

Viñoly stirs interest in sugar site redevelopment



The redevelopment will create 2,200 apartments for folks who could enjoy four acres of open space and a waterfront esplanade. Proposals are winding through the approval process now.

By JOHN MAJESKI

The architect behind “New Domino” last week shared his vision for giving the former sugar refining site a second life as a mixed-use development.

“This is not a sales pitch,” said Rafael Viñoly of Rafael Viñoly Architects, speaking at the American Institute of Architects-NY’s Center for Architecture Thursday evening. Rather, he said, it was a chance to show the results of several years’ worth of work.

The site in question is an industrial swath along the waterfront in Williamsburg, Brooklyn where Domino Sugar once operated. Here, Developer CPC Resources wants to build 2,200 residential units, 30% of which (660 units) would be set aside for affordable housing — a high percentage compared to other developments in the area.

The plan, which is winding its way through the multi-step city review process, also includes up to 274,000 s/f of retail and community space and up to 99,000 s/f of office space, the developer said. The former refinery would be reused and the iconic, 40-foot Domino Sugar sign is to be incorporated into the project.

In addition, New Domino would boast four acres of open space, including a waterfront esplanade, and the building of new glass-and-brick towers on either sides of the refinery. Building heights would vary, with the largest height being 40 stories.

The Uruguayan-born, Argentinian-raised Viñoly has designed the proposed four new towers and master plan for New Domino while the Beyer Blinder Belle firm handled the re-use and addition for the refinery. Viñoly has worked around the world and is behind projects such as Jazz at Lincoln Center and the Tokyo International Forum. Working with the 125-year-old industrial complex has created challenges.

“It is a dilapidated, rather torturous site,” he said. While the complex is “iconic,” Viñoly said it has a “love-hate relationship” with the area partly because it and the other industrial buildings in the area are responsible for pollution.

The developer purchased the 11-acre plot in 2004, the same year that sugar processing ceased there. According to the planning application, the oldest building on the site dates back to the 1880s, though sugar refining had been done there since the 1850s.

The plant was known as Domino Sugar until 2001 when the brand was bought

by American Sugar Refining, which continued operations at the site for the next three years.

In 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated three buildings at the center of the site — the refinery complex — as landmarks. CPC under its plan will save the exterior walls and completely gut the interior.

New Domino’s plan is currently being reviewed by the Borough President’s office. After that, it will have to go to the Planning Commission and then the City Council for a final opinion, most likely sometime in the summer.

If approved, construction would start in 2011 and be



RAFAEL VIÑOLY

phased in over a 10-year period.

Viñoly told the packed crowd at the Center for Architecture that the complex of towers would feature varying heights and are set back from the East River’s edge to maximize views for as many people as possible. He said each block in the plan is based around the idea of a central courtyard.

Attendees were shown a video model that took viewers on a virtual stroll through the proposed complex before arriving at the water near the base of the Williamsburg Bridge, being greeted by a host of trees and scenic promenade. Viñoly said the design offered a “more intimate” way of engaging the river.

The Center for Architecture currently has an exhibition on New Domino on display through May 3. AIA-NY President Anthony Schirripa explained why the development plan is so significant.

“The New Domino brings up issues of density, affordable housing, access to the waterfront, open spaces and adaptive reuse,” he said in a statement. “It’s a rare occasion that these five important concerns come together at one site.”

Fixer-upper loan plan a step towards recovery, says lending veteran Procida

By JOHN MAJESKI

Billy Procida is flipping out — so to speak, that is.

The real estate veteran behind William Procida Inc. has kicked off a small-business loan program designed to tackle the tri-state area’s foreclosures, which have disrupted communities and weighed down markets from the Big Apple to



the Bay Area in California.

Dubbed Fix ‘Em & Flip ‘Em, the initiative lends funding to builders or investors looking to snatch up and quickly turn around problem properties. It is aimed at one- to four-family

houses and small mixed-use sites, according to the specialty real estate and investment banking firm based in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

Procida said homes that go through foreclosure, even in good neighborhoods, often end up in shabby condition with everything taken and sold “that isn’t bolted down.” Adding to the situation is that bank lending has been tight. New Jersey in 2009 contributed more than 63,000 foreclosed properties to the nation’s overall figure of 2.8 million, the firm said, citing RealtyTrac data.

“Banks aren’t financing these and consumers can’t buy them,” Procida said. “I’m doing this (program) to set an example. If we don’t suck these through the pipe, we will never get to new construction.”

Under Fix ‘Em & Flip ‘Em, Procida requires borrowers to “get in and out in 90 days” with an additional 90 days to sell and complete the mortgage.

Procida doesn’t see any issue when it comes to turning over the newly renovated homes in a down market because there is still a demand for abodes under \$1 million, which the program focuses on, and many buyers are taking advantage of low-interest mortgage rates and other incentives.

Fix ‘Em & Flip ‘Em will loan up to 80% of the acquisition and renovation costs. “Our motto is we’re faster than a bank and cheaper than a partner,” Procida said.

In addition to forking over cash to make these flips a reality, Procida said Fix ‘Em & Flip ‘Em provides guidance and training to make the projects a success — even, for example, chiming in about what to use in way of curb appeal (“A \$50 window box could add \$500 in value,” he says).

The small business loan program is a bit of a departure for Procida, who has a background handling multi-million-dollar deals. He sees Fix ‘Em & Flip ‘Em as a type of “community service.”

If a lot more lenders were honing in on foreclosures the way he is, the market would begin to correct itself, he said.

“There has to be 1,000 more of me to finance builders and stabilize the communities before commercial can come in and create jobs again,” he said.

The firm began making the Fix ‘Em & Flip ‘Em loans last year and is at about 20 so far. The loans have largely helped properties in the northern New Jersey area.

Don’t panic, no-one is going to fall

As ‘suicide’ statues prompt worried calls to police, the engineers who secured the works of art explain just how it was done

Engineering powerhouse Thornton Tomasetti this week joined a chorus of approval for a controversial high-rise art exhibition that sparked calls of suicide attempts to city police.

The firm was selected to oversee the installation of the Event Horizon exhibition by British artist Antony Gormley.

Gormley created 31 life-size body forms of himself cast in iron and fiberglass that have been placed on pathways, sidewalks and rooftops around Manhattan.

But earlier this month, police reportedly received calls from residents and tourists

who’d mistakenly thought the statues were real people attempting to jump.

At the Empire State Building, Anthony Malkin, head of Malkin Properties Corp., the building’s management group, told the New York Post that, despite the brouhaha, he had no plans to take the sculpture placed there down.

“We thought it would be interesting and fun to participate in this big public art exhibit, but we only did it on the condition that we first check with the NYPD, and that they said it was okay to do,” he told the newspaper.

“My taste in art is very different, but I have to believe

the artist is getting the reaction he is looking for.”

Both the mayor and the police backed the project which was originally created for Britain’s Hayward Gallery as part of the Blind Light exhibition in 2007 when the sculptures were displayed around London.

Aine Brazil, managing principal of Thornton Tomasetti and member of the board of directors of Madison Square Park Conservancy, said, “The public can rest assured that the supports for the figures were engineered by Thornton Tomasetti with care to withstand hurricane winds if necessary. Public safety was

never compromised and the ‘jumpers’ are not going to fall to the street.”

The exhibition — presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy in partnership with the City of New York — will be on view until August 15, 2010. A large portion of the installation process was donated pro-bono by Thornton Tomasetti.

As well as the Empire State Building and Madison Square Park, the sculptures can be seen on the Flatiron Building, the New York Life Building, 1 Madison Avenue, 5 Madison Avenue (Clock Tower), 853 Broadway (Union Sq), and 11 East 29th Street.



Thornton Tomasetti installed the controversial statues.