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Basketball City nets new home on Pier 36

Financing completed to pave the way for a $13 million, seven-court sports facility that once attracted hordes of dribblers to Pier 63.

By **Daniel Massey**

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Financing for a long-planned transformation of Pier 36 into a $13 million, seven-court home for Basketball City was completed on Monday. The deal involves a city-owned warehouse on the East River pier, which is just north of the Manhattan Bridge.

The closing by the city and United Fund Advisors paves the way for construction of the 65,000-square-foot facility, which will take over space that had been occupied by the Office of Emergency Management. Work is expected to begin within 30 days. Basketball City was booted from its former home on Pier 63 on the far West Side in 2006 to make room for Hudson River Park. That space was set aside for noncommercial, public use.

“We're hoping to start up where we left off,” said Bruce Radler, president of Basketball City. “In this facility, we have a better platform.”

The project, in the works for about a decade, drew opposition from community groups who contended the private facility's steep membership fees would make it off limits to local residents. The local community board approved the project after Basketball City signed an agreement promising discounts and free court time to area residents.

More recently, the community board got Basketball City to agree to local hiring stipulations for some of the 50 jobs that are to be created, said Susan Stetzer, district manager for Community Board 3, but some opposition has remained over issues such as wages.

“I comfortably feel that we'll far and away exceed what we've committed to the community,” Mr. Radler said.

Wrangling over the future of the pier dates back to the Dinkins administration, when the then-mayor's plans to turn it into a refueling station for city vehicles were thwarted by a 1993 lawsuit by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

Mr. Silver and community board officials have written to the city asking that rent taken in from Basketball City be used to maintain the waterfront in the area. The rent is $150,000 a year, plus a percentage of gross income above thresholds, said an Economic Development Corp. spokeswoman, adding that discussions are ongoing on Mr. Silver's request.

The project was financed using the New Market Tax Credit, a federal program enacted in 2000 to spur economic development in low-income neighborhoods. The city is contributing $2.7 million toward costs for heat and air; electrical; plumbing and structural needs. Basketball City will put in a total of about $8 million and use the financing to build an energy-efficient facility that includes solar panels, composite wooden floors, and energy-efficient lighting.

“By leveraging unique financing streams such as this, we are building a foundation for a more livable and stronger city,” said Economic Development Corp. President Seth Pinsky.

The courts will be located on a single floor and will also accommodate volleyball, badminton, dodge ball and indoor soccer. Basketball City is required to provide waterfront access via a new open space along the pier. In addition, the facility will serve as the “home court” for 28 public high schools that do not have facilities of their own.

Basketball City is the tenth project the city has worked on with United Fund Advisors, financing over $500 million of development costs with $89 million in new market tax credits. Construction is expected to be completed in six to nine months.

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