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Committee approves new Talisman Centre roof

By [SHAWN LOGAN](#), Sun Media

The landmark Talisman Centre should be topped with a pricey new roof that will ensure it retains its iconic appeal, a city committee decided today, despite concerns that costs may further spiral.

While aldermen backed plans to spend \$39 million (in addition to another \$5 million from the recreation centre) to build a new fabric roof insulated with high-tech gel and new heating systems, some questioned whether this will be the final funding request for the project.



“It really is a big white elephant that has backed us into a corner,” said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, who voted against the plan, which still much be approved by council next week.

“It was a great, inventive idea at the time and it’s nice to have these things but it’s the taxpayer who has to foot the bill for these architectural wonders.

“Just wait — I’m not confident it’ll stay at that cost and then they’ll keep coming back for more.”

The price tag to replace the familiar white fabric roof that caps the massive facility in Ertlton has soared from \$15 million in 2005 to the current \$44 million, leaving Colley-Urquhart to question why it won’t increase even more by the time work is set to begin in 2010.

Committee members heard while the outer shell is holding on the 25-year-old building, the interior lining is compromised, leading to leaks and circulation problems that are seeing operational costs skyrocket.

Other options were looked at but turned out to be more expensive than replacing the roof with a similar fabric to the original.

Ald. Ric McIver said he wasn’t comfortable moving forward without significant guarantees that the roof would last 30 years while Ald. Bob Hawkesworth suggested the facility set up a reserve fund through user fees to eventually replace the roof years down the line.

Robin Mitchell, president and chief operating officer of the centre, said he’s happy with the decision to move forward and believes it is the best option available.

“We’ve got to keep that iconic structure,” he said.

“I think the people who live around the area wouldn’t want to see a brand new roof that would interfere with their views.”

If approved by council, the nine- to 12-month construction period wouldn't begin until the spring of 2010, Mitchell said, resulting in a full closure of the main facility.

Mitchell added in the interim, the facility will also look for other funding sources for more upgrades such as the aging locker room facilities that need to have a make over.