

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Brooklyn Broadside:

Domino Plan: An Appealing Blend of The Old and The New

by Dennis Holt (Holt@brooklyneagle.net), published online 09-27-2007

WILLIAMSBURG — It is unlikely that the name Lappin will join the names Havemeyer, Elder, Arbuckle, Meyers, Siercks, Wilson, Domino or the sobering phrase The Sugar Trust in Brooklyn's long history of names.

But all those names relate in one way or another to an imposing industrial complex next to the Williamsburg Bridge, a series of buildings long there before the Brooklyn Bridge and long a part of Brooklyn.

Lappin is the newest name, as in Michael Lappin, the president and CEO of CPC Resources, which owns the more than 11-acre site of the former Domino Sugar Refinery, probably the most prominent waterfront site in Williamsburg.

The news reported in this newspaper says that the proposal by Lappin to landmark the old core structure of the Domino site, but not all of the refinery, brings him to the forefront. His overall plan is to build a new complex of his own — four tall buildings with a total of 2,200 residential units with about 600 units for affordable rents.

The other names, obtained by Eagle editor Phoebe Neidl in her research on the highlights of the sugar history in Brooklyn, are embedded, if only rhetorically, in the soil around that old site. At one time, 68 percent of the country's imported sugar was refined in Brooklyn.

But the key part of this story, after many false and fratricidal stops and starts at other old industrial waterfront sites, shows that if people try hard enough and are honest with each other, the very new and the very old can be melded together.

Some preservationists would have liked that more of the old refinery could have been saved, and that's very normal and proper. The developer isn't just singing a money tale when he says including the core building in his building plans will be very costly.

It's too bad that this same attitude hasn't been accomplished before and that, in at least one case, politics got preference over common sense. But there aren't many other opportunities to try the Domino example. There really is nothing worth saving on Piers 7 to 12, for example, except for the 160 Imlay St. complex, and no one wants to tear that down.

The Navy Yard and Brooklyn Bridge Park pretty much have everything else spoken for, as has DUMBO except for the large Con Ed site — the largest single-owned site on the old Brooklyn waterfront. Someday, the property will come into play in a big way, but there is not much worthy of retaining there.

Sunset Park may become the next large waterfront parcel worthy of attention. The good news there is that the Army Terminal and Bush Terminal are in use and will continue in an industrial mode.

The next Brooklyn area for possible industrial landmarking may become Gowanus, but no one has gone though that exercise yet. It will come.