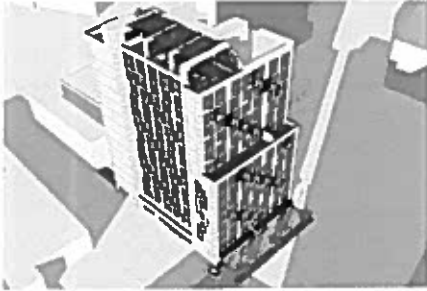


Cappelli Organization back to work in New Rochelle

By Bill Heltzel - April 27, 2017



Rendering of The Cappelli Organization's planned apartment and retail development in downtown New Rochelle.

Nearly a decade after Westchester developer Louis R. Cappelli's grand plan for LeCount Square collapsed, his company has come back to downtown New Rochelle with a vastly scaled-down proposal.

The New Rochelle Planning Board on April 25 approved a new site plan by The Cappelli Organization for 251 North Ave., an apartment and retail development.

"The market has picked up," Bruce Berg, CEO of The Cappelli Organization in White Plains, said in a telephone interview, "and we felt it was time to take the next step."

Ten years ago, Cappelli's New Rochelle Revitalization LLC was fine-tuning plans for LeCount Square, a \$450 million, 1.15 million-square-foot mixed-use development that as proposed would have included 154,000 square feet of retail space, 330,000 square feet of office space, 150 hotel rooms and 243 residential units. New Rochelle's former development commissioner in 2008 called the project "the keystone in the entire downtown."

LeCount Square was to be built across the street from New Roc City and catty-corner to Trump Plaza New Rochelle — both built by Cappelli and often credited as pioneer developments that spurred a downtown revival in the city on Long Island Sound.

The 3-acre property between North Avenue, LeCount Place, Huguenot Street and Anderson Street and includes a U.S. Post Office that was going to be razed.

The financial crisis of 2007 — 2008 and the housing market bust, which brought a halt to lender financing and demand for condominiums in Westchester County and across the country, killed LeCount Square.

Now The Cappelli Organization, formerly known as Cappelli Enterprises, controls only the two-story Standard Star building between the post office and a building occupied by a Planned Parenthood center at 247-249 North Ave.

Standard Star was built in 1924 in a modified Italian Renaissance style, according to a state historic resource inventory form. The newspaper building was altered several times and an addition was built at the rear in 1978 for a restaurant and bar. In 2001, the addition was converted to a nightclub.

The current development site is a sliver of the original property. It consists of about one-fourth of an acre, with only 21 feet of frontage on North Street and widening to 78 feet near LeCount Place.

Cappelli plans to build a 14-story building with 112 dwellings and 4,000 square feet of ground level retail space. It will have 13 studio apartments, 92 one-bedroom units and seven two-bedroom units. Parking will be provided at the New Roc City garage.

Berg would not disclose the cost of the project.

"It's geared to a younger demographic," he said, "that commutes and doesn't necessarily need a car."

The building will include what has become the standard amenities for millennials: a rooftop deck, a fire pit, gym, small business center and bike storage.

Demolition has already begun on the Standard Star building, but only on a portion at the back. The rest of the building will become part of the new tower.

The developer also has proposed installing murals or art work on the building.

New Rochelle Development Commissioner Luiz Aragon commended Cappelli to the planning board for embracing the concept of a downtown arts district and for plans to restore the Standard Star façade.

One resident who spoke at the planning board hearing critiqued the design as "soulless" and rebuked city officials for not requiring more green space, as depicted in a downtown master plan.

The master plan is a general concept, Aragon replied, and there is essentially no private open space left downtown.

But there are green touches in the Cappelli project, architect Mark Schulman, co-founder of Design Development Architects in White Plains, the project's architectural design firm, told the board. In addition to a green space on the roof, there will be an interior patio and a "live wall

system" with plants, he said.

As to the rest of the original LeCount Square site, the Cappelli Organization has no plans.

"We don't own any of it," Berg said.

Bill Heltzel

Bill Heltzel has covered criminal justice, courts, government and sports – as a beat reporter and investigative reporter – for daily newspapers in Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. He worked for Bloomberg LP in training and sales. He joined The Business Journal in 2016.
