

WASAGA BEACH » \$350-MILLION REDEVELOPMENT PLANNED

From ice cream and french fries to condos and bistros

BY JAMES RUSK

Two brothers who started out with an ice cream parlour in Wasaga Beach 17 years ago are poised to radically transform the popular resort community with a \$350-million development.

Dov and Armand Levy's

plan includes seven hotels, several condos, retail shops and services, 10 themed restaurants, a variety of upscale bistros, a conference facility, a full service spa, and an indoor amusement park that would offer skiing and snowboarding year round.

A monorail will connect the

10-hectare (25-acre) project, to be built by Blue Beach Avenue Corp., with parking on the perimeter.

"It was almost like Disney has decided to move to Wasaga Beach, and who would say no to that?" asked Trudie McCrea, manager of the Wasaga Beach Chamber of Com-

merce who attended the unveiling of the plan on Monday night.

But in a move that would end one of Wasaga's venerated traditions, cruising the Strip, Beach Drive would be closed to traffic and made into a pedestrian board walk.

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Plan calls for the developers to acquire 23 properties from the town, most of them parking lots, but including a 3.8-hectare (9.5-acre) waterfront block.

Development aims to make Wasaga year-round playground

“I’ve got [Mr. Levy’s] plan in front of me right here, and there’s no driving on the Strip. It’s all walkway,” Mayor Cal Patterson said.

Dov Levy said “the idea is to make Wasaga Beach an all-year destination. So much of the improved area, which is the waterfront and the boardwalk, will consist of snow and winter activities, ice-skating, snowmobiles and so on.”

In the past few months, he said he and his brother, who already own a number of properties in town, have been able to secure most of the waterfront locations and have already started to tear down some older buildings. They hope to have the entire project completed within five years.

“I’m nervously excited about it, because it is a huge, huge development,” Mr. Patterson said. “It’s a major change to the community, but for the most part where they are developing is already developed. It is just old.”

The mayor noted that, for instance, the developers have



High waters on the beach strip hurt tourism in 1986. MARK BOURRIE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

purchased a rundown old mall area that will be gutted and turned into a New Orleans-themed retail area.

He said the Levys have lined up investors to fund the project, and that town officials have met with them.

For Wasaga Beach, which al-

New look for aging resort



TONIA COWAN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

ready draws more than two million visitors a year, the development provides an opportunity to shift from a primarily summer resort to a year-round destination, only 25 minutes from the ski hills in nearby Collingwood, Mr. Patterson said.

He noted that the plan calls for the developers to acquire 23 properties from the town, most of them parking lots, but including a 3.8 hectare (9.5-acre) waterfront block with 213 metres (700 feet) of frontage on Wasaga’s 14 kilometres of sand.

The mayor said the most

controversial aspect of the project is likely to be the sale of the waterfront block, even though it has been on the market for the past 10 years.

He said the town has had all the properties appraised in anticipation of the project, but no negotiations have yet been held with the developers.

The mayor said minor rezoning would be needed for the project. Council would only have to approve the sale of the land and the minor rezoning, he said.

For Rick Seip of the vintage motor car club, Wasaga Beach Cruisers – members of which, he said, would have been up in arms 20 years ago at the prospect of closing Beach Drive to cars – the end of the Strip would not be a big loss.

He no longer takes his 1965 Corvette there on Saturday nights as he feels out of place among the drivers cruising in their souped-up newer vehicles.

“Wasaga is so ready for this. The place has hardly changed for 30 or 40 years,” Mr. Seip said.



Developers have purchased a rundown old mall area that would be gutted and turned into a New Orleans-themed retail area.