

Blue collar to green collar

Green Exchange could be 'a catalyst' for change

By **TIMOTHY INKLEBARGER**

Editor

Plans to convert a shuttered lamp factory in Logan Square to the country's first green-themed market could be on the fast track, following a proposal approved by the Chicago Plan Commission.

Neighbors, community organizations and 1st Ward Alderman Manny Flores made impassioned pleas to the commission this week in support of the proposal for the building at the 2500 block of West Diversey.

"Three years ago we learned that the Frederick Cooper Lamp Company had to close its doors and lay off about 125 employees, many of whom had been with the company for more than 20 years," said Reverend Sandra Castillo, a neighbor in Logan Square who supports the green business incubator. "They would soon face the prospect of lower paying jobs while paying mortgages and bills. Then we learned that a condominium developer was seeking to purchase the factory and turn it into 150 luxury condos - our heart sank."

Castillo and other neighbors formed the Cooper Lamp Task Force in an effort to find a better use for the historic building. She said the community already has enough residential development and added that the sons and daughters of the former factory workers would not have been able to afford the proposed condos.

"An industrial district that welcomes green industry will allow us to bring empty sites back to life with head of household, blue-collar jobs in the green industry while also retaining employers already in the area," Castillo said.

The building is expected to create 300 to 400 new jobs and include 100 work-live rental units that allow business owners and workers to live in spaces that are primarily used for green businesses.

"The experiment in work-live spaces is intended to demonstrate that this form of development can indeed reduce vehicle trips in an economically functional manner," said Frederick Deters of the Department of Planning and Development.

Deters said the building has been in the neighborhood for roughly seven decades and the proposed redevelopment will "give it a renewed economic viability going into the future."

The proposal, approved this week by the Chicago Plan Commission, is not expected to be fully operational until 2008, but several green businesses are lining up to get a spot. Future tenants include: Greenmaker Supply, a company that deals in environmentally friendly building materials; MeGoGreen, a green search engine, consumer savings guide and educational resource; and Evergreen Oak Electric / Crest Lighting Studios, offering energy efficient residential and commercial lighting.

Ted Wysocki, president and CEO of the Local Economic & Employment Development Council, called the development an "entry point for green-collar jobs." He said that as the delegate agency for the Department of Planning and Development in the industrial corridor, the organization has adopted a strategic plan to support "sustainable" business development that creates jobs and reduces environmental impact.



The shuttered Frederick Cooper Lamp Factory, 2500 block of W. Diversey, will be converted into a green business incubator in 2008, providing 300-400 jobs.

Photo by Josh Hawkins



The Green Exchange aims to house dozens of environmentally friendly businesses. The proposal was approved this week by the Chicago Plan Commission.

Rendering courtesy of the Green Exchange

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"The Green Exchange will do both," he said.

He said the LEED Council also is convening a green jobs summit in early December to review initiatives in Chicago and the rest of the country that provide job training for green industries.

The building itself will also serve as a symbol for sustainability, he said.

"The transformation of this vacant building into a mini merchandise mart for green businesses will be a message every hour of every day for every driver on the Kennedy Expressway that they too can be consumers of green products and services," Wysocki said.

Rolando Acosta, a zoning attorney representing Baum Realty, the developer of the project, said Baum also is seeking Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the federal government through the inclusion of a green roof and the installation of solar panels. He said the developers aim to achieve platinum status, which would make it the largest platinum rated building in the city.

"In addition to being platinum LEED certified, the intention is to make this building a city of Chicago landmark," he said.

Logan Square Preservation vice president Ward Miller said the building is considered architecturally significant and is rated orange by the city's Landmarks Division. Designed in 1913 and 1914, the clock tower at the center of the building "reminds us of Chicago's great industrial past," Miller said.

"It's an early example of reinforced concrete technology and construction among other achievements," Miller said.

He said the renovation of the building would include full-scale restoration of the windows based on historic photographs, masonry repairs to the façade, and restoration of the building's cornice, among other features.

Flores said the development moves away from the residential condo developments in the city and helps establish a healthier lifestyle. He quoted a newspaper article from earlier this week stating that the green economy is a \$341 billion industry that creates 5.3 million jobs a year.

"Right now this economy is still in its embryonic stage," Flores said. "It's still just beginning. The Green Exchange is a leader and could be a catalyst for our city. I envision a day when there will not be one but where you will see many Green Exchanges."

He said the buzz surrounding the development has been growing as the proposal moves forward, attracting attention from news outlets such as the New York Times, Newsweek and National Public Radio.

"So many people told us that the building was obsolete and not suitable and too big and a white elephant, but we didn't give up hope," Flores said.

The proposal now heads to the Chicago Committee on Zoning and then to the City Council for approval. Flores said he hopes the project is up and running in the next 12 to 16 months.

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