

Pioneering green development moves one step closer to fruition in Jersey City

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Amy Sara Clark/The Jersey Journal



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Developers George Vallone, left, and Daniel Gans, owners of Hoboken Brownstone Company, outside the Planning Board meeting tonight, Oct. 26, 2010, after presenting the final site plan for their project.

A 400-unit pioneer in environmentally friendly development in downtown Jersey City is one-step closer to fruition after the Jersey City Planning Board approved the final site plan for the development at tonight's meeting.

Van Leer Place aims to use 90 percent less energy than a conventional building and emit fewer carbon emissions, by harnessing geothermal and solar energy as well as other green technologies, said Daniel Gans who is developing the property with his partner George Vallone of the Hoboken Brownstone Company.

The new development will be linked to the Hoboken Second Street Light Rail by roughly a half-mile walkway.

Gans and Vallone have developed more than a dozen properties in Hoboken. But for this project they are moving a few blocks across the border to redevelop the former Van Leer Chocolate Factory at 110 Hoboken Ave.

The development, called Van Leer Place, will consist of two six-story buildings -- a rental building on the north side of Hoboken Avenue and condos on the south -- 7,500 square feet of retail space, a rooftop garden and a 1.5-acre public park that includes a dog run.

Although some units will have views of The Empire State Building, the project was kept to six stories so it would not block the views from The Heights, said Michael A. Ryan, the Planning Board's chairman.

One new technology the building will use employs heat exchangers 500 feet deep to harness the constant 55 degree temperature below ground. The geothermal technology would cool the building in the summer and heat it in winter.

Roofs will be covered with solar panels to generate electricity, and solar water heaters would heat water tanks.

The development is also using "autoclaved" concrete made with air pockets that will make the walls particularly well insulated. The material is widely used in Europe but is rare in the United States.

The site, previously home to pesticide plant, is a brownfield industrial site which is currently being remediated.

The technology is so unique that the development has been designated a "Urban Energy Technology Demonstration" project by the state Board of Public Utilities. In addition, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities awarded the project a \$3.6 million grant designated for developing alternative energy sources.

Although a stone's throw from the gentrified townhouses and new development in Newport, downtown Jersey City and Hoboken, the site of Van Leer Place is still industrial.

"We're excited about the area," said Gans, who praised its proximity to both Jersey City and Hoboken. "We think it's a location that has a lot of opportunity for growth and development."

Vallone said he liked the spot because it gets relatively little traffic and faces the Palisades, which he called "a magnificent geological formation."

"He likes the country-ness of the job and I like the urban-ness of the job," said Gans.

According to Gans, construction will begin by the end of the year. He said he expects to complete the first phase of the project, the rental building, by the end of 2012.

The plan was approved by the board after Gans and Vallone agreed to open a temporary dog run along with the first phase of the project until the permanent one is completed with the second phase.

"People have dogs and they need dog runs," said Ryan.

Ryan added that was excited to see the project move forward.

"It's going to change the whole landscape of that area. There's a light rail station there doing nothing. We have to develop it. Plus they have the cliffs there. It's a beautiful spot," he said.

The vote was 7-0 with commissioners Michael Sims and Councilwoman Nidia Lopez (who was at the City Council caucus) absent.