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Abdo's N.Y. Ave. project wins OK from District

by Prabha Natarajan
Staff Reporter

Jim Abdo won over the D.C.'s Zoning Commission and got his ambitious project on New York Avenue NE approved on Feb. 12, clearing the way for a residential and retail development at the city's eastern gateway.

He can now move forward with the transformation of a 16-acre, triangular parcel bounded by New York Avenue, Bladensburg Road and Montana Avenue.

What today is a collection of strip clubs, nightclubs and a junkyard could become a lively retail corridor with cafes, restaurants, pharmacies and a grocery stores if Abdo's plans succeed.

"This really brings about the kind of design and project that we'd like to see in a gateway coming into the District, and I think that this project knocks the ball out of the park," said D.C. Zoning Commissioner Greg Jeffries at the hearing on the project.

The \$1.1 billion project, which involves what is said to be the largest assemblage of private land for development in the District, will be called Arbor Place in honor of its neighbor, the National Arboretum. Two parcels on the lot, at the corner of New York Avenue and Bladensburg Road, will be untouched.

"It was an embarrassment that this hodgepodge of really disgraceful uses was the front door of the nation's capital," says Abdo of Abdo Development.

The plans propose eight buildings, rising 11 floors to 110 feet, spread over the parcel, with a total of 3,400 to 3,600 residential units. Most of the units are targeted at middle-income earners, but roughly 8 percent will be set aside as affordable housing.

The proposal also features 130,000 square feet of retail on the ground floor of buildings fronting New York Avenue.

Abdo is providing most of the amenities the residents would need, including Arbor Club, a 42,000-square-foot facility that would



JOANNE S. LAWTON

Let's start: Jim Abdo, left, and Eric Price say they can turn 16 acres of a rundown neighborhood along New York Avenue NE into a massive mixed-use project befitting the nation's capital.

house an indoor basketball court, a gym and a day care center for residents. A 3-acre park would be in the center of the project.

The developer is in talks with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority to get bus stops near the project and plans to provide daily shuttle service to the Rhode Island Avenue Metro station.

"It's about quality of life and being able to afford to live in the District," Abdo says.

He took on the biggest risk of his career when he negotiated a deal two years ago with the Schaeffer family, which owns about 11 acres of the 16-acre block.

The site's visibility and high traffic, about 80,000 cars a day, were a huge attraction.

Abdo and Broadway Management of New York are equal partners in the venture, with Abdo's company taking the lead.

The joint venture will acquire the land from the Schaeffers next June to allow time for the

developers to complete the title and permitting processes. In 18 months, the site would be completely razed, and building permits would be in hand.

At that time, there will likely be huge billboards with catchy ads to entice commuters into buying condominiums priced at \$450 to \$475 per square foot.

The developer is keeping open the option to market some units as apartments, says Eric Price, the vice president of Abdo Development who was hired away from his former position as deputy mayor to manage the project.

As the project is built out, it is expected to generate \$43 million in annual tax revenue for the District. Currently, the property generates \$286,000.

E-mail: pnatarajan@bizjournals.com Phone: 703/258-0836