

BY THOMAS COGAN

An audience of mainly Hunters Point residents met last week with representatives of the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the Department of City Planning in the Citibank building on Jackson Avenue to discuss the Hunters Point South project, expanding a presentation made earlier this month at the Community Board 2 meeting. The plan involves building thousands of residential units in an area bounded by 49th Avenue, Vernon Boulevard, Newtown Creek and the East River, where few if any residences now stand. The audience was understanding of the project, but critical of many of its aspects.

Penny Lee of the Department of City Planning said the Hunters Point South plan has a long history: she worked on an early version in 1988, one that would have provided fewer than half the number of apartments now projected. Years after that, the proposed Olympic Village would have been built there in advance of the 2012 Olympics; it would have occupied more space than the current plan foresees, though with far fewer units and no commercial space.

The current version would yield a waterfront park Lee described as "fantastic". The current plan is aimed at providing a smooth transition from the neighborhood to the waterfront, alternative transportation modes, in addition to the standard ones, which of course do not exist there now and active ground floors in the apartment buildings through a combination of commercial and community

Hunters Point South Will Hold Apartments, Stores

outlets. Management by the city could take the form of a 501 c/3 entity that would take title of the site and control buildings and infrastructure, which is approximately the plan for the Hudson Yards project on the Lower West Side of Manhattan. The city would retain ownership of the site and let it be developed gradually by several private builders.

Speaking of access to mass transportation, Tracy Sayegh of the EDC said that the Vernon-Jackson subway station would be "well within a 10-minute walk from the farthest point" of the proposed building site. Her words implied that in contrast to a great deal of home-building in the city's history, the building of Hunters Point South would not be a matter of following transportation lines laid in advance of development. To the contrary, on the map displayed to the audience, a purple line denoted a possible bus route. But building something from nothing could generate new ideas about alternative transportation, Sayegh said, adding that even the Department of Transportation is "coming to grips" with such ideas. She had an illustration of what Center Boulevard, at the north end of the project, might look like, with double bike paths and, at the same time, 15-foot-wide sidewalks.

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Turning to the 10-acre park proposed for the waterfront, she called it "the signature public amenity" in the project and emphasized its topography. The surface near the water's edge is not level, being as high as 30 feet near the bank of Newtown Creek, and such a contrast should be retained, not reduced to a uniform level, Sayegh said. She spoke of 2nd Street as a future "retail corridor" and envisioned room for an elementary school of some 50,000 square feet, leaving realization of it to the School Construction Authority.

Sayegh said that a lesson learned from Queens West was one of height variance in the buildings, which in this instance would mean buildings ranging in height from 280 to 400 feet, with an attempt to arrange alternating placements that would spare the project a "tombstone" look. She was indefinite about garage space but assumed it would be situated amidst the buildings and above ground; because of the flood plain, no garage space could be located below ground.

The initial draft of the environmental impact statement was released in mid-October, Sayegh said, and the uniform land use review procedure, or ULURP, certificate would probably be ready in early 2008—after

which she foresaw a six-month examination period before approval could be granted.

The head of the tenants' association at City Lights, to the north of the proposed project, said the state-maintained parkland nearby is in a sad state and asked if the city might assume control of it. Community Board 2 Chairman Joseph Conley said he foresaw city control of all parkland along the waterfront between Queens West and Newtown Creek. The tenants' representative, a condominium owner, said he hoped there would be a significant section of Hunters Point South that would be what he called "home ownership" rather than rental, to establish a better feeling of permanency; and that belief was repeated by another attendee.

The transit issue was raised again when a man said that a massive influx of population at Hunters Point South would throw area transit into turmoil. Tom McKnight of the EDC agreed, and said that the population of the new project would be phased in, as would innovative measures in transit.

When a woman brought up the great oil spill in Newtown Creek and wondered why anyone would want to live beside such pollution, Sam Vargas, a political representative, said that the oil spill remediation process is proceeding, and British Petroleum is even extracting much of it.

One of the first tasks of those clearing away the old buildings to begin construction of Hunters Point South, according to a woman in attendance, is the capture or extermination of raccoons, possibly rabid ones, that currently lurk there.

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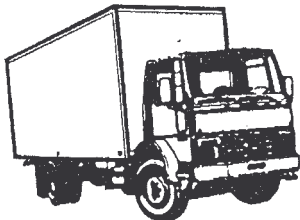
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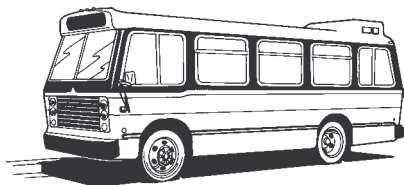
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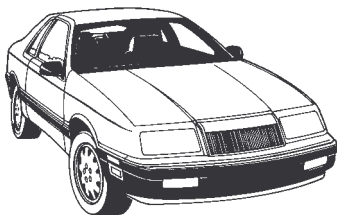
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