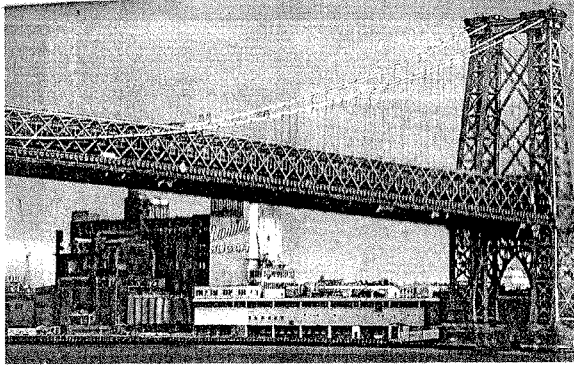


The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2007



Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Brooklyn's former Domino Sugar site is being pushed for landmark status, and a project would keep the plant's exterior for new apartments.

History and Homes May Mix At the Brooklyn Waterfront

BY MICHAEL WILSON

Hulking and dormant on the North Brooklyn waterfront, its floors still sticky from a century's toil, the former Domino Sugar refinery was the focus of a hearing yesterday to let residents sound off on whether to give it landmark status and allow a developer to transform it into part of an apartment complex.

But the residents and the developer seemed to be in agreement on many points at the hearing, held before the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission. The project, named by its planners "The New Domino," would retain the plant's exterior while gutting its interior, a partner in the development, Michael D. Lappin, with the Community Preservation Corporation, said.

In all, there would be an estimated 2,200 apartments built on the 11.5-acre site, he said. Thirty percent of the apartments, about 660, would be reserved for families with low or moderate incomes, a number that seemed to agree with the desires of neighborhood activists traditionally at odds with a long line of developers who have been rushing into North Brooklyn.

The commission took no action yesterday, and will vote on the landmark status at a later meeting.

Neighbors who grew up with the Domino plant when it and other plants along the East River churned out tons of sugar said that their top priority was to ensure that the developer offered a significant amount of low- and moderate-priced housing.

The Rev. Jim O'Shea, a Roman Catholic priest and director of Churches United, an advocacy group for moderately priced housing, said the commission should envision a day when "factory owners live side by side with factory workers" and "children of billionaires play with children of taxi drivers."

A third contingent, preservationists, asked only that the landmark boundaries be expanded to include more buildings in the area.

"This was the seat of the sugar empire," said Mary Habstritt, a preservationist with the local chapter of the Society for Industrial Archeology.

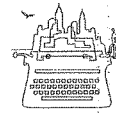
But the developers would not support extending the landmark designation, hoping to build on surrounding areas to offset the cost of the Domino project, Mr. Lappin said. The entire site could cost about \$1.2 billion to develop, according to early estimates, he said.

The Domino plant, operating since

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the 1880s, and its large sign are familiar to drivers and pedestrians. Sugar processing largely shut down there in 2003.

The plant's significance grew in May 2006 when a huge fire destroyed the historic Greenpoint Terminal Market nearby even as that site was being considered for development. A homeless man pleaded guilty to accidentally setting the blaze.

C. P. C. Resources, the development arm of the Community Preservation Corporation, and Isaac Katan, a Brooklyn developer, bought the land and the buildings in 2004. The site is really three buildings that look like one because they have common walls: the Filter House, the Pan House and the Finishing House, each with a role in the production of sugar. The largest is the Filter House, 13 stories tall, where raw sugar was mixed with charcoal, acid and water before the next stop, the Pan House.

"The site's design will reopen all the street connections from the neighborhood to the waterfront, allowing visual and physical access for the first time in over a century," Mr. Lappin said. The plan includes about four acres of public space and retail and community facilities, he said.

While the Domino buildings look similar to others on the waterfront that have been converted, they are very different, Mr. Lappin said.

"The refinery, it turns out, is in many ways no more than a large machine dressed up as a building," he said. "The thick brick walls encase various manufacturing processes and equipment, some of which rise several stories in height. In many areas of the buildings, the equipment replaces the floor structure."

Robert Silman, a structural engineer who surveyed the site, said he remembered thinking, "It must be that the building has plenty of capacity." Boy, were we wrong. "The cast-iron columns inside do not have the capacity to support the planned apartments, and are too close together — every 12 or 13 feet, he said — to design around them, he said."