

The New York Times

Sunday, December 9, 2007

Two Projects Claim Street Savvy

By ANTOINETTE MARTIN

JERSEY CITY

TWO new housing developments here are being designed to have maximum street smarts — or, to put it in planner lingo, “smart streets.”

Liberty Harbor is an enormous mixed-use project stretching 28 blocks between historic Paulus Hook and Van Vorst Park, with plans to include 10,000 housing units. Hamilton Square is a 300-unit complex being carved out of the former St. Francis Hospital on Hamilton Park. The overall success of both hinges on intelligent street design, the developers said.

Peter Mocco, the developer of Liberty Harbor, brought in a Princeton architecture professor to design one special street in the first phase of construction, which includes 667 homes and dozens of just-below-street-level shops. The architect, Mario Gandelsonas, produced a half-dozen designs for the single block running north-south from Grand Street to a new PATH train stop on Avenue B looking out at the Statue of Liberty.

The design that struck Mr. Mocco and his other architects — there are a number of them for the giant project — as “perfect genius” has an ever-so-slight reverse “S” curve to it. The “wavy street,” Mr. Mocco called it.

The street, which will be named Liberty View Drive and is about half-finished, stands out from the rest of the grid, and is designed to influence the look, feel and “livability” of the neighborhood, Mr. Mocco said. Its wavy shape, accentuated by ex-

tra-wide granite sidewalks, will slow traffic, allow for gardens set in its curves and showcase the view of the Statue of Liberty, he added.

At Hamilton Square, the focal point will be Hamilton Square Park, a two-acre oasis in a neighborhood now made up of mostly Victorian brick and brownstone row houses.

St. Francis Hospital was built 70 years ago at the park’s eastern end, on top of what had once been a cobblestone street full of neighborhood shops that opened directly onto the park.

Now, the developer, the Exeter Property Company, plans to recreate the street, cobblestones and all (including some original excavated stones). It is intended to be a “neighborhood shopping promenade,” the developer said, central to the 300-unit development.

Hamilton Square’s six buildings will include an 11-story condominium tower as well as several reconfigured hospital structures, two of them expanded. They will be clustered on either side of the pedestrian street, which will reclaim its old name as an extension of Pavonia Street, rectly on what is a walking route to the Seventh Street PATH station, will be a lively community gathering spot.

“People don’t choose to live in an urban environment as opposed to a suburban one for the anonymity,” Paul Silverman said. “They want a place that feels both communal and diverse.”

At Liberty Harbor, Mr. Mocco said, there should be something new to discover every time someone walks down a street.

The style of the houses is eclectic: one block of attached houses features the work of five different architects, including traditional brick and glass-fronted. Different colors of granite are used to demarcate the corners of the sidewalks, and a distinctive “LH” logo is etched into street lamps, carved stone pediments and front-stoop steps.

Small gardens are nestled in the curves of the street, and more will be created throughout the project, carefully planted to show off color in all seasons and at a height that flatters the building facades.

Mr. Mocco said he and his architects had studied long and hard to try to discern the elements of a great urban street, looking to old European cities and the streets of Boston for inspiration.

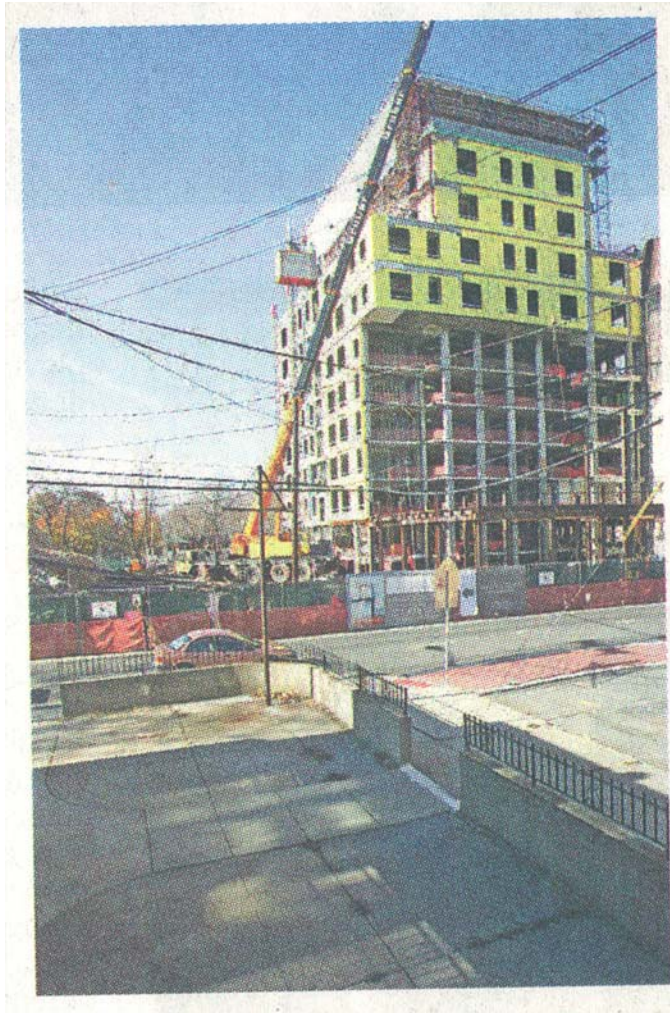
“It’s a struggle, and we just stumble onto things that may be right in many cases,” he said. “Nobody put all the answers in a book.”

“But after two generations of suburban sprawl,” Mr. Mocco added, “people knew there had to be something better and started returning to the cities. What they are very clearly looking for are places that are friendly, with human scale and built-in sociability, where the streets are pleasant and entertaining to walk.”

All the streets at Liberty Harbor will have two-way traffic, Mr. Mocco said, and space to park on both sides.



“But their essential nature is different than traditional streets,” he said. “Old streets were built for cars, and then altered to accommodate people. These streets are for people, but will accommodate cars.”



DEFINED BY DETAILS

The centerpiece of Liberty Harbor, above, will be a street shaped like a giant reverse S. Hamilton Square, left, will be built around a cobblestone street. “Old streets were built for cars, and then altered to accommodate people,” said Peter Mocco, Liberty’s developer. “These streets are for people, but will accommodate cars.”