

Community Landmark

BY CHERYL MAH



The Prince George RCMP has a new \$39 million headquarters, which will greatly improve their ability to serve and protect the community into the future.

Located downtown at the corner of Fourth and Victoria, the modern facility is a much needed replacement of the crowded and inefficient building where more than 100 officers were previously working. At 65,000 square foot, the building is almost twice the size of the old detachment, built in 1972.

Maple Reinders was awarded the \$22.7 million lump sum contract in the summer of 2011 and broke ground in the fall. Substantial completion was achieved in late Dec 2013.

“The new building is a landmark for Prince George,” says Phil Long, operations manager at

Maple Reinders. “Instead of the typical box type structure, it’s nice to see a building that has features in it that make it special. It’s a very impressive looking building.”

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The eye-catching facility is a mix of steel, glass and wood. It is comprised of a two storey building that includes offices, exhibit and record storage areas, a ve-

hicle examination bay, a crime analysis lab and locker rooms. Behind is a single-storey building for 20 holding cells. It will also be home to the Prince George Community Policing services and bylaw services.

“The existing building was undersized and functionally obsolete with a poor layout,” says Peter Bull, principal at IBI Group in Edmonton. “The spaces are now more conducive for the RCMP members to perform their duties effectively.”

The facility serves as an important link between police and the community at large. It is also an important piece of the city’s efforts to revitalize the downtown core, notes Bull.

The building’s design was inspired by the natural setting of mountain forest and meadows as well as the confluence of two major rivers surrounding the city’s downtown.



“If you look at the building, the two main pedestrian entrance sidewalks flow from the two street intersections and arrive at the main public entrance. The lobby is the confluence where the public meets the RCMP members and the civilian staff,” explains Bull. “The whole look of the building is meant to be welcoming — not intimidating — with a very pleasant walk to the front entrance.”

To reflect the forest industry’s importance to the city, wood is prominently showcased in the architectural and structural expression of the building.

A line of 14 tree like massive glulam columns frames the entrance while a secondary row of 13 columns occupies the central spine of the building. A substantial amount of wood decking is

also used along with wood paneling throughout the key public spaces.

The project has already won an award for its use of wood. It received a 2013 Community Recognition Award from *WoodWORKS! BC*. The award is presented annually to local governments that have been exemplary advocates for wood demonstrated through the specification of wood in a community project.

“Without the city buying into the vision for the building, we couldn’t have achieved what we did,” says Bull.

Balancing the need for wood and the non-combustible requirements of the building was a challenge though, according to Bull. RCMP specifications require some areas such as the cells to be only concrete and block construction.

“It is also a very tight site bounded by four streets,” he adds. “Meeting the program requirements within the fiscal realities was a challenge. We also didn’t want to make the cell areas come across as this ugly blank imposing part of the building.”

Imagery of the RCMP was another important part of the design driver, which was subtly expressed on the south facade and in a series of smaller detail features on the interior.

“We have some different banding of metal panels — spots of blue and brown — on the south wall face that are very much like the read-out of a DNA profile,” says Bull. “That carries through to the inside where the upper glass handrails feature a series of coloured glass banding stripes to again symbolize crime fighting.”

Feature Project

The new detachment features a larger and safer cell area with more progressive design features such as metal doors instead of bars, increased lighting and heated concrete floors. Another important improvement was locating the cell area on the main floor.

“One of the issues with the functionality of the old building was the cell holding area was on the second floor so members had to get into an elevator with a potentially dangerous person,” says Bull, adding the old cells also did not meet current RCMP standards.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles were applied to address security and safety. For example, large boulder features have been strategically placed out front to guard against vehicle intrusion into the site.

“The security requirements were high and lots of protocols,” says Bull.

The building is targeting LEED Silver but with expectations of achieving Gold. The building will consume 60 per cent less energy than national standards and includes many energy saving features such as solar panels, dual solar chimneys, groundwater-based cooling system and waste heat recovery. It is also the first new building to be connected to the city’s downtown district energy system which provides hot water heating from wood waste.

Other green features include using regionally responsive natural materials, rainwater for irrigation, re-use of recycled wood (from the original



Safeway store on the site), increased insulation, high albedo white roof, exterior living wall for reduction of solar gain and an interior living wall for air purification.

Natural daylighting is optimized throughout with the two floors bathed in light from the central atrium.

Construction waste diversion was about 80 per cent, according to Long.

“Recycling was more difficult because of the location,” he says. “Concrete foundations found [during excavation] were crushed and re-used. But drywall was a challenge with no nearby dry-wall manufacturing facilities.”

The main challenges on this project were the weather and limited manpower. Many trades came in from out of town. At peak, there was around 80-100 on site.

“The first winter was a challenge. There were days we could not work,” says Long. “It could’ve been a much bigger challenge so in hindsight I would say we were fortunate.”

Installing the membrane system for the building was a learning curve.

“The membrane system that the architect specified is unusual... but it’s a system that is much better and will greatly improve energy consumption,” says Long, adding the curvilinear design of the building provided some constructability issues.

The detachment is also northern British Columbia’s first-ever Gold Seal project.

“It’s a CCA Gold Seal project. We’re using it as an example for the industry to try to get Gold Seal certification more known in the region,” says Long.

In addition to the Gold Seal designation, Long says Maple Reinders conducted a partnering session at the initial stage of the project to ensure everyone on site “would be treated as professionals and to work for the good of the project instead having adversarial relationships” which contributed to the success of the project.

The RCMP will move into the new facility in early 2014.

“It was a busy intensive project for two years. We had an extremely good project team and the city has a building that is attracting a lot of attention,” says Long. “We’ve had a number of positive comments and tours for students.” **CB**

