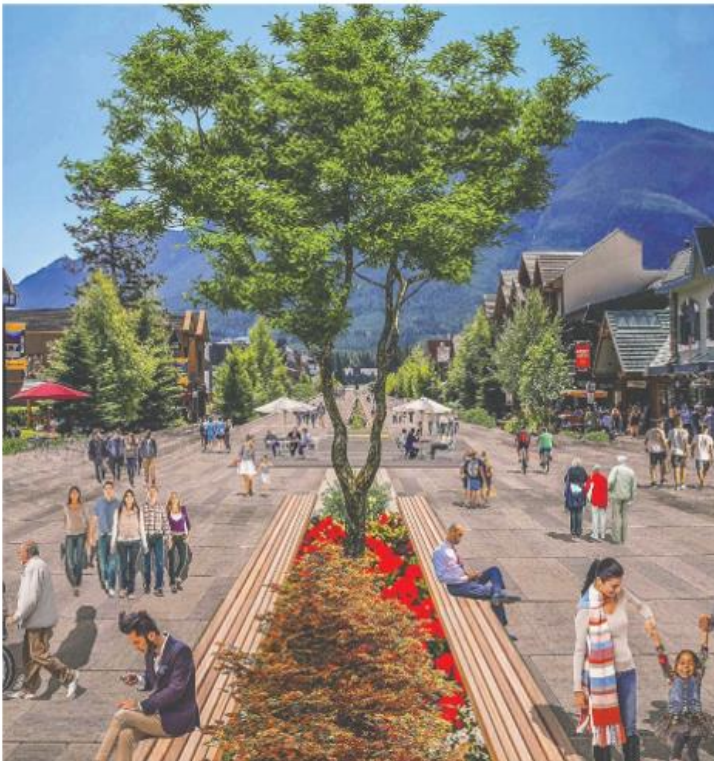
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IS BANFF READY TO CURB CARS?

Proposed 'eco-transit hub' envisions rail, shuttles and gondola **A3**



JACKSON MCCORMICK

Artist's concept of a car-free Banff Avenue, looking south from Wolf Street. Critics of the plan by the owners of Mount Norquay see a purely commercial proposition.

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Ski resort owners pitch gondola, rail service and car-free zones for Banff

The owners of the Mount Norquay ski resort have proposed an ambitious vision for Banff that they say would combine rail, shuttle service, and aerial transit to reduce traffic congestion in the national park.

AMANDA STEPHENSON, CALGARY HERALD Updated: September 14, 2019



Artist's concept of a car-free Banff Avenue, looking south from Wolf Street. JACKSON MCCORMICK DESIGN GROUP



SHARE

The owners of the Mount Norquay ski resort have proposed an ambitious vision for Banff that they say would combine rail, shuttle service and aerial transit to reduce traffic congestion in the national park.

Jan and Adam Waterous of Liricon Capital Ltd. purchased the long-term lease for the Banff Train Station, as well as the 13 hectares of land that surround it, four years ago. Their goal is to create what they call an “eco-transit hub” aimed at transforming how visitors come to and move around Banff National Park.

On Friday, an opening ceremony was held for the first plank of the plan — a 500-stall intercept parking lot that the Waterouses built to the east of the station. The lot provides free parking for day-trip visitors who are willing to leave their car on the edge of town and walk or take a shuttle to the downtown.

Liricon Capital also wants to build an aerial tramway or gondola that would transport visitors from the train station to the ski hill. That proposal is currently before Parks Canada. In addition, the company is pushing to bring passenger rail service back to Banff National Park and has been assembling an investor group that could put in the required capital to build a dedicated rail line from Calgary to Banff. Plans are in the works to develop the existing train station property, adding restaurants, ticketing offices and more.



Artist's rendering of a conceptual transit shuttle station in Banff. JACKSON MCCORMICK DESIGN GROUP

“It’s really been a passion project for my family, because it’s something we know could really be transformative for the national park,” Waterous said. “Banff has the opportunity to be the town that can really be a role model for the rest of Canada, in terms of adopting green initiatives.”

In an interview, Jan Waterous said she and her husband are motivated by a desire to tackle the traffic congestion, which is increasingly reducing the quality of life for residents and harming the visitor experience. She said while the operation of the gondola would be a money-making venture for Mount Norquay, the proposal is not just a business venture.

However, not everyone in the community has bought into Liricon Capital’s vision. Harvey Locke, Banff resident and well-known conservationist, said he believes the talk of an “eco-transit hub” is window-dressing for a nakedly commercial enterprise. He is particularly concerned that the Waterouses have proposed building another intercept parking lot with up to 2,000 stalls but have indicated that is conditional on the gondola project going ahead.

“If there were a conversation about how we have a better experience for pedestrians in Banff that didn’t involve a gondola to Mount Norquay, I would be interested,” Locke said. “But this whole thing is just an outrageously brazen effort to get a gondola constructed up to a ski hill to expand its summer use and enrich them. Banff’s problem is too many people.... That’s what we need to be managing, not adding more attractions.”



Artist's concept of a car-free Banff Avenue, looking north from Buffalo Street. JACKSON MCCORMICK DESIGN GROUP

As part of their proposal, Liricon Capital has also suggested that the Town of Banff should go so far as to implement a “resident-only vehicle pass,” so that all day-trip visitors will be required to park in the lots at the Banff Train Station and the downtown could be converted to a “car-free” zone.

Mayor Karen Sorensen, who attended Friday’s event, said council hasn’t considered anything that drastic yet, though she said the new intercept lot along with the Waterouses’ other plans would go a long way toward addressing traffic congestion in the area.

“If there was another 2,000 stalls in that (train station) vicinity, I would probably go so far as to say we would have no parking challenges whatsoever,” Sorensen said.



Jan and Adam Waterous, owners of the Mount Norquay ski resort, propose transforming how visitors move around Banff National Park.

According to Parks Canada, Liricon Capital’s first proposal for an aerial tram at Mount Norquay exceeded the scope of what can be permitted under the site guidelines and park management plan. Since then, Liricon has provided a response to the preliminary review of their proposal and the new information is now being considered, said Parks Canada spokeswoman Carly Wallace.

Formal public consultations would also need to take place before any such proposal could be approved.

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