

IN THE REGION/Westchester

Expanding New York City Into Yonkers

By ELSA BRENNER

YONKERS
IF it is approved by local officials, a \$3.1 billion proposal unveiled earlier this month to revive major areas throughout this gritty city with new residences, a ballpark and stores would be the largest municipal revitalization effort in Westchester County, far outstripping even the construction that is transforming downtown White Plains.

Indeed, the cost of the proposal here is almost as large as the plan for the Atlantic Yards development in Brooklyn, which has been described as the biggest project in the borough's history and the third-biggest ever in New York City.

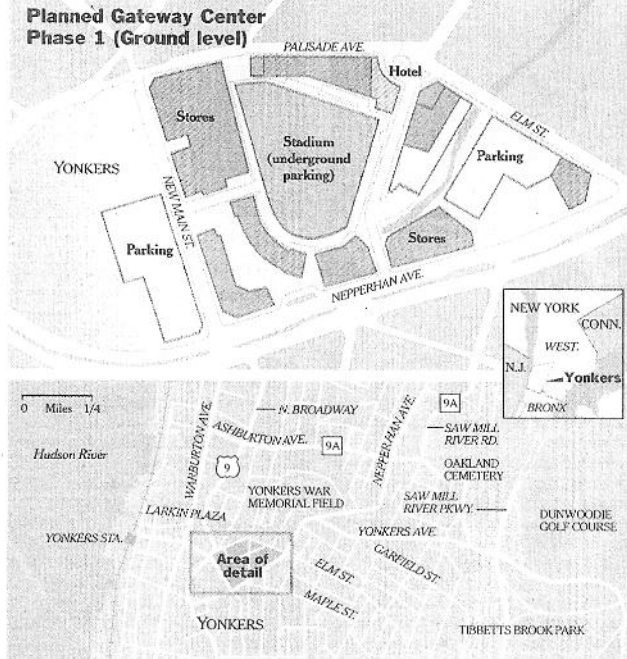
Parts of the Yonkers plan have been unsuccessfully proposed before. The catalyst for the latest version is Louis R. Cappelli, the Valhalla-based developer who is behind \$2 billion in residential and commercial projects in White Plains and New Rochelle.

For Yonkers, Mr. Cappelli has joined forces with Struever Brothers Eccles & Rouse of Baltimore and Fidelco Group of Millburn, N.J. The two companies last year outlined a proposal for a 6,500-seat ballpark that would be home to an expansion franchise in the independent Atlantic League. Proposals for a minor league ballpark here have stalled under two different developers since first being put forth in 2002.

Mr. Cappelli said he was trying, in effect, to expand the northern residential boundaries of New York City by building high-rise apartments in economically depressed cities in the southern tier of Westchester, just beyond the upper reaches of the Bronx.

One dispassionate expert endorsed the notion that Yonkers is a good candidate for significant renewal. Christopher Jones, vice president for research at the Regional Plan Association, a nonprofit planning group in Manhattan, said, "If you look at places where you'd like to see intensive redevelopment, Yonkers is one of them."

"The region needs more housing," Mr. Jones said. "New York City can't accommodate all the demand." In particular, he said, the region needs residences for moderate- and middle-income people. Whether such projects would be created in Yonkers is not clear; the developers have not yet worked out those details, accord-



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ing to Geoff Thompson, a spokesman for the three.

Apartments in Mr. Cappelli's new high-rise condominiums in White Plains and New Rochelle are marketed as being in the luxury category, but they cost less than comparable residences in Manhattan.

Like White Plains and New Rochelle, both within a 35-minute commute of Manhattan, the city of Yonkers is along major transportation routes, and its downtown has deteriorated in recent decades as suburban shopping malls expanded.

"The idea is to also create a mix of offices, hotels, retail shops and entertainment to complement the residential development, including a nightlife and things to do on weekends," Mr. Cappelli said. "It makes a complete package."

In Yonkers, the development being proposed would fall in an area a mile north and a mile south of the Getty Square neighborhood, in the heart of downtown from the Hudson River to the Saw Mill River Parkway.

Most of the property affected is privately owned, and the developers may have to invoke the city's power

of condemnation to acquire them, although, according to Yonkers Mayor Philip A. Amicone, they will try to buy them first.

The new development team, called Struever Fidelco Cappelli, will begin a six-month planning process, which will include public meetings.

Alfred DelBello, a former mayor of Yonkers and currently a White Plains lawyer, who represents all three developers, informally brought them together some months ago, Mr. Cappelli said. "We're better attacking this as an army than as individuals," he explained. "When we got together, we discovered that there was a chemistry between us, and that we have the same priorities."

According to their agreement with Yonkers, the new developers could build the downtown projects themselves or form partnerships with other developers. After the study in coming months, the partners will submit a comprehensive redevelopment plan to the City Council.

The plan would be carried out in three stages. The first would encompass the ballpark and surrounding area in the heart of the downtown. It

would also uncover the Saw Mill River, which now runs under a 2,000-foot stretch of city streets before it empties into the Hudson, and create a riverfront promenade along it.

Preliminary plans for the first stage call for 750,000 square feet of mixed-use buildings; stores would be on the ground floors and offices and up to 800 units of housing above. The tenants might include a major retailer, movie theaters and possibly a hotel. This phase would include development of two riverfront parcels south of the Yonkers train station that have already been zoned for new residential construction.

The second phase calls for new waterfront residences on industrial properties north of the Yonkers train station, between the Hudson River and the Metro-North tracks, and mixed-use redevelopment — including commuter parking and office, residential and retail space — for an area surrounding the post office between Main Street and Larkin Plaza, near the waterfront.

The third phase would redevelop a residential area near the Ludlow station, another Metro-North Railroad stop in Yonkers, and in the Nepperhan Valley, an economically distressed industrial area. The area encompassed by the three phases could reach 526 acres, said David Simpson, a city spokesman.

But no timetable has been set for the new development, and in past years, Yonkers has had a poor track record with developers. "There was too much bad politics and a lot of haggling," Mayor Amicone conceded. "It turned off the private sector. But that's changed in the last eight or nine years."

Indeed, several new apartment projects have been completed on or near the waterfront in the last decade, along with other commercial development downtown.

Residents, meanwhile, want more say in how development moves ahead, "especially now that there's a feeding frenzy of developers in Yonkers," said Robert M. Walters, a long-time activist and Hudson River environmentalist here.

He wants to ensure that developers listen to the concerns of existing residents. With that in mind, a dormant neighborhood group, the Hudson River Community Association, was reactivated a few years ago "to create more of a dialogue" with government officials, he said.