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<http://www.dnainfo.com/20101209/upper-west-side/extell-amends-riverside-center-plan-include-affordable-housing-parks-improvements>

Extell Amends Riverside Center Plan to Include Affordable Housing, Parks Improvements

By Leslie Albrecht



UPPER WEST SIDE — Heeding demands from community members who feared Riverside Center would be an exclusive enclave for the wealthy, Extell Development Company agreed Wednesday to make several changes to the proposed five-tower residential and retail complex.

Extell said it will make 200 of the apartments at Riverside Center "affordable," pour \$20 million into improvements at nearby parks, and build a \$36 million 100,000 square-foot school at the site,

between West 59th Street and West 61st Street, West End Avenue and Riverside Boulevard, among other things.

The concessions came at the end of a series of "intense" negotiations between Extell, members of Community Board 7 and City Councilwoman Gale Brewer, who fought "adamantly" on behalf of neighborhood interests, said Extell spokesman George Arzt.

"Both sides are happy with what they got out of this," Arzt said. "At the end we all hugged each other. You don't understand how intense these negotiations are. There were deep feelings."

The City Council's Land Use Committee was scheduled to vote on Riverside Center on Tuesday, but the vote was postponed because Extell and community representatives hadn't reached agreement on several points, Arzt said.

Both sides hammered out those differences until 1 a.m. Wednesday, then started over at 9 a.m. At 4:30 p.m. the parties were in agreement and the Land Use committee voted to approve the project about an hour later, Arzt said.

Brewer hailed the agreement as a win for the Upper West Side.

"Our goal has been the preservation of the Upper West Side as a vibrant, family-oriented community, cognizant of its history and values, open to all, friendly to business, eager for living-wage jobs, and dedicated to a common public interest," Brewer said. "I believe that the concessions obtained from the developer ... advance these goals."

Extell expects to build about 2,500 apartments at Riverside Center. Under the agreement, the developer said it would create 500 units of affordable housing. Of those, about 200 will be part of Riverside Center, and the others will be built elsewhere on the Upper West Side, Arzt said.

The developer also promised to make an effort to rent retail space at Riverside Center to "neighborhood businesses as opposed to destination chain stores," according to a statement from Brewer's office.

Extell had some wins of its own. The Planning Commission had asked the developer to move an auto dealership off West End Avenue, but in the end Extell got to keep the business where it wanted it, Arzt said.

The full City Council will vote Dec. 20 on Riverside Center, which is slated to be built on the largest piece of vacant land on the Upper West Side.

The development has drawn criticism from nearby residents, who worried Riverside Center would do little to enhance the Upper West Side beyond providing high-end housing and retail.

Community Board 7 issued [a list of demands](#) on the project, calling on Extell to build a 150,000 square-foot school and make 30 percent of the housing affordable. Extell's president Gary Barnett has repeatedly said some of the requests were unreasonable, because they would make Riverside Center too expensive to build.

Arzt said he didn't know exactly how much the concessions Extell agreed to would cost the developer. "It's a lot of money," Arzt said.