

Jersey Journal - February 4, 2023

Controversial ‘Steel Tech’ project returns to planning board bigger -- and with community’s approval



The 18-story project includes a three-story recreation center, which will be deeded to the city, and a neighborhood commercial facility for local businesses. Courtesy of Skyline Development Group

The controversial “Steel Tech” site project near Berry Lane Park is returning to the Jersey City Planning Board Tuesday after two years of court battles bigger than before with additional community givebacks.

In February 2021, the Morris Canal Community Development Corp. (MCCDC), a critic of the [then-proposed 17-story residential project at 417 Communipaw Ave.](#), [filed a lawsuit that claimed the project](#) violated both New Jersey law and the terms of a neighborhood development plan because of its height.

Even after a judge ruled a partial victory for the community group and another lawsuit was filed and then dropped, MCCDC was desperate to halt the project on the grounds that the city’s previous plans called for the acquisition of the land as future green space.

But Skyline Development CEO Louis Mont says everyone now seems to be in agreement on the project, which is named for the former business that operated at the site, Steel Technologies, and which was first presented to the planning board in 2020.

The “Steel Tech” project plans were amended to increase the size of the residential building to 18 stories and to build a three-story recreation center and a one-story neighborhood commercial facility. The plan also includes a 40-space public parking lot and nearly 35,000 square feet of public open space.

The proposed high-rise — which dwarfs the surrounding neighborhood — would house 420 residential units, of which 21 will be affordable housing, and retail space on the ground floor.

“We had conversations with the community group and have finally released the final drawings to them and I think they were pleasantly surprised with how we attempted to allay their concerns,” Mont said. “The primary building is situated 100 feet back from the curb and sidewalk so that it is not a giant high-rise imposing right up on the street level.

“We positioned the building on the site so that when you do a shadow study there is virtually no shadow cast on Berry Lane Park at any time of the day.”

Mont added that the project will also include a 30-foot-wide walkway from Communipaw Avenue to Berry Lane Park, which is northeast of the development site. He said along that walkway there will be additional public space, restaurants, a dog grooming and daycare center and a food market.

The walkway was not part of the original plans for the site.

Bergen-Lafayette Councilman Frank Gilmore, a critic of the project, isn’t happy how the large-scale project fits in the existing neighborhood. But overall, he said the community is feeling better about the development.

“I just think a project of that magnitude ... does not fit the fabric of the community but it’s not about me and what I think,” Gilmore said. “When you take things into totality; you look at the community givebacks, look at the affordable rate, look at the site being desolate for so long, you look at the quality of life in that area, I get it.

“Ultimately, it is a big win.”

MCCDC Executive Director June Jones could not be reached for comment, but Gilmore said the community group was part of the conversations with the community to shape the current project.

The group’s first lawsuit resulted in the planning board reconsidering its decision to amend the Morris Canal Redevelopment Plan and provide evidence of its merit. [MCCDC’s second lawsuit](#), in May 2022, claimed the city violated its inclusionary zoning ordinance (IZO), but the suit was voluntarily dismissed by MCCD, according to court documents.

The recreation center, which increased in size by one story, and the public parking lot would be deeded to the city once completed, Mont said. The \$200 million project could possibly break ground in the spring and open in three years as all the buildings will be built simultaneously.

“I think (MCCDC) understands in order for me to give the level of community givebacks to the city and to the community that I have to have that density in order to support it,” Mont said. “We are very excited and at this point, it seems everyone is rowing the boat in the same direction.”



Aerial view of 417 Communipaw Ave. in Jersey City, on Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021. Reena Rose Sibayan | The Jersey Journal