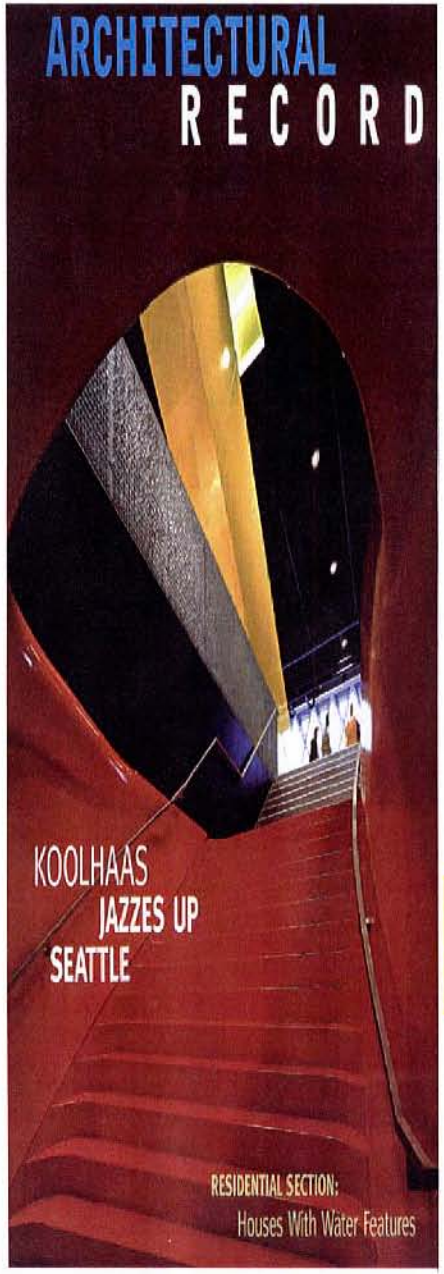
AYDWS IN THE NEWS



Record News

Designers develop alternatives to Gehry's Brooklyn plans

When architect Joel Towers first saw developer Bruce Ratner's proposal for a $2.5 billion Nets arena complex in Brooklyn, he saw one problem: His home was within the site.

Soon afterward, Ratner announced that he would remove buildings in the area through eminent domain, a law that allows the city to condemn property for urban renewal, and Towers quickly began sketching his own plan—one that would preserve his house.

Towers is one of several local architects working on counterproposals to Ratner's plan, designed largely by Frank Gehry, FAIA, that aims to construct a 15,000-seat arena and four soaring residential towers over the Atlantic rail yards in downtown Brooklyn. The new plans vary greatly, but all attempt to prevent the displacement of residents and businesses. "We are working to create a menu of alternatives," says architect Marshall Brown, who is working with district council member Letitia James and a team of neighborhood architects and urban designers.

Brown's plan includes a winding park and a relocated stadium.

Towers' first plan, called "Shift," moves the 300,000-square-foot arena onto a platform above the Atlantic Center, just north of the rail yards. New residential buildings would remain in the plan but be horizontally scaled and densely packed to blend with surrounding buildings and preserve existing structures. In January, Towers discussed his proposal with Ratner and Gehry. Gehry liked the platform idea but insisted the arena stay at ground level.

Towers, a partner at SR + T Architects and director of Sustainable Design at Parsons School of Design, then drew up another scheme, called "Swerve," which reconfigures Atlantic Avenue, near the site, to provide more land for the project. He presented the plan at a city council meeting in April that was attended by Ratner.

Meanwhile, Brown and his team, after meeting with residents in March, offered an option that calls for five- to 10-story buildings, a winding green space, and a reconnection of streets now severed by the rail yards. The plan does not include an arena. Instead, it aims to move it to the Brooklyn Navy Yards, a 300-acre swath of land owned by the city on the East River. Congressman Major Owens also commissioned architect Jennifer Gelin to examine the site. Her proposal links the arena with the 2012 Olympic bid plan, which relies heavily on waterborne transportation.

As of now, Ratner has not made any further commitments to review the alternative proposals. However, James Stucky, vice president of Forest City Ratner (FCR), said the company is making every effort not to displace residents. "We will either have to buy the buildings or carve out a space for them," he says. Beth Davidson, an FCR spokesperson, says the company has already gone through 36 sketches in order to minimize the need for condemnation. Still, such plans remain vague at best. *Christina Rogers*