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Talisman Centre's roof likely to outlast facility

Replacement cost soars to $39.4 million

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The $40-million replacement of the iconic roof on the Talisman Centre could outlast the rest of the building, officials suggested Wednesday, as aldermen approved more money for the project.

City staff have been working for the past year to nail down the final cost of the roof -- recommended for replacement by 2010 -- after estimating a year ago it would be about $24.5 million.

The bill has now soared to $39.4 million.

There is also another $5.1 million in energy-efficiency upgrades -- a cost that would be shared by the city and the Talisman Centre.

Following several hours of questions, aldermen on the community and protective services committee approved spending another $28.5 million for the project in a 7-1 vote. Council had already set aside $13 million in November 2006.

The additional spending, for a total of $41.5 million, goes to city council on June 9.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, who voted against the move, said she was struggling with the magnitude of the request as the city tries to deal with its infrastructure backlog.

"Even though I value everything about this facility, it's a white elephant that is placing us in an untenable situation where we are left with nowhere to really manoeuvre," she said. "We're backed into a corner with no choice.

"The one thing, the only thing that gives me confidence, is the experts who have been brought to the table have provided outstanding advice."

Several other aldermen said it's clear the city has done its due diligence on the project.

Robin Mitchell, president and chief operating officer of Talisman Centre, said there has been extensive research conducted on the roof.

"They have explored all of the options . . . and they are too expensive, too costly and too much time to build."

Mitchell said the replacement roof will last as long as the facility itself.

Officials with Birdair, the company that built the original and will replace it in 2010, confirmed that the roof -- combined with the related energy upgrades -- will last several decades.

"I firmly believe this roof will outlive the structure itself," said Martin Augustyniak, director of engineering with Birdair.

The company, he said, will offer a 10-year warranty with an option to extend the guarantee for another 10 years provided annual maintenance is done.

Engineers hired by the city suggested replacing the roof with the same type of material is the most cost-effective option for the city, which is contractually obligated to repair it.

The existing roof will be replaced with two layers of a similar, weather-resistant fabric that would be filled with a substance called Nanogel, which is also used as insulation in deep-water pipelines.

Both of the options will maintain the existing iconic appearance of the building and allow for natural daylight to filter into the building.

The nine- to 12-month closure, which will also include some life-cycle maintenance of the facility, won't take place until 2010 and won't affect the two annex buildings.

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