

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Brooklyn Broadside

Toll Brothers Proposal for Gowanus: First To Focus On Neglected Area

by Dennis Holt (Holt@brooklyneagle.net), published online 03-25-2008

BROOKLYN — Last month a major new real estate development was announced in Brooklyn, in many ways similar to several other new projects that are underway in the borough.

But there is a major difference with this project: it is located in Gowanus and is the first proposal totally from the private sector to focus on this part of town.

(The development of the Public Place is a joint private/public venture, and the private developer has yet to be chosen.)

This latest proposal comes from the Toll Brothers, the largest developer of upscale housing in the country. Wisely, this company purchased a significant parcel of property in Gowanus some time ago and waited for things to happen.

What has happened is movement on the Public Place property and realization that the zoning plan for Gowanus being created by the City Planning Department is going to take a lot of time. It will be a controversial proposal whatever is offered.

Because zoning changes are needed — the site, as most of Gowanus, is zoned for manufacturing — the proposal requires a public process with an environmental impact statement, following the city land use review outline.

In short, this proposal is the first of its kind and probably will be followed by similar concepts because the environmental nature of the Gowanus area makes small projects too expensive. Thus what happens in the next few weeks and months should be watched carefully.

The proposal consists of 3.4 acres, or more than 605,000 square feet west of the Gowanus Canal. The plan is to build 477 market-rate housing units and 130 affordable units, the last being an unusual step for Toll Brothers. Included will be about 2,000 square feet of retail, the same amount for community space and 260 underground parking spaces.

The site is between Bond Street and the canal, and between Second and Carroll streets. The project includes about 0.6 acres of public space along the canal.

A rendering released by Toll Brothers shows two major clusters of buildings in various sizes and heights. The shortest is four stories high, and the tallest are 12 stories high, reaching to about 125 feet nearest the canal.

Recognizing the terrain of the area, the project will be raised higher to mitigate the effects of flooding, which often happens in the area.

The public review process began on March 13 at the City Planning Department at what is called a scoping meeting. Such meetings are to permit the public to suggest what should be studied in an environmental impact statement.

Craig Hammerman, district manager of Community Board 6, made clear the importance of that session. "We know that if an issue doesn't make it into the scoping document, we can't get it studied, and if it isn't studied it can't be considered when looking at changes to the project."

Concerns expressed at the meeting covered the whole business of environmental conditions, an element sure to exist in every project proposed for Gowanus; the particular problems of flooding, endemic to the canal area; building heights; and the overall question of what should be built in Gowanus.

This latter issue is the underpinning of all that will be followed in the coming years. There are some who don't want very much built — leave things as they are, they say. Others want to stress manufacturing since this is the last space of any size in Brooklyn where manufacturing makes any sense.

Another set of interests wants to stress housing, both market rate and affordable, and all the amenities which follow when new people set up a bunch of new houses.

So, the structure of the process and commentary that will follow the Toll Brothers project could be looked on as a template of future proposals in Gowanus.

© **Brooklyn Daily Eagle 2008**