

Microtel hotel back on track for 2019 opening

By Brock Weir

They broke ground last year hoping to be up and running later this year, but the builders behind the incoming Microtel by Wyndham hotel in Aurora's business park have now set their sights on a summer 2019 opening.

Eric Watson, President of MasterBuilt Hotels, the Alberta-based company steering this project, says site plan issues including soil challenges on-site conspired with an earlier-than-usual winter to delay the formal start of the build, which is located at 180 Gouling Avenue.

"It was a combination of a few things [like] delays in the site plan process, an earlier than usual winter, and we missed the window to start last year," says Mr. Watson. "There were also poor soils at the back of the site, so we had to do an amendment with our site plan application and it takes time to move the building forward a bit on the site from which we originally intended to build. That was just approved recently, so we should be recommencing [the build] on site in the near future, getting the services put in, to be open next summer."

While those issues caused the project to be pushed back by several months, Mr. Watson says this particular cloud does have a silver lining for the community.

"We have a new prototype, so we have incorporated a lot of the changes," he says. "We were able to solicit a lot of feedback from the community through a focus group Economic Development put together. We have added a light service bar based on the feedback of the businesses and there are a few other modifications we have made to the hotel. I guess the positive with the delay is it is going to be the latest and greatest."

Although the footprint of the hotel has been moved to account for the soil issues, and while some of the amenities have been updated to current Microtel standards, much of the rest of the plans remain the same, including 108 rooms, meeting spaces, a fitness, centre, pool, and water slide.

In the intervening months, however, a new kid has arrived on the block a planned Holiday Inn Express just up the street, the site plan for which was approved by Council last month.

Although Microtel was the first hotel company to make its intentions known for Aurora, they say there is room in the market for both and there's also room for some competition.

"We compete with Holiday Inn Express all the time," says Mr. Watson. "The addition of the bar is part of that. That is not something that would be standard within a Holiday Inn Express and I think would be a differentiator for our hotel. Given the time and everything else, I think we'll be open well in advance of them. We will have an opportunity to establish ourselves in the community but they are comparable type products for sure. They are very strong competition and it is good to have strong competition. I think there is a need within the community and capacity for more than one hotel. Whether there's a need for three or four is a different story! As a hotel owner and operator, less is better for us, but I think there is room for both of us."

Now that the site plan has been approved, Microtel by Wyndham is also looking at commencing the hiring process to get the hotel up and running.

Mr. Watson says this process will start in "about six months" and there will be opportunities for guest services and housekeeping. First, a General Manager will need to be hired by that timeframe and once he or she is in place, they will lay the groundwork for facilitating job fairs and other employment opportunities, most likely within the "nine to 10 month time frame."

"You'll probably see a remobilization on site very quickly in terms of the services and earth work, and the excavation which is approved," says Mr. Watson. "We will get the full building permit and you will start to see the erection of the building commence this fall. We continue to be very excited about the Market. Any delays are unfortunate, but it happens. Development, often more than not, takes longer these days than one hopes it does, but I think we have all the major hurdles out of the way now and it is full steam ahead now."