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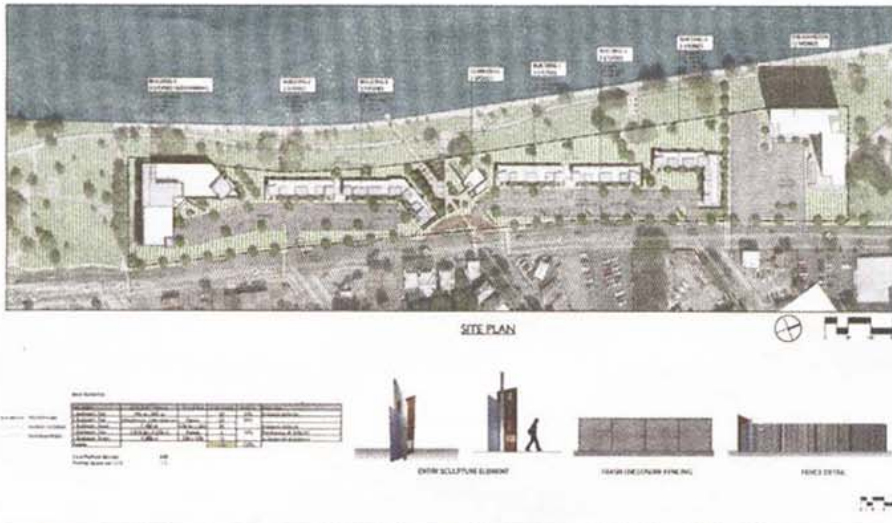
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Community Aids in Riverfront Transformation

New Erie Harbor and The Hamilton Planned for River Park Commons Site



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By Robert Boyd

The South Wedge dream of a revitalized riverfront on the site of River Park Commons on Mt. Hope Avenue is coming closer to reality through the combined efforts of a vocal community and a responsive developer.

In May 2008, Conifer Development presented their initial plans for the redevelopment of River Park Commons. A number of important issues were identified such as access to the river, tenant parking and the design of the planned buildings.

The South Wedge Planning Committee, Inc. encouraged the community to express their concerns and helped them to outline significant issues. (To all those

who wrote letters, attended meetings, made telephone calls or otherwise communicated the message—Thank you!) The developer reached out to us in response to study the issues and understand our concerns.

SWPC is pleased to provide an update of the project and to acknowledge Dick Crossed and Alan Handelman of Conifer Development for recognizing the value of the site and taking a totally new approach. Crossed and Handelman started by bringing in a new architect – The Barton Partners, a nationally respected firm with experience in urban design.

In the May proposal, access to the river was limited. The current proposal provides improved vistas

with three river access points. At Averill Avenue, a 60 foot wide access point will provide a “grand entrance” to the river. A welcome sculpture is planned that will include a broad landscaped walkway with a water fountain that will guide people to the river.

Another major concern to the community was the lack of parking. As a result of the new design, parking allows for almost two spaces per unit, which is what was needed.

The proposed structure design in May was for 100 two-bedroom units in 12 buildings with no variation in design. This arrangement did not attempt to incorporate the

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Riverfront Transformation

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river or the neighborhood; it simply reconstructed the cement wall that exists today on the site. It was in essence single-family architecture applied to multifamily buildings. The design was not of appropriate scale, did not promote a “walkable” development and did not incorporate the site’s assets.

Architects Barton Partners recognized the river, the city skyline and the neighborhood as assets that needed to be included in their site plan.

In contrast, the new design is tailored to the site. The plan has 130 units with a mix of one, two and three bedroom flats and town homes. This will allow the development to appeal to a broader resident base and create a more diverse community.

There are now six buildings and a clubhouse. A 5-storey building over parking on the Ford Street Bridge side is included. The five three-storey buildings have been placed on the site in different ways to break up the “wall effect” and to increase the river and city skyline views.

The distinctive design does not attempt to mimic anything. It is very people scale and walkable. It includes a generous use of windows and porches. The flat roofs provide more rooftop living and reflect the nature of buildings on the east side of Mt. Hope.

In addition, the design complements an already architecturally diverse neighborhood. The Wedge is an eclectic mix of architectural styles including 19th and 20th Century Vernacular, Queen Anne, Bungalow, American Four Square, Italianate, Greek revival, art deco and modern.

The architectural connection to the neighborhood is through the use of architectural materials (brick and “hardiplank”). There is a liberal use of blues and yellows for the coloring.

The existing 13-story tower will be integrated with the new buildings by the use of a color pattern consistent with that used in the new buildings. The interior of the high rise, renamed “The Hamilton,” will be also be completely remodeled.



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Most important, the developer intends to incorporate as many “green” building practices as possible on the site.

The timeline now is to complete the relocation of existing residents before the end of the year, start demolition in early 2009 and begin construction in the summer of 2009 with occupancy in 2010.

This will provide additional housing options for those who wish to live in the South Wedge. The new residents will no doubt contribute to the sustainability of our businesses and become part of the fabric of the neighborhood.

River Park is dead! Long live Erie Harbor and the Hamilton! ▲