

PLANS UNVEILED FOR HILTON HOTEL IN NANAIMO

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An artist's drawing shows the vision behind a proposed hotel under the Hilton franchise on Nanaimo's waterfront.
— image credit: Image Contributed

A \$100-million skyscraper hotel proposed for Nanaimo's waterfront will bank on Asian tourists to help fill rooms, according to the consulting firm behind the project.

Nanaimo's Front Street is being pitched as the new home of a 30-storey Hilton-brand hotel that would boast just more than 300 rooms, plus restaurants, commercial spaces and public waterfront access.

According to John Steil, senior planner with architectural and consulting firm Stantec, it's hard to find waterfront property in places like Victoria and Vancouver for new hotel developments making this "one of the last great sites for a waterfront hotel."

There is also optimism for the local economy and the ability to create a market for the hotel among international tourists thanks to the Hilton-brand – all ingredients to make the project successful, he said.

The project is proposed for 10 and 28 Front St., beside the Pacifica condominiums, and will look to attract Asian travellers, anticipated to make up a significant number of its visitors.

The project follows on the heels of work to build a \$50-million luxury conference centre hotel by a company that also plans to rely on Asian tourists.

"[It] won't be competing per se with most of the hotel industry in Nanaimo. It's creating demand," Steil said, adding the goal will be to provide a high-quality hotel a certain sector of travellers want.

Charles Koo, owner of Insight Holdings which is organizing the project, did not want to elaborate much on the initiative, but did say there isn't room for two luxury hotels at the present time. Investors are counting on the attraction of more tourists and people from overseas, thanks in part to the city's efforts to promote Nanaimo.

The hotel, which needs to go through rezoning for height and setback, is not anticipated to be complete until 2018. It will involve strata arrangements, where individual rooms are sold and rented to guests by a hotel operator.

"We didn't force these people to invest in Nanaimo," said Mayor John Ruttan. "They saw the opportunity and they made the business decision to come here."

An open house is set for the Vancouver Island Conference Centre at 4 p.m. on Tuesday (May 13).