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## Neighbors vow they will swat B'ball City

By Brooke Edwards

Design plans for the exterior of the new Basketball City on Pier 36 were met with mixed reviews, some heated discussion and, finally, vows that the community will do a Ben Wallace and block the project with a vengeance at a presentation at Community Board 3's Parks Committee last Thursday.

Board and community members expressed concern over the congestion and commercialization the new Lower East Side round-ball mecca will bring, along with giving scarce waterfront space to a for-profit corporation.

Basketball City, based in Long Island, develops and operates indoor basketball courts and charges for their use. The company currently has sites in Boston, Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles. Basketball City occupied its original location — on Pier 63 at the end of W. 23rd St. in Chelsea — for just under a decade before it lost its lease and was forced to vacate in September of last year, following a long battle with the Hudson River Park Trust.

Basketball City has now been granted the northeastern third of the shed on Pier 36 for its reopening. The Sanitation Department will retain the other two-thirds of the building.

While C.B. 3 has already approved the planning concept for the new Basketball City, the development team is required to have a preliminary review with the community board before presenting their final design to the city's Art Commission on April 16.

Bruce Radler, Basketball City's president, spoke very little during the meeting last week, leaving the presentation to a group including his lawyer, a representative of the city Economic Development Corporation, the building architect and the landscape architect.

The design team assured the board that they would not be changing the building's structure or exterior much, since they only have a lease for what they called a "relatively short" period of time.

The exterior plans include a parking lot that can accommodate up to 71 cars and also

double as a special-event space for basketball games, by using movable backboards to create up to three outdoor courts. They have also planned a plaza, with seating and planters, next to a turn-around sized for buses. To provide added security, Basketball City plans to install exterior security cameras, extensive lighting and a gate that can close off access to the entire property when the facility is not in use.

There will still be public access to the waterfront behind the building. In fact, the development team is upgrading the public space — a narrow pathway along the water behind the building — with enhanced lighting, stainless steel benches and planters.

The team making the presentation for Basketball City was not there to show design plans for the interior space, since they have not yet even been allowed access to the site. Yet they did go over some basic plans.

Just like their former Pier 63 site, Basketball City's main indoor space will feature six full-size courts, with limited seating around the exterior. They also showed plans for a reception area, and lockers and changing rooms on the ground level.

Upstairs, in the existing mezzanine, they plan to design common rooms that will be available for special events and for community use.

The C.B. 3 committee members made two recommendations following last Thursday's presentation. They asked that the team enhance the safety of the street entrance and reduce the signage in front of the facility.

The concern over the signs came after the committee was shown renderings of the new facade, which features bright blue paint across the top several feet of the building with "Basketball City" in large white letters. The plans also showed a 10-foot illuminated sign with the Basketball City logo in the front plaza entrance. Board members said the plans looked too commercial for the residential neighborhood.

The other major concern was over safety and anticipated congestion near the facility's entrance. The board asked that they relocate the entrance from Montgomery St., which is an approach to the F.D.R. Concerns were also raised about the existing bike and running path that would cross the entrance, and they requested installing a stop sign on the way out of the parking lot.

Radler's lawyer informed the board that the Department of Transportation has already determined, as part of the environmental assessment statement, that the entrance to the facility will not affect the approach to the F.D.R. He also stressed that this will not be a high-intensity use of the site, and said that they will address all traffic concerns during the lengthy uniform land-use review procedure, or ULURP, which they will commence on March 26.

Under a ULURP — which can take six months to a year to complete — the local community board, City Planning, borough president and City Council each review changes of use of the property.

Though the purpose of last week's meeting was to discuss Basketball City's design plans, community members and board member Rocky Chin also took the opportunity to voice their concerns about the proposed use of the building.

Since discussions over Basketball City's move began, Chin has expressed his opposition to the property going to a private, for-profit corporation rather than to a community facility. During Thursday's meeting, Chin said, "A lot of people aren't going to be able to afford to play there."

"People don't pay to play basketball in our community," echoed James Jannuzzi, a resident of the Lands End 1 apartment complex, across the street from the Basketball City site. "It's not for our community," he said.

Jannuzzi, along with tenant association representatives from Rutgers Houses, Two Bridges and 286 South St., brought a petition with 1,300 signatures from residents of virtually every neighboring apartment building and local churches opposing the development.

Barbara Porrazzo, speaking for the Two Bridges Waterfront Coalition, said, "The Waterfront Coalition will do anything in its legal power to prevent Basketball City from coming to our neighborhood."

A brief yelling match ensued, with board members arguing among themselves and with community members over the use, design plans and how the community was informed about the development.

Immediately following the meeting, Radler shook his head at the controversy, arguing that his courts will be a community resource whether they are free or not. Radler did not respond to repeated requests for further comment on the new development.

During a follow-up interview Monday, Jannuzzi expressed his frustration at the way the committee members treated him and the other community members during the meeting, and at their failure to represent popular opinion.

"Our community has been promised a community center for many years," Jannuzzi said. When C.B. 3 had a chance to fulfill their promise, he said, they voted to allow a profit-making establishment instead.

Jannuzzi said that he attended several meetings on the redevelopment of the East River waterfront, and the shed on Pier 36 was always skipped over during the

discussions. He said the residents of the 20-plus apartment buildings in the poverty-designated community heard nothing about Basketball City coming to the neighborhood until it was a done deal.

Jannuzzi is particularly disturbed by the lack of communication by board one board member who lives in Jannuzzi's building, yet, according to Jannuzzi, never solicited input on the neighboring development.

"He never even said 'boo' to us," Jannuzzi charged.

After so many community members voiced opposition to Basketball City at the meeting, yet felt C.B. 3 members had not heard them and then shouted them down at Thursday's meeting, Jannuzzi asked, "Isn't the community board voting on behalf of the community?"



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