

Downtown renewal: Homegrown to be 'reborn' in old Windsor hotel

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It's hard to tell if it's a late-afternoon caffeine buzz, giddy anticipation or both.

But Michael Pattison is unabashedly infatuated with the torn-up, debris-strewn space he's renovating from the ground up to reopen Homegrown Hamilton.

"There's our window of opportunity," Pattison cracks, pointing to a large window frame salvaged from the original 137-year-old building at the corner of King William and John streets.

Homegrown closed its doors Saturday night after operating a block west on King William between Hughson and James, for about five years.

The café is taking a hiatus while operator Pattison and a crew work on its future home.

It leaves a temporary void, but the new Homegrown promises to breathe life back into a corner of John and King William that's been vacant for at least seven years.

"It's become a 'nothing,'" Pattison says about the derelict three-storey brick building.

That wasn't always the case.

It — 31 John St. N. — has hosted bars and live music venues.

Perhaps most fondly, Pattison knows it as the Windsor Hotel, where John Dick, the husband of Evelyn Dick, was last spotted in 1946 before his torso was found near Albion Falls.

The spot wrote itself another colourful chapter in 2008, when police found \$1.2 million worth of pot plants — 1,236 of them — after busting a grow-op above a nightclub operating there.

All that history is part of why Pattison's "bloody excited" about the move.

Pattison, who has construction experience, says he looked at 22 spots downtown before falling for the old Windsor. "When I walked in, it was us."

"Us" had been 27 King William St., where loyal patrons went to sip java or beer, eat organic fare, watch live music, appreciate art and talk social justice.

"I've always been able to feel good about what we provide here," said barista Keisha Neoma-Quinn while working her last shift Thursday.

She spearheaded an effort to raise more than \$10,000 for the big move and will help with the renovation along with other Homegrown staff.

The change is bittersweet.

The Sky Dragon Centre decided not to renew Homegrown's lease-end and is expecting to occupy the space with a brew pub.

Pattison wasn't happy about that but looks forward to the "rebirth, if you will."

A larger space at the Windsor, which boasts 12-foot ceilings, will allow for a more equipped kitchen, ergo, a more expansive menu. There'll also be a bigger stage for performances.

Local architect Bill Curran says the plan is to open up the brick building to as much natural light as possible through glass while showcasing original features, such as interior arches.

"It could be quite a nice way to open up what is now a pretty bland stretch."

To the west, King William is experiencing a resurgence of new eateries and condos. A renovated Windsor could help that evolution spread east, Curran said.



Mike Pattison, owner of Homegrown Hamilton, is framed by one of the original wooden window frames found in the old Windsor Hotel building. Patterison and friend Mike Willoughby are renovating the historic space as the new location for his restaurant on King William at John Street.

Hotel reno

Inside the old Windsor Hotel building.

Homegrown Hamilton

Homegrown is closing its King William Street location, to be reborn at the former Windsor Hotel building.

Old Windsor Hotel reno

Inside the old Windsor Hotel building.

Windsor Hotel 3rd floor

Inside the old Windsor Hotel building. HomeGrown Hamilton's Mike Pattison and friend Mike Willoughby are renovating the historic space.

Windsor Hotel

The Windsor Hotel

"I think people will be pretty pleased to see that building come back to life."

Pattison struck a deal with Maciek Walicht, the building's Toronto-based owner, to renovate the three floors. In exchange, he gets a 10-to-15-year lease with "reasonable terms" for the ground level.

Pattison is budgeting at least \$250,000 for Homegrown's relocation.

The overall renovation of the building — including office space on the second and third floors, a mezzanine and finished basement — is expected to cost about \$1.4 million.

Walicht, who bought 31 John St. N. in 2010 for about \$400,000, said it would have been cheaper to tear the building down, but he was fond of its historical look.

"I thought it would be a shame to lose all of that," he said.

The goal is to have the second and third floors done by December and Homegrown open in May.

Inside, the building is a Frankenstein monster, featuring a patchwork of flooring and decades of ad hoc repairs.

Mike Willoughby, the project's right-hand man, knows there's quite a job ahead.

The old Windsor has seen better days, he says.

"This is the last kick at the can for the place," Willoughby concludes. "Either it gets done or it's going to be a tower."

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