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Ruben Diaz Jr. Calls for Redevelopment Of South Bronx Waterfront

By Denis Slattery

The borough president and SoBro have preliminary plans to redevelop the Lower Concourse

Imagine walking over to the waterfront on a hot summer night, putting down a blanket and watching a movie under the stars, steps from Yankee Stadium. Or moving into a gleaming new tower with stunning views of the Manhattan skyline and ready access to the Harlem River.

Those plans — and others — are far from fruition, but Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. believes they're closer than one might imagine.

At his annual State of the Borough address, Diaz called for an industrial stretch of Exterior St. between 138th St. and 149th St. to be transformed into a mixed-use waterfront district that he likened to Brooklyn Bridge Park.

“Bronxites should have quality waterfront access, and this project could make that happen,” Diaz said.

The former manufacturing zone was rezoned in 2009 by the city Planning Commission to allow for commercial and residential redevelopment.

The non-profit South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, or SoBRO, used a state grant to study 15 properties within the so-called Lower Concourse Special Harlem River Waterfront District.



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People enjoy the cool seas breeze in the newly opened Brooklyn Bridge Park. The Park borders Furman Street along the East River.



A preliminary rendering of one of the waterfront properties along the Harlem River in the Port Morris section of the South Bronx

The planning report was finished in January, and now Diaz will use it as a blueprint to start drumming up support among city agencies and developers.

The site could be used for more than 2,000 units of housing, 1.5 million square feet of commercial space and 500,000 square feet of community facility space, public parks and waterfront access, the group said in its preliminary analysis.

“The current proposal provides this community, and the affected property owners, with a vision for the future of this waterfront and the road map of how the vision can become a reality,” said Lourdes Zapata, the senior vice president of SoBRO.

The group has been meeting with property owners to gauge interest, Zapata said, and at least two have expressed interest.

“It’s exciting,” said **Steven Hornstock of ABS Real Estate Partners**, who manages two properties along the river. “It could be a very exciting place for a community.”

One of the firm’s properties is home to a Smartcube storage facility, which has a 99-year lease for the land just north of the Madison Ave. Bridge.

Businesses currently renting the lots along the river include a school bus depot, a Verizon truck yard, a food distributor.

Some South Bronx residents said that waterfront access does not need to be tied to development in order to be expanded.

“I think it sets up a dynamic where it’s only good enough to provide waterfront access if there are higher-end residential properties,” said Mychal Johnson, a local activist.

Johnson said projects such as Brooklyn Bridge Park, where former industrial zones were converted to parkland, are generally a product of gentrification.

“I do commend the borough president for stating that there is a need for waterfront access,” Johnson said. “But there are already underutilized areas and land along the South Bronx peninsula that can be used without more development.”

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Artist's rendering of waterfront development along the Harlem River in the South Bronx



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