

Planned building inside Reed-Putnam project would be tallest in Norwalk

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NORWALK — Visitors entering South Norwalk, or just driving past, might someday lock their sight on a roughly 15-story office tower rising at the juncture of Interstate 95 and West Avenue.

This month, Spinnaker Cos.-led 95/7 Ventures LLC unveiled its conceptual master site plan for the last dozen acres of the city's Reed-Putnam Urban Renewal project. Anchoring the development immediately south of the freeway and east of West Avenue is a 234-foot tower.

If built, it likely would be Norwalk's tallest building, rising up about 15 stories.

The conceptual site plan, prepared by Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners

LLP of New York City, lays out building locations, size and heights. In other words, there are not yet elevations drawings or colorful renderings showing how the office tower might look.

"We're just starting the schematic design. We really wanted to make presentations to the various committees and agencies on the horizontal plan. We (now) have to do our architectural studies," said Spinnaker Cos. Principal Kim Morque. The office tower "is going to be very high quality. It's going to be Class A. We want to make it special and unique."

A 12-story office building at 50 Washington St. now dominates the South Norwalk skyline. That building rises roughly 150 feet, according to

Michael B. Greene, the city's planning and zoning director. Building a 234-foot building at the Reed-Putnam site not far to the north is nearly in keeping with zoning regulations.

"You're allowed 204 feet and 14 stories. Once you get up to 204 feet, you're talking about a big building," Green said. "Generally, the concept has always been to have a building in Reed-Putnam that was the showcase building of the city. The (Reed-Putnam) plan was always for it to be the tallest building."

So far, the Common Council's Planning Committee and Redevelopment Commission have viewed 95/7 Ventures LLC's conceptual site plan.

Redevelopment Commis-

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City's tallest building part of newly unveiled Reed-Putnam plans

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sioner Emil Albanese, during a presentation of the plan Wednesday night, commented that Spinnaker Cos.' work, to date, in the Reed-Putnam project has preserved existing buildings, such as renovation of the Lock Building, or incorporated Norwalk's architectural

past in new buildings, such as Maritime Yards, the residential complex nearing completion north of The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk.

Albanese asked whether the new development might carry that "preserved look."

"I think these are going to be modern buildings. As office buildings, they will be trans-

parent as they move up. But I think there's a lot of opportunity, between the ground level and the different uses, to really create a great vernacular," said Morque, the Spinnaker Cos. executive. "The challenge, quite frankly as I see it, is that it's difficult to be iconic and 200 feet of height. We'll work with it. We want to resonate and be

special. I'm not sure what that is (yet)."

As 95/7 Ventures LLC moves into the architectural design phase, city officials are optimistic about the final product, for aesthetic and other reasons.

Mayor Richard A. Moccia said the office tower, as Norwalk's tallest building, will bring in major tax revenue for the city, thereby reducing the property tax burden on homeowners.

Tad Diesel, the city's director of marketing and business development, predicts the building will be noticed from near and far.

"Norwalk really does have

that position along the highway — an hour from New York. As a landmark, as a point of attraction, a building like that could be very good, not just for that site, but for the whole city," Diesel said. "What you have here is a developer who really understands the neighborhood, who respects the history and the design of the neighborhood. This is a development that I think will fit in very well."

The larger plan for the site shows the office tower at the corner of West Avenue and Interstate 95 and connected to a six-level parking garage immediately to the east. Building heights would drop to five sto-

ries along West Avenue and lower moving southward, so as to permit views of the SoNo area.

The conceptual plan conforms — with one exception — to Norwalk Redevelopment Agency-recommended and council-approved ranges for the site. Sought is 475,000 to 625,000 square feet of offices; 75,000 to 125,000 square feet of retail; 250 to 350 housing units; an 80,000-square-foot select-service hotel; and 2 to 4 percent of total square footage devoted to a "public cultural use." The conceptual master site plan, by contrast, has up to 140,000 square feet of retail use.

Transit focus of SWRPA discussion

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application remains pending, an interregional consortium is

have the people who introduced it received?"

State Sen. Bob Duff, D-25, said existing mass transit

outlined the agency's legislative priorities for 2007: Boost funding for regional planning organizations and local aid pro-