

UBCO student housing eyed by private sector

Ron Seymour | Posted: Monday, February 9, 2015 11:23 am

Hundreds of university students could be living in privately-owned micro-suites of less than 300 square feet if Kelowna city council approves a new housing project next to the UBC Okanagan campus.

The unique development is planned for Academy Way, within 900 metres from the centre of the university precinct.

The 251-suite project is said to be an example of the new way in which private developers are expected to provide the kind of student accommodation traditionally offered by the universities.

“The extension of a progressive university culture beyond the campus boundary can benefit the school, the community, and the students equally,” says architect Timothy McLennan, working on behalf of Watermark Developments Ltd.

“This privately-owned and operated student housing project endeavors to facilitate study, socializing, and solidarity,” McLennan says.

Currently, there are about 1,700 student beds available in on-campus housing. That's enough for 20 per cent of UBCO's approximately 8,500 full-time students.

But the university's master plan anticipates providing accommodation for 40 per cent of students, which would require an additional 1,700 residences. University administrators are looking to the private sector to provide many of the new housing units.

A previously-approved, private sector housing project immediately south of the campus has sold-out, and an expansion is underway. That development has mainly one- and two-bedroom suites, but the proposed new project would have much smaller residences.

City council has recently approved a micro-suite housing project near the Landmark business and technology centre. Plans for the new development on Academy Way will be reviewed by council at a meeting next Tuesday. Staff are recommending the project be approved.

Under provincial law designed to encourage more rental housing stock, the builders of complexes with micro-suites do not have to pay development cost charges which can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars to medium- to large-scale projects.

Outside of the September-April post-secondary academic year, the owners of the new micro-suite project on Academy Way envision renting some of the units to members of the general public.