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Arverne Renewal To Begin In June

Two developers picked to undertake project

By Merle English
STAFF WRITER

City officials yesterday tapped two Long Island developers to undertake the $350 million development of Arverne-by-the-Sea, a 100-acre oceanfront community in the Rockaways.

At a City Hall news conference, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and other city officials said that a plan by Benjamin-Beechwood LLC, a joint venture, was selected from among several competitive proposals for the Arverne renewal area, bounded by the Rockaway Freeway, Beach 32nd, Beach 74th and Beach 81st Streets.

The project, on which construction is slated to begin in June, would include:

- 2,300 middle-income, residential units in a mix of one- and two-family homes with some mid-rise apartment buildings. Purchasers of homes would be selected by a lottery run by the Department of Housing Preservation & Development.
- Up to 250,000 square feet of commercial and retail space.
- A 30,000-square-foot community recreation center.
- A charter school for up to 800 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The Benjamin-Beechwood venture, a joint undertaking of housing developers Benjamin Development of Garden City and the Beechwood Organization of Jericho, will obtain private financing for the development.

"This has been a dream for 30 or 40 years," said Jerilyn Perine, commissioner of the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development. "We don't get to see this too much in New York City, because large expanses of vacant land are exceedingly rare."

The community will not "have any parallel anywhere in the city," Perine added, "and [will] bring the ocean to our front door."

"Moving forward with this ambitious initiative, especially in light of the recent tragedy in Belle Harbor, sends a strong message that the city is committed to bringing important new projects to Queens and the Rockaways," Giuliani said in a prepared statement.

The Rockaway community lost nearly 100 residents in the World Trade Center terror attack and five more on Nov. 12 when American Airlines Flight 587 crashed in the neighborhood.

Arverne-by-the-Sea takes the place of a proposed $1-billion Technodome sports and recreation project for the 308-acre urban renewal site. Technodome was sidelined because of financing uncertainties.

Queens Borough President Claire Shulman, Community Board 14, local organizations and residents developed guidelines upon which the Arverne-by-the-Sea concept was based.

"For a long time, we've been looking at the 300 acres to figure out what can we do with them," Shulman said. "We now have a very good proposal that we believe will give a shot in the arm to the Rockaway peninsula and create housing we desperately need."

The "easy commute" to job centers and the unique oceanfront setting "will make Arverne-by-the Sea one of New York's most desirable communities," Benjamin-Beechwood said in a statement.

Staff writer Dan Janison contributed to this story.

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