

DAILY NEWS

Ousted vendors eye waterfront market

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GREENSPACE or Greengrocers?

That's the choice the City Council could face next month when it considers what to do with a plot of waterfront property next to the Bronx Terminal Market.

The 5½-acre site — once slated to host an indoor bike racing track for the city's 2012 Olympic bid — is now on track to become a waterfront park when the Council votes Feb. 8, though a developer hopes the land might be used for displaced merchants at the Bronx Terminal Market.

The Council will vote that same day on whether to approve a controversial redevelopment proposal for the market, which aims to replace the ethnic-foods wholesale stalls with a \$395 million shopping mall — displacing about two dozen current tenants.

The remaining merchants recently lost a year-long court battle against the developer, The Related Companies, and now face imminent eviction — which many say will mean bankruptcy unless they can relocate their complementary businesses as one market.

While the city has refused to build a suitable facility for a mass relocation, rescue might yet come from developer Irwin Cohen, the creator of the successful Chelsea Market development in Manhattan. He wants to try something similar on the Velodrome site.

"I think this works for New York City," Cohen said yesterday, describing an ethnic foods market that would keep the merchants in the area and add a new shopping venue to the South Bronx.

The new market would be a far cry from the current dilapidated collection of warehouse space. Cohen

said the new one would house food retailers alongside the wholesale operations, ethnic eateries and a 600-foot riverfront esplanade.

But trading greenspace for a marketplace could be a tough sell in a borough which has or is expected to lose dozens of acres of parkland already to a massive filtration plant under Van Cortlandt Park and a new Yankee Stadium on top of Mullaly and Macombs Dam parks.

Councilwoman Helen Foster (D-Highbridge) has said she is skeptical about Cohen's market plan.

"I'm concerned about the parkland," Foster said in one published report, "but I'm equally concerned about finding a new home for the merchants."

Foster said her initial caution stemmed from her worries about what she sees as a dangerous trend — giving up parkland for the sake of development.

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