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Developer's plan to remake much of Yonkers' downtown wins first of three City Council approvals

Len Maniace
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YONKERS - More than 2 1/2 years after its unveiling, the Struever Fidelco Cappelli plan to remake much of this city's faded downtown last night won the first of three City Council approvals.

The council action - officially declaring complete the plan's final environmental impact statement - came after the developers said they face \$2.2 million in penalties from its major lender if the plan doesn't win a second council approval before the end of this month.

And it came as the nation's economic crisis deepened, raising concerns over the ability of future lenders to provide the bulk of the financing for the \$1.6 billion project.

Still, the proposal's public face, Joseph Apicella, was buoyed by the council's 5-2 approval, with only council members Joan Gronowski and Sandy Annabi voting "no."

"I'm very optimistic, in spite of the economic times, that we have a project that is going to happen," said Apicella, SFC's executive project manager. "This council had done its work and is going to continue to do its work."

The vote took place before an audience that overflowed the Council Chambers. More than 30 spoke - most calling for the council to act immediately on the plan. Many comments were greeted with enthusiastic cheers, some with boos.

The proposal is actually four projects in one:

- River Park Center, an 11-story shopping and entertainment complex topped by two 50-story apartment towers and a baseball stadium to be built east of City Hall.
- Palisades Point, two 25-story apartment buildings on the Hudson River.
- The Cacace Center, a hotel, office building and a new Fire Department headquarters across Nepperhan Avenue from City Hall.
- The uncovering of the Saw Mill River at Larkin Plaza.

Much of the last year had been taken up with an impassioned debate over the proposed injection of massive residential and commercial building into a downtown long bypassed by development, and its scale - far larger than any other structures in Yonkers - and its potential for blocking the city's prized views of the Hudson. Also at issue has been the amount of affordable housing to be built by developers; how much open space would be provided; and a public-financing plan for the project's infrastructure that's never been used before in the state.

Mayor Phil Amicone had criticized the council over the length of the review, saying it jeopardized the project and urged it to move faster.

Two major City Council actions remain. Sometime before the end of the month, the council is expected to issue a series of environmental findings that determine the steps needed to deal with environmental and social effects of the development, including open space, affordable housing, traffic

and transit improvements.

The last action by the City Council is known as a land disposition agreement, which amounts to a contract covering the transfer of city-owned land on which most of the redevelopment is planned.

Once that is completed, the project goes before the city Planning Board for site-plan approval, a process that lays out the details of various elements in the development.
