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City of West Haven unveils plans for new 73,000 s/f West River Crossing redevelopment project

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Mayor John Picard, joined by U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro, D-3, and U.S. Senators. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., recently unveiled plans for a six-story, 73,000 s/f LEED-certified high-rise along New Haven Harbor. LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a worldwide green building certification.

The flagship development would potentially house several dozen business tenants, including the new world headquarters of steel door manufacturer The Bilco Co., and create hundreds of mid to executive level jobs for the city and region.

The announcement complemented work nearly underway to restore the decaying bulkhead in the West River area of New Haven Harbor, a pivotal piece of the puzzle to develop the brownfield parcel at 105 Water St. that had long been home to an oil refinery, for the modern West River Crossing redevelopment project.

The news conference included remarks from Picard and the delegation of federal officials, who have lobbied to secure millions in funding for the commercial development. Bilco executive vice president Roger Joyce also spoke, along with representatives from the Yale Urban Design Workshop and others involved in the multifaceted mixed-use project.

To help advance the expansive development, which was launched in 2007 with an environmental assessment, the city was recently awarded a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to fix the bulkhead, which sits off the city-owned 105 Water St. property.

The \$1 million federal grant joins a \$1 million grant the city received earlier this year from the state Department of Economic and Community Development to replace a 400 ft. section of the 1,400 ft. wooden bulkhead, which was damaged in a 2007 storm, with a new steel seawall.

The proposed development is located in a neighborhood zoned for "waterfront design" projects near I-95 and the future Metro-North Railroad commuter station on Sawmill Rd. The highly anticipated project is composed of three phases: site cleanup, bulkhead repair and building construction.

Phase one, which includes ongoing environmental remediation of the 4.12-acre site, is projected for completion in a few months. Phase two, reconstruction of the bulkhead, which was erected in the late 1920s, will coincide with phase one.

Rebuilding the bulkhead, which is meant to keep land from washing into New Haven Harbor, is a necessary measure in preparing the waterfront property for development.

"Shoring up the bulkhead is crucial to stopping erosion, controlling pollution, spurring economic development and creating jobs," Picard said. "This game-changing project is a cornerstone of the West Haven renaissance and will change the economic landscape of the region."

The innovative project is expected to give the region's economy a much-needed boost by generating hundreds of executive level jobs, as well as scores of temporary construction jobs for the region,

and yielding hundreds of thousands in annual tax revenue for the city.

After the city selects a developer, construction on the environmentally responsible, LEED-certified building should take about a year. The project's estimated ground breaking is spring 2012.

Bilco, a global company owned and managed by the same family since 1926, would anchor the commercial high-rise, expanding beyond its 60 executive level jobs in West Haven, according to preliminary plans.

The multimillion dollar, state-of-the-art building would border Bilco's current corporate headquarters at 37 Water St.

Under the plans, the company, which operates facilities worldwide and across the country, intends to occupy 14,000 s/f on the fourth floor.

Once built, Bilco intends to demolish its old facility, a Water St. institution since 1952 which houses the company's global headquarters.

The company is the worldwide source for commercial and residential specialty access products, such as roof hatches, automatic fire vents, vault doors, basement doors and egress window wells.

"West Haven has been the home to Bilco for 60 years," Joyce said. "The city and its residents have been very supportive of our company which now has plants, warehouses and offices in four states and five countries. We are pleased that the city's plan to have a new office building built adjacent to our current headquarters offers us the opportunity to occupy new, more efficient space while remaining in West Haven."

In addition to Bilco, the city's vision for the West River Crossing project includes a marina, restaurants, condominiums, stores, recreational venues, including a seaside walkway, and a hotel.

Picard credited federal, state and local officials with "securing the vital funding to bring this \$2 million project to fruition."

Earlier this year, DeLauro, Lieberman and Blumenthal, who wrote letters supporting the grant, said they were pleased about the development.

"The development of the West Haven waterfront will greatly benefit the surrounding communities, improving our shoreline, helping to reduce pollution, and creating good, well-paying jobs that will strengthen our local economy," DeLauro said. "The West River Crossing project, with Bilco's vital support, will help to lay the foundation for future economic development in Connecticut."

In 2007, the city secured \$200,000 in federal brownfields grant funds from the Environmental Protection Agency to clean up petroleum contamination at 105 Water St., a step toward its goal of making 15 to 20 acres ready for development.

"This project has the potential to open the door to a revitalized district consisting of waterfront property redeveloped with attractive commercial, retail and recreational areas," Lieberman said. "The project will support workforce and housing goals by creating good-paying jobs close to affordable workforce housing."

Blumenthal said, "This project will promote a vibrant mixed-use development along the waterfront, creating a regional commercial destination, drawing businesses and new jobs to the region, and supporting local economic development."

Shown (from left) are: Yale Urban Design Workshop director Alan Plattus; former city planning and development commissioner Eileen Buckheit; Mayor John Picard; U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.; Bilco Co. executive vice president Roger Joyce; new city planning and development commissioner Meredith Allen; and city environmental counselor Nancy Mendel.