



Wayne London, lead architect of Populous, right, presents an update Tuesday at City Hall on Webster Block plans. Derek Gee/Buffalo News

Hotel with lake views, lantern marks Webster Block plan

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A “spectacular” hotel with views of Lake Erie and a lantern feature that will beckon visitors are two of the elements of the development plans for the Webster Block that were discussed Tuesday in City Hall.

The transformation of one of Buffalo’s prime pieces of real estate along the Erie Canal Harbor from a surface parking lot into a destination for hockey lovers is moving on schedule, and environmental testing has uncovered no surprises, representatives from the Buffalo Sabres said.

A groundbreaking is planned for March. The retail components are scheduled to be finished in July 2014, and skaters are expected to take the ice in September 2014. The hotel is expected to open in May 2015.

The Sabres’ lead architect, Wayne London of Populous, gave a preliminary presentation of the new development to the Planning Board and will return in a few weeks with a more detailed site plan and to seek the board’s approval.

The \$123 million HARBORCenter project calls for two National Hockey League-sized rinks, which will sit atop a parking deck, and also will include a large fitness center, a hotel, a 12,000-square-foot sports bar and retail space.

The bar will be on the corner of Washington and Scott streets, and will feature a lantern-like light on the corner, “an icon” that will be visible to people traveling south on Washington once the street is narrowed to two lanes, London said.

The hotel’s profile from north to south will be slim, to give as many rooms as possible a lake view. The size of the hotel and who would run it are still under consideration.

“The hotel is going to be a pretty spectacular entity, as is the sports bar, so I don’t think we’re overly concerned about having partners,” said Cliff Benson, chief development officer for the Sabres.

One rink will have seating for 1,800 people, the other will have 200 seats. Both will have enough locker rooms to accommodate simultaneous tournaments, London said.

“Certainly what we saw this morning is on the right track in terms of reflecting the heritage of the area and yet still building a contemporary building,” Planning Board member Cynthia Schwartz said Tuesday.

The 1.7-acre parcel, just north of First Niagara Center and bounded by Main, Scott, Washington and Perry streets, has not been sold by the city yet, as a purchase price is still being negotiated.

Also Tuesday:

- The Planning Board approved plans from Savarino Cos. to redevelop 500 Seneca St., the former headquarters of F.N. Burt Co., into a multiuse development for office, retail and cultural institutions. The project has been granted historic tax credits, and the building will be renovated according to state historic preservation standards, said Samuel J. Savarino, company president and CEO.

- Plans for a new school in South Buffalo were approved, and the school is scheduled to be open by fall of 2014. South Buffalo Charter School is planning to build a new school at 154 S. Ogden St., on a brownfield.

- The board approved plans to construct a brewery at Gene McCarthy’s, a bar at 73 Hamburg St. in the Old First Ward.

- Plans for an addition at the Annunciation Convent for the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur, 245 Lafayette Ave., were approved by the board.

- Plans for a one-story addition at Karma Salon & Spa, at 731 Elmwood Ave., were approved.

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