A 41-Story Tower Is to Rise Over the West Side Y.M.C.A.
By THOMAS J. LUECK
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By THOMAS J. LUECK

The Y.M.C.A. of Greater New York said yesterday that it would proceed with a fiercely opposed and long-stalled plan for a 41-story condominium over its branch on West 63d Street, creating one of the tallest residential buildings to overlook Central Park.

The tower, first proposed in 1986, is to be built by two large real estate concerns, the Vornado Realty Trust and the New York development company owned by David Edelstein. Y.M.C.A. executives said they had signed a contract to sell their development rights to the two companies for $9.3 million in cash and improvements to their existing building valued at about $9 million.

The plan provoked immediate protests from community groups on the Upper West Side. They said they would challenge the proposal. Neighborhood groups had sued to stop the Y.M.C.A.'s 1986 plan, saying it would create too much traffic congestion, overburden municipal services and cast a long shadow over Central Park. Although the courts ultimately ruled in favor of the development plan, the Y.M.C.A. was forced to put the plan on hold when the city's real estate market sank into a deep recession at the end of the 1980's.

"If we can find a way to stop it, we will," said Olive Freud, vice president of the Committee for Environmentally Sound Development, which has challenged several large developments in the neighborhood.

Under the new proposal for the Y.M.C.A. site, the tower would be built over the former McBurney School, a five-story building that is owned by the Y.M.C.A. and adjoins the west side of its 14-story building at 5 West 63d Street. Meeting rooms, athletic areas and other Y.M.C.A. facilities would either be rebuilt or left untouched by the developers, and the ornate facade of McBurney School, which is protected as a New York City landmark, would be left intact.

The residences would begin on the sixth floor, with the eight lowest residential floors reserved as rental apartments for low-income people, senior citizens and artists.

Beginning on the building's fifteenth floor, where it would ascend over the ornate roof line and cantilever over the Y.M.C.A., it would become a luxurious building by any measure. Most, if not all, the condominiums would command sweeping views of Central Park, extending beyond the Y.M.C.A. and two smaller buildings on Central Park West that house the Ethical Culture Society and its school.

Real estate executives said the condominiums might fetch prices of almost $1,000 a square foot, or $1.2 million for a two-bedroom apartment.

A plan to build a 41-story condominium tower over the 14-story West Side Y.M.C.A. on West 63d Street would substantially change the skyline along Central Park West.

Y.M.C.A. executives said they had received all necessary development approvals from the city and could begin to erect the new condominium immediately. John M. Preis, the chief financial officer of the Y.M.C.A. of Greater New York, said he expected construction to begin early next year, but he declined to be more specific.

One immediate cause for concern, according to many parents in the neighborhood, is the West Side Y.M.C.A. Co-op Nursery School, with 180 full-time students and

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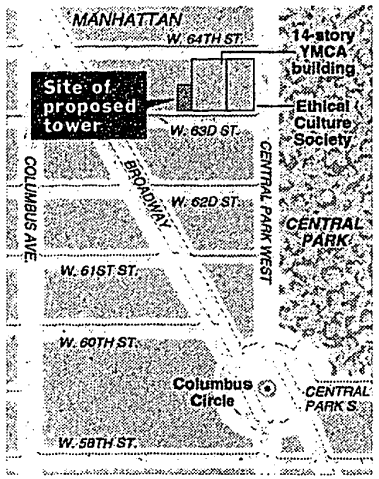
educational programs for more than 1,000 others. Parents said they were informed of the Y.M.C.A.'s plan at a meeting on Monday night.

"They definitely didn't give parents enough notice," said Moisha Blechman, a resident of a cooperative building at 64th Street and Central Park West, who attended the meeting. "There will be noise, dust in the air and other disruption. Just being in that atmophere will create problems."

Mr. Preis said the Y.M.C.A. had retained a real estate broker, Cushman & Wakefield Inc., to find space in another nearby building for the school during construction. He also said other measures would be taken to protect children who will use the Y.M.C.A. building while construction takes place. "We know we are dealing with a bunch of 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children, and we will go the extra five miles," he said.

Others in the neighborhood said the Y.M.C.A. project may become a catalyst for the kind of tightly organized community resistance that emerged in the 1980's and has since ebbed even though several large condominiums and commercial buildings have been built or are nearing construction on nearby blocks. Indeed, the burst of building has made the blocks just west of the south end of Central Park one of the city's most active development areas.



The New York Times

A building above the Y.M.C.A. would overlook Central Park.

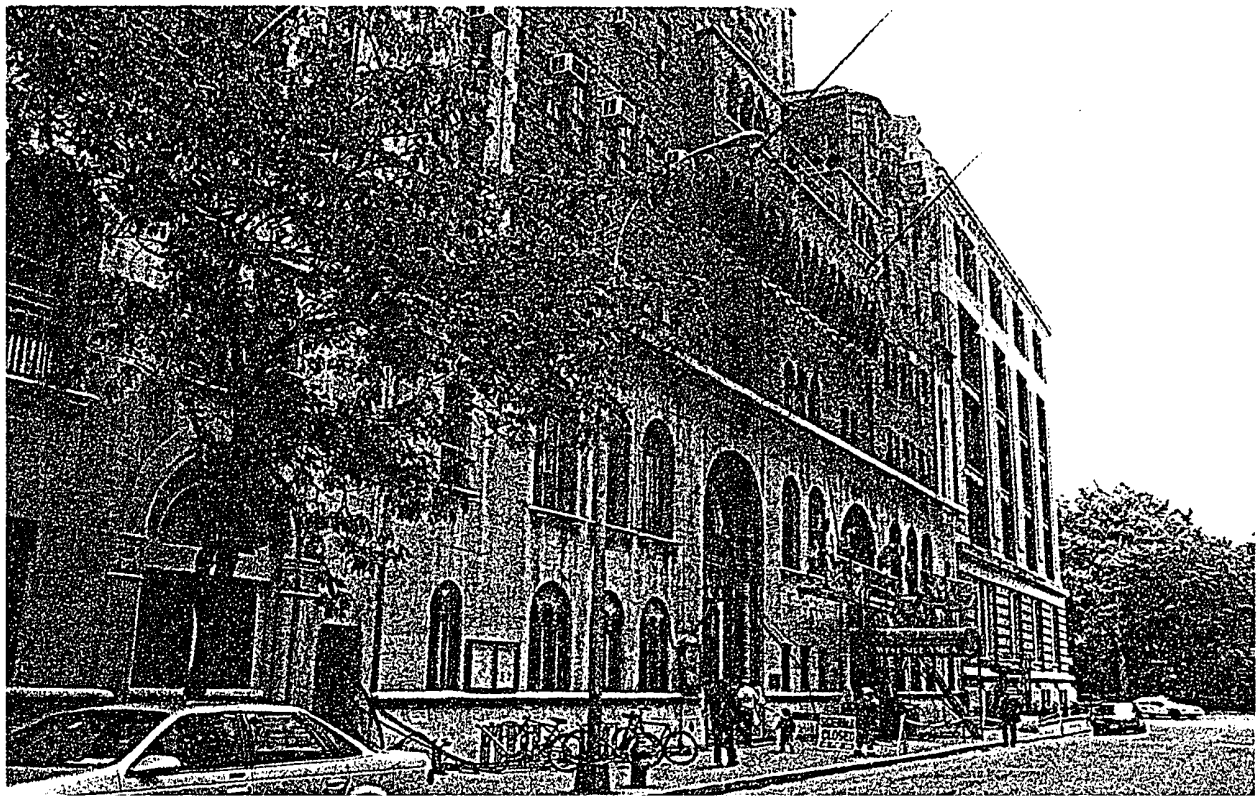
"This is becoming Times Square North," said Arlene Simon, president of Landmark West, a community group. "People in this neighborhood don't want it to stand still, just slow down enough so we can evaluate what is going on around us."

But real estate executives said yesterday that rapidly rising real estate values, particularly along Central Park West and on the blocks around the West Side Y.M.C.A., are providing a powerful incentive for developers.

"The prices are astounding," said Clark Halstead, owner of the Halstead Property Company, who said prices in the most sought-after Central Park West buildings now exceed those along Park Avenue. He said the building planned over the Y.M.C.A. could become among the most expensive in the city.

Mr. Preis said the timing of the Y.M.C.A.'s decision was guided in part by the resurgence of property values.

Despite neighborhood protests, he said the money raised through the sale would be used mainly to expand and improve services in the West Side building.



John Sotomayor/The New York Times

A condominium tower would begin next to the West Side Y.M.C.A., at 5 West 63d Street, and over the historic McBurney School, then cantilever over the Y.M.C.A., which would also receive improvements.

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