

# Shipping boxes set to become washrooms in Assiniboine Park

FROM SEA TO SHINING WEE

By: Murray McNeill / Commercial Real Estate

Posted: 1:00 AM CDT Monday, Apr. 1, 2013

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## OPINION



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Jeff Olafson, John Kozlowski and John Duerksen (from left) with three large shipping containers that are being converted into public washrooms at Assiniboine Park. They hope to have the washrooms open for the Victoria Day long weekend.

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A decommissioned shipping container that spent about a decade being hauled back and forth across the South China Sea is about to get a new lease on life as a public washroom in Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park.

The big steel box is one of three recycled shipping containers -- all of them 12 metres long, 2.4 metres wide and nearly 2.7 metres high -- being converted into washrooms by Peter Sampson

Architecture Studio and Gardon Construction Ltd.

That's the same team that last year converted two shipping containers into a funky new bicycle repair kiosk (The BikeLab) for the University of Winnipeg campus.

This time, their client is the Assiniboine Park Conservancy (APC), the not-for-profit organization responsible for redeveloping and managing Winnipeg's largest public park.

The APC plans to install the unique washrooms, which will be clad in wood siding, along the edge of a bush just east of the Lyric Theatre.

It hopes to have them fully operational for the Victoria Day long weekend, John Kozlowski, the group's director of facilities, said in an interview.

Kozlowski said the original plan was to go the conventional route and build the washrooms out of cinder blocks. And the Gardon/PSA Studio team won that contract after coming in with the lowest bid.

It was only after they and APC officials began kicking around ideas for further reducing the project's costs the two partners pitched the idea of using shipping containers instead of cinder blocks to build the washrooms. And it wasn't a hard sell.

For starters, it's lopping more than \$100,000 off the cost of the project, Kozlowski said. And then there was the whole "green" aspect of using recycled containers.

"It fit well with the park's mandate with regards to sustainability and the environment," said Jeff Olafson, Gardon's senior project manager.

And because shipping containers are so sturdy and were designed to be moved, "we do have the option down the road to pick these things up and move them if necessary," Kozlowski added.

In order to keep the interior space as big as possible, the insulation and the water and sewer pipes will be installed on the outside of each unit, said John Duerksen, another PSA Studio architect working on the project.

The electrical and exhaust equipment will be on the inside, but hidden behind a false ceiling. Each unit will also be equipped with an electric heater.

The exterior siding and wooden skirts for each unit will be made from recycled lumber.

The units will also feature low-flow water taps and toilets, and energy-efficient lighting and exhaust systems.



PETER SAMPSON ARCHITECTURE STUDIO INC.

Three large shipping containers are being converted into public washrooms at Assiniboine Park.

To further reduce energy consumption and allow natural light into the interior, the crews are removing one end of each container and replacing it with a glass wall with a door.

Architect Peter Sampson said the glass will be mirrored on the outside, to reflect the nearby surroundings, and frosted on the inside.

That way, the occupants can see out, but people on the outside can't see in, even at night.

Sampson and Olafson said another advantage of using shipping containers is most of the retrofit work can be done off-site -- in this case in a heated warehouse in east Transcona.

Not only does that give work crews more control over the quality of work they do, they can work much faster.

"Our site time, which is one of the most expensive parts of a project, is down considerably from the six months... we might otherwise be dealing with during the winter," Sampson said. "So the advantages are massive."

Olafson said the crews have been working on the containers since early February and expect to move them to the park on April 22.

Once there, it will take only about a month or so to finish everything.

The APC and BikeLab projects are the first two shipping-container projects PSA Studio and Gardon have been involved in. But they're eager to do more.

Sampson said he's watching closely to see if a much bigger project involving Winnipeg architect David Penner and Toronto developer Tali Zhiubritskaya proceeds.

That one would involve using 36 shipping containers to build an 18-unit condominium complex, to be called Nightingale 956, at 956 Notre Dame Ave.

Although Fort Whyte Business Park owner Mario Costantini has built a 1,500-square-foot office building and a 1,600-square-foot home out of shipping containers, the Nightingale 956 project would be the city's first multi-family housing complex made out of the boxes.

"It's a challenge," especially in a cold-weather climate, Sampson said of the plan to build a multi-family complex.

"The economics may not necessarily be there yet."

As for the APC, Kozlowski said while this is its only shipping-container project at the moment, it may not be the last.

"I anticipate this will not be the only shipping-container solution that will be advantageous for us."

Know of any newsworthy or interesting trends or developments in the local office, retail, or industrial real estate sectors? Let real estate reporter Murray McNeill know at the email address below, or at 204-697-7254.

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