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Big Plans for Old Sugar Refinery Face Review

By CHARLES V. BAGLI

In 2004, the Domino Sugar refinery that occupied five blocks along the Brooklyn waterfront in Williamsburg for more than 150 years shut down, joining the neighboring brick factories as remnants of the area's industrial past.

Now a developer is beginning a public review of a proposal to turn the vacant 11-acre industrial site into a \$1.5 billion residential complex, reusing the refinery and installing the historic, 40-foot-tall Domino Sugar sign (now on a separate building) on top. There would be 2,200 apartments in all. The developer also plans to build a waterfront esplanade and a set of new glass and brick buildings that would range from 6 to 40 stories.

"We saw this as an opportunity to create what is best in New

In the former Domino plant, 30 percent of apartments would be designated affordable.

York: a mixed-income community, with a lot of affordable housing and some pretty interesting architecture, on a waterfront that's been closed to the public for 150 years," said the developer, Michael D. Lappin, chief executive of the Community Preservation Corporation, a nonprofit group, and CPC Resources, its for-profit subsidiary.

An unusually large percentage of the apartments, 30 percent, or 660 units, would be set aside for low- and moderate-income families and distributed throughout the project. (Generally, development projects promise to dedicate 20 percent of their units for such housing.)

The plan might sound a little ambitious, given the recession. And the project still faces some criticism from community advocates who say the project may be too densely packed.

The city's land-use review for the project started Monday at the City Planning Commission with a public hearing and the certification of the developer's proposal. Over the next seven months, various governmental entities — from the local community board to the City Council — will weigh in on the plans.

In the years since the last sugar cubes were packed into cartons at the refinery, the neighborhood has been the center of the residential building boom and then the real estate downturn. More than one-fifth of the 500 projects stalled in New York City are in Williamsburg.

But like a few other developers, Mr. Lappin said he had adopted a slow, multiphased approach. It will take nearly a year to get city approval; once that is



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The Domino Sugar refinery, next to the East River, was built in 1884. It closed in 2004 and was designated a landmark in 2007.

secured, only the first building will immediately go up — on the east side of Kent Avenue, between South Third and South Fourth Streets. The rest will follow on the waterfront parcel, with construction to be completed in 2021.

Although the market is inundated with luxury housing, Mr. Lappin said, there was a continuing need for housing for teachers, construction workers, clerks and low-income families. Community Preservation Corporation, a lending consortium of banks and insurance companies, has financed \$7.2 billion in mostly affordable housing in its 35-year existence.

Mr. Lappin's company and his partners have already spent more than \$125 million on the land, environmental assessments, architects and plans. The architect Rafael Viñoly designed the transformation plan for what is known as the New Domino, while Beyer Blinder Belle, the architectural firm, drew up the plan to convert the 12-story refinery building, which was declared a landmark in 2007, into 241 apartments, with shops, a community center and a multilevel rooftop structure that would rise as high as four stories.

The original plan was to sell condominiums on the site and use the profit to subsidize the low- and moderate-income units. That may still happen, but Mr.

Lappin acknowledged that the current condo market was soft.

Peter Gillespie, executive director of Neighbors Allied for Good Growth in Williamsburg, credited the developer with a well-designed plan, nice open space and the inclusion of a high percentage of apartments for low- and moderate-income residents. But, he added, "there's a concern about the size and scale of the buildings. There's greater density here than other developers have gotten."

Christopher Olechowski, chairman of Community Board 1, which includes the Domino site, agreed. "It's a trade-off," he said. "They will have to make some really strong arguments about affordable housing versus density and height. It's not going to be an easy sell."