

Riverside South Working Group
Ethel Sheffer, Chairperson
joint with
Land Use Committee
Richard Asche and Page Cowley, Co-Chairpersons
March 17, 2010

Presentation by the Extell Development Company on revised plans for Riverside Center (59th-61st Streets, West End Avenue-Riverside Boulevard)

Riverside Center Working Group Chairperson Ethel Sheffer introduced the meeting, explaining that the developer, Extell Development Company, would be presenting the latest version of its proposal for the last undeveloped Riverside South site. The project is expected to be certified to enter the seven-month Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) in mid-April.

In addition to the Extell team, members of MCB7, Council Member Gale Brewer, and representatives of City Planning and the Manhattan Borough President, approximately 20 members of the public were present.

Donna Gargano, SVP of Extell, presented the project. She pointed to two models—the one previously seen by the public and another updated according to requirements of City Planning during the pre-certification phase. The project covers the southernmost portion of the Riverside South site—previously designated as parcels L, M, N. Extell intends Riverside Center to include:

- 2500 residential units
- 250-room hotel
- 210,000 square feet of retail, including cinema
- K-8 school
- 1800 below-ground parking spaces
- Approx 3 acres of open space

She discussed the open spaces of the site—central plaza with water feature with fountain, flower fields, lawn. She also described the changes since the last public presentation of the proposal, approximately one year ago:

- Reduced parking from 2500 to 1800 spaces
- Decreased total square footage by 150,000
- Changed building heights
- Committed to finance and build the core and shell of a 150,000-square-foot public school
- Widened all sidewalks to 15 feet

Attorney Paul Selver of Kramer Levin explained the technical land use actions being requested:

- Amend Restrictive Declaration controlling all of Riverside South
 - Floor area and site plan
 - Number of dwelling units
 - Extend affordable housing obligation
- Special Permit for Rail and Transit Airspace (including garage requests)
- Zoning text changes:
 - Bulk—waiver to allow additional
 - Use—allow operation of an automobile showroom and service center
- Authorization for a curb cut on a wide street (WEA @ West 60th Street)

Landscape architect of Signe Nielsen presented the plan for site and circulation. She noted that West 60th Street cannot extend and connect to Riverside Boulevard. She pointed out the water feature, a mile's worth of seating, flowering fields, topographic features, and a terraced area on West 59th Street. She explained her stepped solution to the grade change at Riverside Boulevard. She plans to use native plants tolerant of the environmental and climate conditions at this site.

Architect Stephen Hill discussed the ground-level and below-ground plans for the site. He pointed out truck elevators and loading bays in the building at WEA & West 59th Street (i.e., hotel site), a curb cut on West

61st Street, two on Freedom Place South, and four along West 59th Street (for a grand total of seven cuts in the site – in addition to the public access easements at the ends of Freedom Place South). The plan is for individuated garages for each of the five buildings proposed for the site. On the cellar level, most space is allocated to the automotive dealership and service center. Below the cellar level are two subcellar levels dedicated to parking.

Hope Cohen asked about the multiple curb cuts and individuated garage entrances. Mr. Hill responded that multiple entrances help to disperse the traffic. There is also the issue of staging garage access and building construction.

Page Cowley asked about the automobile showroom use. Ms. Gargano explained that Extell has limited choice in tenants who both need a large amount of space and can afford to contribute toward the cost entailed in the subcellar construction. Ms. Sheffer noted that MCB7 has requested further information from Extell about the plans and costs of the subcellar component. Ms. Cowley expressed concerns about ventilation and quality of life above ground.

Andrew Albert asked about street directionality and implications of/for the hotel. Mr. Hill responded that West 61st Street, West 59th Street, Freedom Place South, are two-way. West 60th Street is eastbound. Riverside Boulevard is two-way and branches into a divided configuration just north of West 60th Street. Transportation consultant Philip Habib explained that approximately 1200 parking spaces are anticipated to be dedicated to site-based uses, and the remaining 600 are anticipated to be used by the public (technically, the application is for all to be public). He also explained possible bus service for the site—along WEA, Freedom Place South, and West 61st Street. Service along Riverside Boulevard is a possibility in the long term.

Klari Neuwelt asked about the design of the open space in relation to Riverside Park and Riverside Park South. In response to Ms. Neuwelt's specific question about lamp style, Ms. Nielsen explained that lamps will be dark-sky compliant. Streets on the site will look like regular New York City streets, with the usual components—trees, cobblestones, etc. The major lawn and meadow areas will be as similar as possible to Riverside Park South, within the constraints of preserving a West 60th Street view corridor and working with the windiness of the site.

Mark Diller asked about the capacity of the school. Ms. Gargano responded that a 150,000-square-foot school could accommodate approximately 1300 students. Extell is awaiting further guidance from the Department of Education on the exact requirements for the school. In response to Mr. Diller's question about schoolyards, Mr. Hill pointed out rooftop playspaces and agreed to provide dimensions of the proposed playspaces.

Elizabeth Starkey asked about cogeneration on/for the site. Extell provided no clear answer. In response to her question about waste management, Mr. Hill pointed out the hotel's dedicated compaction facility. Otherwise, buildings work as other modern buildings do in the city.

Ms. Sheffer asked about the ratio of affordable housing on this site. How will Extell achieve a goal of 20% for the site? Ms. Gargano responded that the plan is currently at 12% and will be negotiated throughout the ULURP process, based on the various costs imposed on the project.

Roberta Semer asked about the water feature, expressing concerns about the effect of wind on the feature. In answer to her question about staging, Mr. Hill responded that open space will be constructed with each adjacent building.

In response to Jay Adolf's question about the proposal for 2500 residential units, attorney Ken Lowenstein of Bryan Cave explained that the Restrictive Declaration currently allows 572 units along the water and none further east (where TV studios were originally anticipated and approved). Mr. Lowenstein further explained that 2500 units is the proposed program; if the proposed hotel is dropped from the plan, the applicant would replace that use with residential units beyond the 2500 now anticipated.

Sheldon Fine asked about the details on affordable housing—unit size mix, income ranges, etc. Mr. Lowenstein responded that such details will be settled in coming negotiations. Extell's current proposal is to follow the existing guidelines for Riverside South overall.

Ken Coughlin asked about the basis for requesting 1800 parking spaces. Mr. Habib explained the peak overnight demand of 1100 to serve residential and hotel uses. Right now the site hosts 1600 parkers, so 800 existing parkers are anticipated to be displaced. In response to Mr. Coughlin's question about bicycle circulation on the site, Mr. Habib pointed out the bikeway in/through Hudson River Park and Riverside Park; for the rest of

the site, he anticipates an “informal” system with a ramp from West 61st Street down to the level of Riverside Park South.

Ms. Semer asked about the size, type, and configuration of ground-level retail. Ms. Gargano anticipates one-story retail including neighborhood services, restaurants, and cafés.

Craig Whitaker asked about total square footage dedicated to parking. Mr. Hill will check and respond.

In response to Paul Willen’s question about the sculptural architecture of the proposal, Mr. Hill explained the applicant’s approach of defining building envelopes to meet zoning requirements.

Olive Freud asked about the implications of climate change and sea rise, the question of train service under the site, and whether it is possible to build the school sooner. In response, Mr. Hill explained that MetroNorth found that the right-of-way curvature cannot accommodate a train station and that the Department of Education has passed up previous sites as Extell built out Riverside South. The building that includes the school will be the first Riverside Center building to be constructed.

Daniel Gutman asked about the auto showroom subsidizing the below-ground construction. He suggested reducing construction cost by eliminating a level of parking.

Richard Asche asked about the possibility of replacing the automotive showroom with other uses underground.

Ann Weisberg asked about the taxes anticipated to be generated during the construction period.

Mark Derr asked about the public-space value of the cul-de-sac just north of West 59th Street. Mr. Hill responded that the building at Riverside & West 59th Street cannot be accessed from the site perimeter (i.e., West 59th Street) because of the grade change at this point. Mr. Asche highlighted Mr. Derr’s point that the car-dedicated cul-de-sac subtracts from potentially usable open space. Ms. Cowley added that this feature interferes with pedestrian use of West 59th Street. Ms. Cohen noted that numerous problems/questions are associated with the grade change at this part of the site—and wondered how much of this is self-inflicted by the parking- and auto-intensive program underground.

In response to a question from Michael Kramer, Mr. Lowenstein confirmed that the NYC Department of Sanitation had inquired about locating a garage under the site. However, the agency never pursued the question following that initial inquiry.

Daniel Cassell and Marta Black asked about the implications of changing the density allowed by the existing Restrictive Declaration. Mr. Selver responded that the residential uses proposed now—even though a bit more dense—are no more negatively impactful than the commercial uses originally approved for the site.

Adam Meagher of the Department of City Planning indicated that the ULURP application will likely be certified either April 12 or April 26. Ms. Sheffer reviewed the stages of the ULURP process and urged MCB7 committees to get her comments as soon as possible on the material presented today. MCB7 Chairperson Mel Wymore alerted everyone to a web-based tool for ranking the various principles and priorities recently identified by MCB7 for the Riverside Center site.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Land Use Committee Members Present: Page Cowley, Jay Adolf, Richard Asche, Hope Cohen, Mark Diller, Sheldon Fine, Paul Fischer, Roberta Semer, Ethel Sheffer.

Land Use Committee Members Absent: Miki Fiegel, Victor Gonzalez, Lawrence Horowitz, Dan Meltzer, Tom Vitullo-Martin, John Mark Warren.

Riverside South Working Group Members Present: Andrew Albert, Phyllis Gunther, Klari Neuwelt, Elizabeth Starkey.

Board Members Present: Ken Coughlin, Mel Wymore, Dan Zweig.