

## \$3.1B redevelopment plan launched in Yonkers

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YONKERS — The City Council last night approved an agreement with a trio of developers that will launch planning for a \$3.1 billion redevelopment proposal for downtown and the waterfront.

The 32-page agreement between the council and developers Louis Cappelli, Bill Struever and Marc Berson was approved unanimously in a special council meeting that followed nearly two months of discussion and negotiation.

In the end, however, the council agreed with the developers and their own attorneys, who said the only binding aspects of the agreement were to give the group six months of exclusive rights to develop a master plan and sell certain city-controlled property for \$10.4 million.

"Everything discussed in this document is going to continue to

be debated," said Councilman Dennis Robertson, D-3rd District, who oversaw discussion of the project as chairman of the council's Real Estate Committee.

The developers now have six months to draw up a plan to build new homes, retail and amenities from the Nepperhan Valley through Getty Square to Larkin Plaza and the waterfront to the south. The plan includes a minor-league ballpark at a city-owned parking lot known as Chicken Island and uncovering stretches of the Saw Mill River that have long run underneath downtown.

Robertson noted there would be no fewer than 15 council votes on various aspects of the plans. Struever, who attended the meeting with his two partners, said after the 7-0 vote that much work remained to win the council's support, but he was excited to take on the redevelopment of an old town with a lot of character.

"We are by no means starting from scratch," he said. "This is a great city with a great spirit."

Chicken Island is one of several city-controlled properties for which the developers would pay a total of \$10.4 million, or \$1.2 million per acre. Others include the vacant, old library building on Main Street and waterfront property owned by the city's Community Development Agency near the American Sugar Refinery.

The developers also agreed to build a new fire headquarters in the deal. Plans for the ballpark would displace the current fire headquarters on New School Street.

Much private property also must be acquired. Several speakers at the meeting expressed concern about references in the agreement to using the city's power of condemnation to acquire private property.

Several council members said they were opposed to condemning

private property. Council President Chuck Lesnick, however, said the developer and city needed to use the threat of condemnation to ensure property owners negotiate with the developers in good faith.

While the council was unanimous in its approval of the agreement, the massive project still faces heavy scrutiny in the months ahead.

The council deliberated the deal since Feb. 7, including five meetings behind closed doors. The council cited an exemption under the state's Open Meetings Law for shutting its doors, an opinion largely upheld by a state watchdog.

The council's private discussions centered on a number of issues outlined in the agreement that concerned the council, including the relatively low price offered for city-controlled land.

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