

Westfair Business Journal

\$2.5B redevelopment concept proposed for WP Galleria mall

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Rendering of a view of Galleria redevelopment concept.

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"There's a bet to be made here of \$2.5 billion," developer Louis Cappelli told the Business Journal after a presentation to the White Plains Common Council of a concept for redevelopment of an approximately 11-acre site where the now closed Galleria mall is situated. "It's a big bet to make on the city of White Plains or any city. We're prepared to make that bet."



Louis Cappelli addresses Common Council with Attorney Mark Weingarten nearest wall. Photo by Peter Katz.

The Galleria at White Plains was closed as of March 31 of this year.

Cappelli's mention of a \$2.5 billion figure for building what is contained in the concept shown to the Common Council confirmed what the Business Journal had been told by sources regarding a ballpark estimate for the project, with a caveat that the cost could go higher in the future.

Last November, the owners of the Galleria, California-based Pacific Retail Capital Partners and Aareal Bank Group, which is headquartered in Wiesbaden, Germany, announced that they were joining with Cappelli's The Cappelli Organization and SL Green Realty Corp., to redevelop the site. The Galleria at White Plains was closed as of March 31 of this year.

"This was just a preview of some-

thing we've been working on for one year," Cappelli said about what was shown to the Common Council at its Sept. 27 nighttime work session. "We're not coming in for an application. We're here to get some feedback and I have certainly gotten feedback, but it's going to be a long process. It's going to be nine months to a year of going back and forth. Some of the council members are looking for some benefits and there are going to be. When we did City Center we put in the performing arts center as part of it, and we put in the dancing fountains and we put in all those things. There's going to be plenty of room here to do everything the community and the city would like

us to do."

The Common Council was shown a presentation introduced by Anmarie Plenge, vice president of design for Pacific Retail Capital Partners. It included an animated computer-generated flyover of what the development could potentially look like, including detailed graphics of numerous special features such as a food hall, ice skating rink, public open spaces, fountains and green areas. The development would be known as The District Galleria.

The concept calls for seven new buildings to be constructed. They would range in height from 650 feet to 352 feet. The tallest proposed building at the Galleria site would be lower than the existing Ritz-Carlton tower, which is diagonally across from the Galleria.

According to the concept, 46% of the redevelopment would be open space including landscaped gardens, courtyards, parks and communal plazas. There would be 3,200 apartments, with 384 designated as affordable housing in conformance with city requirements for 12% of apartments in new residential developments to be in the affordable category.

There would be 228,940 square feet of space devoted to retail, restaurants and services with 39,000 square feet of that space being above street level. Amenities for residents would include fitness centers, swimming pools, spas and wellness centers, and co-working spaces. The development would



Galleria District rendering of outdoor area.

be pet friendly with designated play areas for pets.

All parking would be underground, with the number of spaces for residents and the commercial uses to be determined. In addition, there would be public parking to replace spaces lost when the municipal garage adjacent to the Galleria is torn down so that the land it is on can be used as part of the redevelopment.

"I've been building and developing for 42 years. I'm 72 years old now," Cappelli said. "Is this the crowning achievement, could it be the crowning achievement? The answer is absolutely 'yes.' This could be and will be a transformative project that's never been done in a suburb in the United States. This will be an absolute gem."

Cappelli said that while the Galleria was transformative for the city when it was built in the late 1970s and opened in the summer of 1980.

"It must go. It cannot stay because it destroys the city, not because of anything other than time. It's been 50 years. It's had its time. It had a good reason to be built, but no longer today," Cappelli said. "The city needs what we're talking about, with all the input of the council, with all of the input of the community. The city definitely needs this 11 acres to be the centerpiece of the city together with Renaissance Square, together with City Center, together with the Ritz-Carlton, and everything that's happening in the city."

Attorney Mark Weingarten of the White Plains-based law firm Del-Bello Donnellan Weingarten Wise & Wiederkehr LLP said that the track record of the entities involved in the Galleria project proves that they will be able to deliver on the plans once they are approved.

"The \$2.5 billion investment will create a visionary project that redefines urban living by seamlessly blending open space and residences with a rich array of amenities to create a thriving, sustainable community where residents and visitors can live, work and play," Weingarten told the council.

Some council members expressed initial concern about building heights

and project density. There were suggestions that more trees could be added and that a new community center perhaps to replace the aging Slater Center could be added. Council members seemed amenable to exchanging ideas with the development team as an application and site plans are developed.

Mayor Tom Roach made a point of emphasizing that no application has been submitted and what the council had seen was the development team's concept. He suggested that it might be appropriate to have more affordable housing than the 12% required by the city. He pointed out that right now the site is zoned for an enclosed mall and anything that goes in there would need a zoning change, which along with owning the Galleria garage puts the city in a strong position.

"I think we all have an opportunity to do something here and I think what I'm hearing from my colleagues and what I hope you're hearing from me is not tearing this up and throwing it in the garbage," Roach said, adding that they want to make sure the outcome is something that everybody in the city can be proud of.

"Anything that happens on that site most likely would not involve preserving the historic and beautiful Galleria garage," Roach said to laughter from the council members, development team and audience. "So we have power over these things and we could get something here that I think could be transformative for the city," Roach said.



Rendering of some of the open space in the concept for Galleria redevelopment.

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