

Neighbors Criticize Plan for Tower at 63d St. Y.M.C.A.

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

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A 41-story tower would rise above the West Side Y.M.C.A., adding a pyramidal copper peak to the Central Park West skyline, under a plan being advanced by the Young Men's Christian Association — and attacked by neighbors.

Six floors at the tower's base would adjoin the Y at 5 West 63d Street and include a new swimming pool and locker rooms. The next seven floors would have low-income residential rooms and high-priced condominiums. Luxury dwellings would occupy the remaining floors.

Paul L. Kendall, vice president of the Y.M.C.A. of Greater New York, said the tower would improve conditions at the West Side branch — particularly for women, children and the handicapped — and would pro-

vide money for needy branches throughout the city.

It also is designed to take advantage of a zoning bonus so new that the procedure has not yet won final city approval, although it has been passed by the City Planning Commission.

Behind Former School

The tower would be situated behind the former McBurney School, 15 West 63d Street, and would adjoin the main building. The school, now independent of the Y.M.C.A., has moved to West End Avenue and 60th Street.

With its setbacks, red bricks and cast stone, the tower was designed to complement the "marvelously idiosyncratic host-building below it," said John H. Beyer, a partner in Beyer Blinder Belle, architects of

the addition.

The 14-story original, designed by Dwight Baum and completed in 1929, evokes an ancient Italian hilltown. The asymmetrical facade is composed of many recesses and projections — and filled with peaks, porches and parapets. To this would be added "a symbolic bell tower or campanile as an extension of the hilltown metaphor," Mr. Beyer said.

Despite its midblock location, the new tower would also be an imposing presence on Central Park West, unobscured by the low buildings of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, which face the park.

Opposed by Neighbors

The project has stirred neighbors' anger. Many believe that the Y.M.C.A. deserves landmark status, that the addition would be

esthetically harmful, and that too much redevelopment is already planned around Columbus Circle and the Lincoln Center area.

Last Monday, more than 100 neighbors gathered at the West Side Y to see the proposal. "When the photos and renderings were undraped, there was an audible gasp," said Gladys Dobelle, of the West 63d/West 64th Street Block Association.

"The big question becomes, 'Who owns the sunshine?'" she said. "Some day, we'll look out our windows and not be able to see the sky. Somewhere, the people have to say, 'Enough is enough.' Maybe this is the building."

Another neighbor, Elizabeth Mayers, considered the esthetics of the tower and said:

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"Although it has the feeling of a campanile, the Italians never dreamed of building one 41 stories high. This would be a fine addition to the Y — if it were 25 stories lower."

New Zoning Procedure

The tower's size is based on the "inclusionary housing" zoning procedure, which is to be considered by the Board of Estimate in coming weeks.

The procedure rewards developers who build or preserve low-income dwellings by allowing them to add in a high-rise luxury development up to 20 percent more space than zoning rules would ordinarily permit.

To earn the bonus, the Y.M.C.A. intends to build 40 rooming units in the tower. It would also retain 25 apartments for lower-income tenants in two tenement buildings it owns at 14 and 16 West 64th Street.

If the zoning procedure is adopted by the Board of Estimate, and if the tower proposal later wins approval from the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate, the Y.M.C.A. would

sell development rights for the condominium to a private builder.

A "significant portion" of the sale's proceeds would go to the many Y.M.C.A. branches citywide that are not self-sustaining, Mr. Kendall said. "We are operating on the basis of one Y," he said, "where the strong locations pay for the others."

But that was one of the neighbors' complaints last Monday night. "They're putting up a tower on the West Side to pay their bills someplace else," said Arlene Simon of Landmark West, a preservation group.