

New youth hostel planned for Jasper: \$6M project will replace current building on Whistler's Mountain Road

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EDMONTON - Jasper will have a youth hostel within its townsite for the first time by 2013. The Canadian Hostelling Association made some organizational changes this week that will allow it to proceed with building a 120-bed, energy-efficient hostel in Jasper. The nearest hostel to the townsite, called the Jasper International Hostel, is seven kilometres out of town on Whistler's Mountain Road.

"It is Parks Canada's desire that we cease hostelling operations from that site," said Liz Ferguson, executive director of the Canadian Hostelling Association's northern Alberta branch. "They've identified that site as an environmentally sensitive area and they want to decrease the amount of human traffic in that area."

Parks Canada is providing land on Sleepy Hollow Road south of the rail tracks in Jasper for the new building, which is estimated to cost between \$5 million and \$7 million. The new hostel has been under discussion for several years.

This week the northern Alberta region of the hostelling association merged with the Pacific-mountain region, which runs youth hostels in British Columbia and Alberta south of Red Deer. "The northern Alberta region is a healthy organization, but it's small, and as a result it's not capable of taking on a project of that size on its own," Ferguson said. "Our assets total \$2 million, which would not put us in a position to finance a building of \$5 or \$6 million. No bank would give us the money."

Barry Romanko, Jasper's manager of municipal services for Parks Canada, said the old hostel will be torn down and the land around it returned a natural state. This is part of Parks Canada's goal of minimizing the impact of development on the park, he said.

Alistair McLean, chief executive officer for the Pacific-mountain region of the hostelling association, said from Vancouver the new Jasper building will work better. "It will be easier for people coming off buses and trains to be right in the townsite."

Romanko said the new hostel will provide temporary accommodation for newly arrived workers while they look for places to live in Jasper, which has a tight housing market. The current hostel, besides being out of town, is three kilometres up a steep hill. McLean said the old hostel has huge dormitories, but there is a growing demand for smaller dorms and more private rooms among today's travellers.

The preliminary design calls for an energy-efficient building, with solar panels and a "green roof" that features grass to provide insulation and reduce the amount of stormwater going into the sewer system. The Jasper hostel is one of five major projects planned by the association in Alberta and B.C.