

Construction & DESIGN

SECTION B

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New face of Yonkers? The development team has ambitious plans.

Partners present \$1.5B plan to transform face of Yonkers

BY DANIELLE WOLFFE

Development team Streuver, Fidelco, Cappelli (SFC) presented the first \$1.5 billion dollar phase of a \$3.1 billion development plan for Yonkers to the city council this week which they hope will revitalize the former industrial city and serve as a model for other cities that have fallen into de-

cline in the last half century.

"If we can pull this off, and there is every reason to believe that we can, this can be a model for other cities around the state and the country," said David Simpson, director of communications for the City of Yonkers.

This team of independent developers that formed a partnership for the project was given exclusive rights in February 2006 to research and develop a plan to build on 450 acres of designated land stretching from downtown Yonkers to the Hudson River Waterfront and the Nepperhan Valley Corridor.

The first phase of the project was unanimously accepted by the council, but must still be approved by other

bodies before the first shovel can hit the ground. The plan includes a mixed use office, retail and entertainment space, including a minor league ballpark, and 950 residential apartments; the reopening of an underground stretch of Saw Mill River; and an expansive office space and park at Palisades Point, including 436 condominiums.

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— DAVID SIMPSON,
CITY OF YONKERS

A more comprehensive master plan is due to be submitted to the council November 16. If city zoning requirements and environmental assessments are ironed out, developers hope the first phases of construction could begin on the project in the next six months.

Yonkers is a city of nearly 200,000 people two miles

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Partners present a \$3B plan to transform face of Yonkers

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north of the Bronx. Once a thriving industrial town, home of the first elevator factory in the world — Otis Elevators — the Alexander Smith Carpet Factory and numerous large-scale oil and industrial plants, the city has been falling into decline since the mid 1950's when businesses began relocating or shutting their doors. The waterfront and downtown area have been blighted and underused, and much of the property is derelict.

City representatives expect the first phase of the project could bring 13,000 temporary and 5,000 permanent jobs to the area, and generate \$14.8 million a year in tax revenue for Yonkers.

"This isn't just about creating a shopping center. We are looking way beyond that. This is about bringing new life to a community. There hasn't been anything like this in Yonkers in half of a century," said Geoff Turner, spokesperson for SFC.

Most of the money generated for the project is private money, with a small slice of the public pie funding some of the infrastructure, Simpson said. The city is searching for creative ways to offset those costs, Simpson said.

Developers have faced some resistance from residents. Concerns they have addressed include the height of the building, the success of the

ballpark, and congestion of traffic that could occur with more people moving in, and the skyrocketing of property rates.

"There's always some resistance whenever you bring up a development plan of this scale. In some way resistance is a

good sign because you know you are moving," Simpson said. "What is amazing is the amount of support this development scheme is receiving from a community that is traditionally a fractious community in that different interest groups are competing. We are finally reaching a point where we have a credible plan, and a visionary mayor taking the city in a positive direction," Simpson said.

The plan follows other independent projects proposed by private developers that fell to the wayside over the years for political or economic reasons, Simpson said.

"The city was reaching a point of critical mass and we decided that rather than do it piecemeal we would do a large scale project that includes the waterfront, residential and commercial properties all at once," Simpson said. "I don't know anyone who has tried to do this on as grand a scale — it is almost unprecedented. It is the largest, most ambitious redevelopment plan that we know of."

Representatives believe Yonkers canvas is better primed for development than some of the other upstate New York cities with similar economies. Smaller scale manufacturing jobs dot the Nepperham Valley. A lot of the infrastructure like highways, four Metro North train stations and an Amtrak station, a water taxi, a government receptive to proposals and the

sheer size of the population, makes Yonkers a good fit for a large scale project, Simpson said.

"What sets us apart from Rochester and Utica and some other upstate towns is that we have the water, and also a proximity to New York City that makes the area more attractive," Simpson added.

A unique feature of the first phase of development includes the reopening of the Saw Mill River that had been driven under the streets and diverted to pipes in the 1920's, then run out on the other end to the Hudson River. \$34 million has already been committed by the State of New York to this project. When completed the river will snake through the downtown, and a river walk will most likely be built to complement it.

Furthermore, the structure of the city is a good fit.

"It's got good bones. There is a lot of interesting architecture; the city has not been leveled yet. A lot of the space is already opened and has kind of been left sitting on the sidelines for a long time," Turner said.

If the developers are able to clean up the turf enough to pass environmental inspection, is able to secure the funding and jump through hoops to change zoning laws, the face of Yonkers may truly change.

"In ten years, Yonkers will be a very different place," Turner said.

