

The Armour Group

It's the first major private office development to come to Halifax, Nova Scotia's downtown district in 20 years, so why wouldn't it be a showstopper? The Waterside Centre, which will be renamed the RBC Waterside Centre once its anchor tenant the Royal Bank of Canada moves in, is a nearly 100,000-square-foot, nine-story Class-A office building set to open by late 2013 or early 2014.

The Armour Group, a fully integrated real estate developer bringing this downtown vision to fruition, broke ground on the LEED Gold-targeted building in January. The development, which will serve as the RBC's new Atlantic regional headquarters, indubitably bodes well for downtown Halifax's future, but it is also a development very much in tune with its past.

As with all of its developments, whether commercial, residential, retail or hospitality, the Armour Group is focused on living up to its motto of creating a "sense of place" at the Waterside Centre – a site that could stand alone yet also integrates with its surroundings to foster a connected community.

"For 40 years, the Armour Group has always had creating a sense of place as its philosophy," explains Stuart McCrea, vice president of the Armour Group, which was founded by his father Armour "Ben" McCrea. "We also tend to trend on projects that are more difficult – most notably we did the restoration of a development called Historic Properties on the Halifax waterfront and Founders Square. We rejuvenated both areas into modern complexes of office and retail within historic sites that were slated for demolition.

"My father saw the value in maintaining them and wanted to make it reusable whereas many developers wouldn't do that," he continues. "From there forth we have continued on with that philosophy. Today, as we are under full construction on Waterside Centre, we are still pursuing that."

A Look at Waterside

Waterside Centre will consist of five heritage buildings along the corner of Duke and Hollis streets. The buildings' roofs and interiors were demolished, but the exterior will remain. Many of the buildings are linked at the ground level, but a main entrance lobby, parking garage entrance and some infill pieces will connect the remainder. Atop the heritage facades, Armour Group is erecting a contemporary glass tower. Below the building, Armour Group is building a basement parking facility.

"We are in the process right now of pouring the slab for the basement and underground parking," McCrea says.

"We are on schedule right now and in the last two weeks have erected the tower crane and we will continue with this process for probably the next four to six months until we are above the façade of the heritage buildings. After that it will start to speed up because we won't be as confined."

Armour Group has taken major steps to ensure the \$25 million investment is sustainable for the long term through a number of high-efficiency and green elements. McCrea explains that the design includes floor-to-ceiling windows and its narrow layout will allow light to penetrate the building. Also, last August, the developer was given the city's blessing to install a saltwater cooling system that will pump seawater from the nearby Atlantic to the downtown Halifax site, which will significantly reduce its heating and cooling costs and put it well on track to meet LEED Gold certification standards.

"We're hoping to target LEED Gold and we believe the technology we are using on this development should yield us to that category," McCrea says.

Long-term Outlook

Saltwater cooling systems may be a current trend in the construction industry, but for the Armour Group, technology such as this has been part of the company's lifeblood since its founding. Ben McCrea, a civil engineer by trade, was one of the first in North America to install a saltwater cooling system in 1972 when he restored Historic Properties into what it is today. The company still manages this office property today. In fact, it has a hand in every property it's ever developed and has not sold off a single one of its assets.

McCrea says that when embarking on a new development, the Armour Group plans for the long haul. It develops with the goal to be involved in the project throughout its lifetime and because of that, easy-fix cost-cutting measures during design and construction take a back seat.

"We are not afraid to spend a little more because the more we spend upfront, the better it will be over time and because we don't sell, it's to our benefit and our clients as well as it provides a better longevity and quality project at the end," McCrea says. "Because of our integrated nature of building and managing and ownership, who better knows the product than us? We feel it's important for our clients to understand that, because it allows us to better serve them in a timely and effective manner."

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