

---

February 6, 2003

## Competing Ideas to Develop Brooklyn Waterfront

By ANDY NEWMAN

Things are starting to happen on Brooklyn's most promising stretch of undeveloped waterfront. Sort of.

At the end of North 12th Street in Williamsburg, on a lot now filled with oil tanks, a man named Adam Victor, assisted by the son of a famed Soviet dissident, wants to build a \$1 billion Frank Gehry-inspired complex lined with art galleries, video galleries and a sculpture park. It would be, Mr. Victor said, "representative of the thriving artistic community that is the north side of Williamsburg."

It would also, not incidentally, house an 1,100-megawatt power plant, big enough to light a million homes.

Just to the north, a woman who sometimes dresses in Civil War uniforms to deliver school lectures hopes to buy a cove from a Saudi-owned oil company for a museum dedicated to the warship Monitor, the Union ironclad, which was built nearby.

To the south, one of Mr. Victor's potential neighbors has a big "Fight the Power" mural painted on the side of his building. This gesture of grass-roots solidarity with local preservationists is motivated largely by the man's fears that the plant would kill any chance for him to build a 34-story apartment tower on his parcel.

That would be right next to the spot where the city proposes to hold the beach volleyball competition at the 2012 Olympics.

Of all the wasted waterfronts in the city, the crumbling stretch of the East River in Williamsburg and Greenpoint might be the biggest. It is at the foot of two of the city's most vibrant neighborhoods, yet for years its breathtaking views of Manhattan have been enjoyed only by rats and trespassers.

So it is fitting that this piece of waterfront would attract people with big — or perhaps quixotic — dreams.

Certainly, not all of these visions will be realized. If the last 20 years of attempts to redevelop the Williamsburg waterfront are any indication, none of them may. What happens next will depend to some degree on what the Bloomberg administration wants, and that has been a mystery.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has promised grand plans for housing and parks on the waterfront in Greenpoint and Williamsburg. But the city is in dire need of electricity, and it is reluctant to chase off a potential supplier at a time utilities are having trouble finding money to build plants.

Today, the city is scheduled to announce whether it will weigh in with the state on Mr. Victor's TransGas Energy Systems application.

But whatever happens, the discussion is likely to be lively.

"This is not your average not-in-my-backyard situation," said Stephen K. Hindy, a member of the community board who opposes the plant. He is also the president of Brooklyn Brewery, a few blocks in from the water. "We're really talking about the future of an incredible resource for the city of New York. You're really talking about New York City's backyard."

Standing atop storage tank No. 10 at the Bayside Fuel Oil depot on North 12th Street a few weeks ago, Mr. Victor's environmental project manager, Stephan Solzhenitsyn, looked out at a defunct freight yard, a bus wash, a metal stamping plant, a truck-rental place, a garbage-truck garage and a document-storage warehouse.

"The plant doesn't need to look nice to fit in with this," said Mr. Solzhenitsyn, an urban planner who works for an environmental consulting firm in New Jersey called TRC and is the son of Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel laureate and Soviet dissident.

But TransGas Energy, which has contracted to buy the land from Bayside, promises that it will. The building, Mr. Victor and his consultants say, would echo the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

Not only that, they say, the plant would burn relatively clean natural gas and recycle its waste heat to make steam to heat buildings in Manhattan. Mr. Victor, 49, who has built a 250-megawatt plant in Syracuse, said he would also remove the underground residue — mostly petroleum and coal-tar waste — from the site.

"This is a facility," Mr. Victor said, "that cleans up the air, cleans up the soil, saves water, improves electric reliability, generates half a billion dollars in economic activity, and will save the electric and steam ratepayers in New York City tens of millions of dollar a year at the same time that it serves as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the underachieving North Brooklyn waterfront."

Mr. Victor, who says the site he has picked out is the only practical one because of its proximity to various steam and oil pipelines, says he does not see why the power plant, a park, a museum, housing and beach volleyball courts cannot coexist.

But few people in Williamsburg and Greenpoint seem to share that view. Most of the area's elected representatives have come out loudly against the project, and many residents have rejected the idea.

"We don't really care how nice the galleries are," said Deborah Masters, a prominent sculptor who lives nearby. "We don't want to live next to 4,000 tons of particulate matter" — the amount the plant's opponents say the smokestack would discharge annually.

Many locals are not excited about the prospect of 30-story apartment houses on the waterfront, either. But next door to the power plant site, a would-be rival developer, Norman A. Brodsky, hopes to be seen as the lesser evil.

Mr. Brodsky, 60, the man with "Fight the Power" painted on his wall, owns CitiStorage, one of the biggest archiving firms in the Northeast. He said he would gladly move his holdings of two million boxes out of his waterfront warehouse if he could build apartments, and added that there is no way anyone would willingly choose to live next to a power plant, no matter how many amenities it had.

"It would kill all waterfront housing development for the next 10 generations," he said.

Just north of the Bayside tanks, Janice Lauletta-Weinmann dreams of building a museum about the Monitor, which was launched in 1862 from Continental Ironworks, along a tiny spur of the river called Bushwick Inlet.

The state granted the museum a charter in 1996, but Ms. Lauletta-Weinmann has not been able to find a home for it. She was negotiating with the owner of the land that borders the inlet, Motiva Enterprises, a gasoline refiner jointly owned by Saudi Refining and the Shell Oil Company. But Motiva withdrew the offer, then withdrew another one it had extended to the Trust for Public Land, which wants to turn the land along the inlet into a park.