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Grand designs for Nets arena

One plan places it at the navy yard

By PAUL H.B. SHIN AND HUGH SON
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

Brooklyn politicians, architects and activists revealed their designs this week for the Prospect Heights site where mega-developer Bruce Ratner wants to build an NBA arena.

Navarro for NEWS

One of the designs for proposed Nets arena that would allow many neighbors of the Atlantic Ave. site to keep their homes.

The new proposals include one that calls for the arena to be built at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, instead of over the Atlantic Ave. rail yards, where Ratner is seeking to develop it.

But the designs were overshadowed by Ratner's surprise announcement on Tuesday that he will try to reduce or eliminate the need to displace residents - a major complaint of foes of his plan.

Some opponents groused that Ratner was trying to appease his critics with hollow promises.

"I think he's trying to steal the thunder of one of many, many arguments we have against this project," said Daniel Goldstein, political chairman of the grass-roots group Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn.

"He didn't make the commitment they wouldn't use eminent domain, and that's what we've been asking for," added Norman Siegel, the lawyer representing the 140 to 160 families facing eviction under Ratner's $2.5 billion plan.

Marshall Brown, an architect and urban designer working with City Councilwoman Letitia James (WFP-Prospect Heights), has drawn a design calling for buildings five to 10 stories tall, interlaced with parkland, to be built on the rail yard site. The plan also would include 700,000 feet of retail space.

"We're building only over the yards, so we're not removing a single building from the site," Brown said.

Rep. Major Owens (D-Brooklyn) - a longtime proponent of developing the Brooklyn Navy Yard - said that the waterfront site had 300 acres that would better suit an arena for the NBA's New Jersey Nets, the team Ratner recently purchased and wants to move to Brooklyn.

"You could see it from Manhattan and the three bridges," Owens said. "It would be a terrific tourist attraction."

Meanwhile, Joel Towers, an architect and director at Parsons School of Design, offered two ways Ratner could develop a sports arena on Atlantic Ave. without venturing onto private property.

Towers' designs involve either placing the arena on a raised platform above Atlantic Ave., or on property Ratner already owns at the Atlantic Mall. The second plan would require the developer to raze his own buildings and adjust Atlantic Ave. to go around the arena.

Siegel vowed again this week that he wouldn't rest until Ratner issued a guarantee that no resident whose property is endangered by the plan would be forced to move.

"The fact that some people might be spared is a step in the right direction, but I have to be concerned about everybody," he said.

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Welcome Marshall Brown — May 7, 2004

Brooklyn SPACE

Architects, Planners Present Another Way To Develop Atlantic Yards Area

by Ben Silverbush (Ben@brooklyneagle.net), published online 05/06/2004

They Say Their Buildings Would Be Less Dense Than Ratner's — With More Retail

BROOKLYN — Calling themselves the "Atlantic Yards Development Workshop," architects and urban planners from Downtown Brooklyn announced their alternate plans Tuesday morning for the site where Forest City Ratner wants to build an arena for the Nets, 4,500 housing units, and office towers. Opponents of Forest City's proposed project — including Councilwoman Letitia James, Joel Towers of Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn, and Pratt Institute Professor Brent Porter — joined the architects in a press conference at City Hall. The event took place shortly before City Council's Economic Development Committee hosted a four-hour-plus public hearing on Forest City's plan.

Atlantic Yards Development Workshop (AYDW)'s members include Marshall Brown, Anna Dietzsch, John Natrigor, and Sarah Strauss. Brown says their plan calls for the construction of new housing units and offices without requiring any existing businesses or homeowners to move because of the use of eminent domain — a controversial part of Ratner's plan.

A spokesman for Ratner recently said the giant real estate firm is looking to minimize the use of eminent domain, and may possibly revise its plans with this in mind.

"We proposed a mid-rise scheme that ranges from five to about 10 or 12 stories," said Brown. "Basically, we've come up with a density that's about 60 to 70 percent of Bruce Ratner's density in terms of square footage.

"Basically the idea is that the question of developing the site is not really about whether or not to do the arena," said Brown. "It about what's the best way to develop the site, assuming another place around Brooklyn is better for the arena."

Brown continued that the group's new buildings would not be 400- and 600 square-foot skyscrapers, like some of those in Forest City's proposal.

"They have something like 300,000 square feet of retail space; we have about 700,000 square feet of retail on the ground floor. It's important to emphasize that without building huge towers, by doing a horizontal development, we can still achieve a relatively high density."

The number of housing units for the plan have yet to be calculated, Brown said. He noted, however that they would include affordable housing that goes beyond the standard percentage model of 50 percent market-rate housing to 30 percent moderate income to 20 percent affordable — which Forest City has stated it would likely follow.

Brown said that AYDW believes that affordable housing should not be calculated based on state or city income, but rather by the wage earnings of local residents in the areas where projects are being planned.

"We think that the revenue captured by achieving such a dense amount of retail on the ground floor can be used to subsidize a larger amount of affordable housing," said Brown.

Forest City Executive Vice President Jim Stuckey said at a public hearing Monday that his company's project would create more than 17,000 temporary construction jobs and 10,000 permanent jobs. NYC Economic Development Corporation President Andrew Alper agreed with the former figure, but put the second job one at more than 7,000.

Brown contended that his project would more create more local jobs than Forest City's plan. "And this is why: We've partitioned the site, created lots of different scales so that instead of having one developer do the whole project, our idea is that you could get multiple developers involved.

"Smaller-scale developers involved would use more local labor, and the same thing holds for retail or businesses that would move in there," he said.

Further contrasting Workshop's plan with Forest City's, Brown said, "Where the Ratner proposal removed streets, we're actually adding new ones, by extending certain streets from Fort Greene to Prospect Heights — Cumberland and Adolphi Streets."

In addition to new housing and jobs, Brown said his group is proposing to reuse the two existing buildings atop the railyards on Atlantic Avenue — one is abandoned and the other is being used for storage — for public space such as educational facility, community center, or recreational use.

Cover

Poll

How do you feel about the prospect of a Nets sports complex in Downtown Brooklyn?

- I'm mixed. While I like the idea of adding some prestige to this great borough, I'm concerned about its effect on Downtown Brooklyn.
- I'm against it. Don't Manhattanize Brooklyn with your fancy sports arena.
- I'm in favor of it. Let's bring basketball back to where it belongs in Brooklyn.
- I don't really have an opinion on this topic.
- I have an opinion on this topic, but this poll doesn't represent it.
- I'm in favor of the arena, but not in favor of the accompanying development.

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