

Build a hotel on Boardwalk? Plans pass GO of Palos Heights PUD Commission

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Preliminary plans for the Boardwalk of Palos Heights won unanimous approval of the Palos Heights Planned Unit Development Commission after a hearing Wednesday last week.

The plans envisions shops, restaurants, a 4-story hotel and a 4-story condominium building to be developed on the long-vacant property at the northeast corner of 119th Street and Harlem Avenue.

“Things are looking very good,” Chuck Allenson, a representative of 83 Harlem LLC, the newly formed corporation leading the redevelopment push, told The Regional Tuesday. “Last week, we cleared a pretty good hurdle, and this week we had productive follow-up meetings with city staff.”

The next step, according to Alderman Jeffrey M. Key (1st Ward), a member of the PUD Commission, is for the 83 Harlem team to submit final, details plans to the commission. “This is no longer a concept,” Key said after the commission meeting last week. “The plan needs to be in final form, so our engineers, our building department and others can examine it.”

Key predicted that the commission will give final consideration to the plans next month. If plans are given the green light, they are expected to be shepherded through the City Council for approval, with ground broken as early as fall.

While last week’s PUD panel meeting played to an overflow room at City Hall, 7607 W. College Drive, it lacked the organized opposition that had helped derail developer Bill Basic’s previous attempt to redevelop the property.

“I think people around here are just weary over haggling about this piece of property,” said Jeanne Pribyl, who said she has lived in Palos Heights just a few years, but was disappointed by all the arguments over the previously proposed NorthPointe and Palos Town Square developments, both of which died on the drawing board several years ago. “I think people are starting to understand that no matter what you propose for that land, somebody somewhere will raise an objection. We have to stop insisting on perfection and embrace what is good, and this plan looks good to me.

“It looks like jobs, it looks like sales tax revenue, it looks like a connection with Lake Katherine, and it looks like fun,” she added.

The 83 Harlem plan calls for a mixed-use development that includes a “restaurant campus” of several different types of upmarket eateries designed to make the site a destination for diners not only from the Palos area, but from Orland Park, Tinley Park and other nearby suburbs, as well.

Also in the group’s plans are a small, “boutique” hotel and a high-end condominium building with its own under-building parking. The 32 condo units would be marketed for \$300,000 to \$350,000 each.

Asked at last week’s commission meeting, Allenson said that sensitive negotiations prevented him from disclosing which corporation would operate the hotel, but did say that it would most likely be a respected, established operator of a top-tier hotel in or near downtown Chicago.

Addressing concerns

Several concerns were raised by individual residents, including financing, security, noise and light levels, hours of operation, traffic control, drainage and more.

Developers addressed them one at a time.

“This will be a development designed to attract families and people of all ages,” said 83 Harlem developer John Livaditis at last week’s PUD panel hearing. “If it’s too rowdy an environment, if the music is too loud, then some people don’t feel comfortable, and that’s bad for business. So no, there are no plans for a music venue here or even a rock-themed restaurant.”

Palos Heights Fire Protection District Chief Tim Sarhage said he was seeing the plans for the first time and said that he had “no major objection” to the development, but planned to meet with 83 Harlem representatives to ensure that emergency vehicles have appropriate access to all buildings on the property, and that the boardwalk itself will be strong enough to accommodate the weight of fire trucks.

Voicing a concern about the Boardwalk’s effect on nearby restaurants was Frank Radochonski, founder and owner of Pop’s Italian Beef & Sausage, located at 7153 W. 127th St. since 1980, and which has expanded to a total of 14 Chicago area locations.

Radochonski said he was generally supportive of redevelopment of the parcel and “loves the look” of the plans, but wondered aloud about the impact of five new restaurants on established eateries, such as Jullianni’s Pizzeria & Pub, 7239 W. College Drive. While he acknowledged that the development would most likely have no negative impact on Pop’s, he suggested that the plans be revised to reflect “moderation” and feature two restaurants rather than five.

His comments were the only ones of the evening to draw applause from the several dozen people in attendance.

Radochonski was the only eatery owner who spoke at the meeting, and he expressed disappointment that no other restaurateurs were on hand to offer input.

Allenson said Tuesday that the Boardwalk of Palos Heights is designed to “dovetail nicely” with the city’s plan to rejuvenate the Harlem Avenue corridor and predicted that the new restaurants would draw people to the area who normally would not be there, and therefore benefit surrounding businesses, including established restaurants.

To address the concerns of nearby residents, 83 Harlem has modified its initial plans somewhat, erasing a banquet facility from the mix and reducing the number of condo units from 48 to 32.

The new plans will also include a limited amount of retail shops mixed in with the restaurants.

A major selling point of the proposed Boardwalk of Palos Heights is its plan to be a destination for al fresco dining in mild weather, as well as small-scale musical performances and celebrations of the arts, as men, women and children stroll along the boardwalk that will frame the property’s northern edge and

which is expected to offer a view of the Cal-Sag Channel and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's SEPA (Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration) waterfall on the north bank.

History

The triangle-shaped parcel, which serves as half of Palos Heights' northern gateway, was the site of a thriving Sinclair service station in the 1950s. Its heyday ran from 1963-89, when it was home to Crown Buick, owned and operated by Harvey R. Eiseman. One of the more successful Buick dealerships in the Chicago area, the business was highly regarded and publicly referred to as a "godsend" in 1985 by then-Mayor Eugene Simpson.

After Crown closed, the site was home to Rizza Buick for several years. Rizza left in the 1990s, and for more than 15 years city officials have wrangled and struggled over what to do with the unused parcel. Two years ago, after the Palos Town Square plan died after a 4-3 city council vote, Alderman Jack Clifford (2nd Ward) wrote with disappointment that the parcel went "from a field of dreams to a field of weeds."



Image courtesy of exp U.S. Services Inc.

A view looking east along the signature boardwalk of the proposed Boardwalk of Palos Heights on the northeast corner of 119th Street and Harlem Avenue. Planners say the boardwalk will be an informal,

pleasant gathering place of choice for Palos Heights residents of all ages, home to al fresco dining and occasional small-scale music performances, art fairs and more.



Image courtesy of exp U.S. Services Inc.

A bird's-eye view of the proposed Boardwalk of Palos Heights, looking east/northeast from Harlem Avenue. The development will include a wrap-around sidewalk and easy pedestrian access points to encourage neighbors to walk to and from the site.

BOARDWALK
OF PALOS HEIGHTS

USE	SQ. FT. AREA (GSI)	REQUIREMENTS	PROPOSED PROVISIONS (SPACES)
RESTAURANT	50,000	2 spaces are provided per 1,000 SF of floor area based on number of employees working	228
RETAIL	11,000	Two spaces are provided for every 1,000 SF of floor area	68
RESIDENTIAL	80,000	The additional 10 units will utilize underground parking in the same building	20
HOTEL	80,000	10 units and 7 staff members are anticipated	17
ADA	-	All ADA compliant spaces require 8 ADA spaces	-
TOTAL PARKING REQUIRED			225
TOTAL PARKING PROVIDED (BASED ON 10' WIDE PARKING SPACES)			218



Image courtesy of exp U.S. Services Inc.

Five restaurant/retail buildings will be erected on the western half of the site, with a four-story hotel and four-story condominium building to the east, where the triangle narrows.