

OUR VIEWS

Daylighting the Saw Mill

Providence a guide for uncovering Yonkers' river, and potential

Think outdoor dining on the banks of the liberated Saw Mill River as it flows through downtown Yonkers. Think public plateaus and Riverwalk, a landscaped plaza that features the river as a central attraction as Yonkers joins other Hudson River communities in redeveloping its waterfront. Think rebirth.

Gov. George Pataki visited Yonkers last week to promise an additional \$10 million to help uncover parts of the Saw Mill River from a flume that has contained it for decades. Freeing the river from its brick and concrete confines is part of a proposed \$3.1 billion makeover of a large swath of downtown Yonkers. One of the development partners in the project seems ideally poised for that particularly attractive part of the plan.

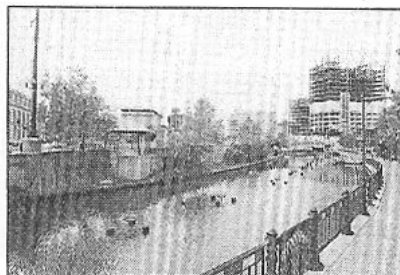
Struever Bros. Eccles and Rouse of Baltimore, a partner in Struever Fidelco Cappelli LLC, uncovered the Woonasquatucket River, a tributary of the Providence River, two years ago as part of the construction of a \$55 million residential/office development in Providence, R.I., called Rising Sun Mills. The similarities between Woonasquatucket River and Yonkers' stretch of the Saw Mill River are striking, as staff writer Michael Gannon's recent reports make plain.

The Woonasquatucket was a dumping ground for old tires and other debris, as has been the Saw Mill. Over the years, just about everything unwanted has been pulled from the Saw Mill, from shopping carts to millstones from the 1800s, a reminder of how the river got its name.

Struever spent \$5 million uncovering and cleaning the Woonasquatucket and working with local community groups. In Yonkers, there is no shortage of environmental and community groups ready to help uncover the Saw Mill. Ned Sullivan, president of the Poughkeepsie-based Hudson support organization Scenic Hudson, has called the project "an integral part of Scenic Hudson's Mission to preserve and restore the Hudson's tributaries as public and natural resources. Daylighting and creating a walkway along the Saw Mill River, we... can transform downtown Yonkers." Sullivan made those comments last year when Pataki supported uncovering the Saw Mill in his State of the State address. Yonkers also has Groundwork Yonkers and the Saw Mill River Coalition interested in seeing the river see the light.

Uncovering the Woonasquatucket was a lesser job than uncovering the Providence River itself, which the City of Providence and State of Rhode Island did in the mid-1990s to rejuvenate the downtown and turn the river into a tourist attraction.

Mark Motte, an urban studies professor at Rhode Island College, co-authored a book, "Providence, the Renaissance City," and called the river's uncovering



Matthew Brown / The Journal News
A portion of the Providence River flows through Providence, R.I., where it is a tourist attraction.

On the Web

Check out the Saw Mill River daylighting project at www.sfcyonkers.com/projects

"the catalyst" of Providence's rejuvenation. It cost \$330 million to uncover and provide public space along the city's waterways, Motte told Gannon.

While the Saw Mill project is less extensive than Providence's, the initial agreement between Yonkers and Struever Fidelco Cappelli calls for the developer to do the work but not pay for it. That's where \$34 million in state funds — the \$10 million freshly promised by Pataki and \$24 million already approved — comes in.

The Providence project increased property values. Still, the Rhode Island city depends on hefty state aid to pay for its schools and keep fiscally stable, according to Francis Leazes, Motte's co-author. Higher property values have brought fear of being priced out. Artist's model Claudia Perri told reporter Gannon that "I don't know anyone who can afford it who's not a doctor or a lawyer or some insane thing where you make a ton of dough."

Being priced out has been a concern in Yonkers ever since redevelopment was first proposed with a minor league baseball stadium in April 2002. The stadium plan lagged and is now part of a redevelopment master plan that the Struever Fidelco Cappelli partnership is due to present to the city in November, with — and it must be insisted upon — plenty of affordable housing.

Uncovering the Providence and Woonasquatucket rivers has redefined Providence. Uncovering the Saw Mill is a small part of the \$3.1 billion Struever Fidelco Cappelli proposal, but a critical one. The laborious "rebirth" of Yonkers' downtown needs the catalyst.



Matthew Brown / The Journal News
Developer Bill Struever tours a section of the Rising Sun Mills complex in Providence.

Have your say

Could uncovering the Saw Mill River in Yonkers help revitalize the city? Visit the "Yonkers" forum at LoHud.com.

