

A 'Go' in Yonkers

Developers given six months to prepare master renewal plan

The Yonkers City Council this week gave a development firm exclusive rights for six months to draw up a master plan for a sweeping proposal to remake a major swath of the city. It is encouraging that the vote was a unanimous 7-0, although several council members expressed reservations about parts of the agreement.

The redevelopment, expected to take about 10 years, would be done in three phases: first the downtown, then the Hudson waterfront and finally the Nepperhan Valley industrial corridor and the area around the Ludlow Metro-North Railroad station.

The downtown would get a minor-league baseball stadium, home to an independent Atlantic League franchise, mixed-use retail development and up to 800 residential units. In addition to exclusive rights for six months, the developer, Struever Fidelco Cappelli LLC, would acquire a municipal parking lot called Chicken Island for the stadium site, two waterfront parcels and an old Main Street department store building once used as a public library for \$10.4 million.

The developer would build a new fire headquarters to replace the one displaced by the stadium. The plan also calls for uncovering parts of the Saw Mill River as it flows beneath the downtown in a

flume. The developer would do the work, but not pay for it. Money to "daylight" the river would come from \$24 million that state Sen. Nicholas Spano, R-Yonkers, has proposed in the state budget to spur the redevelopment.

It took the council two months to digest, debate, get consultant advice and hear from the public on the agreement, which was first approved by the developer and Mayor Phil Amicone in February. The council moved the agreement along at a pretty good clip, given that the stadium has been stalled since it was first proposed in April 2003. Council President Chuck Lesnick and his council col-



Chuck Lesnick

leagues are to be commended for permitting public comment at the special council session called Tuesday to approve the contract. Public comment is usually not allowed at special meetings.

As the plan develops, it is important that the public be kept informed. There will be questions about building heights; the location of the new fire headquarters; the possible use of tax-increment financing, a development mechanism through which money borrowed to pay for infrastructure and other improvements would be repaid out of future property tax revenue. Also, at least two council members are on record against using eminent domain to take private property, although that may be necessary.

Green-lighting the initial agreement may have been the easy part.