

Former Women's Prison in Chelsea to Become Commercial Development

By Mathew Katz on February 4, 2014 7:50am

DNAinfo/Mathew Katz

CHELSEA — New York state is moving forward with a plan to sell a shuttered women's prison in West Chelsea and convert it to a commercial development, despite the community's hopes it would become affordable housing — and developers want in.

According to state documents, representatives from dozens of prominent developers toured the former home of the Bayview Correctional Facility, which the state hopes to sell for a tidy profit.

Companies that toured the space in January include Jamestown Properties, Edison Properties, the Related Companies and the Brodsky Organization.

In a request for proposals quietly issued in December by Empire State Development, the state detailed its plan to allow a private company to purchase and adaptively reuse the Bayview Correctional Facility — with a goal of "maximizing economic impact."

The 550 W. 20th St. facility consists of two connected buildings, one eight stories and the other six stories, spanning 108,000 square feet.

The site was a Seamen's YMCA from 1931 to 1966 before it became a women's correctional facility with a robust work-release program.

The prison housed 153 inmates until Hurricane Sandy struck and they were relocated upstate. Residents and local politicians urged the state to keep the facility open, but it was included in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 2013 plan to sell several state prisons.

Community Board 4 hoped the space could be transformed into much-needed affordable housing in an area now dominated by pricey condos.

According to the RFP, the state does not want the building to become yet another condo — or any sort of apartment development.

"Proposals for residential uses will not be considered," the RFP says.

Instead, the state hopes to attract a commercial developer and will require the future owner to maintain most of the existing buildings and include a community facility in the final plan.

"Any proposal featuring the full demolition of the site will not be considered, and all proposals should include some community facility component," the RFP states.

A spokesman for ESD said the proposals should focus on job creation and offer a positive economic impact, which the state organization hopes will promote the welfare of the community. ESD is not providing any price guidance, he added — meaning developers will have to bid with a competitive price.

In a Jan. 29 letter sent to Empire State Development, CB4 asked it to maintain the building's historic façade and include a community facility operated by a nonprofit organization. The building contains both a gym and a swimming pool, which the board hopes will become community recreational space.

"Today's city budgets are hard pressed to construct such facilities," the board wrote. "These recreational resources, with adequate support space, must be preserved and be operated by a not-for-profit organization to provide recreational space for youth and teens."

The deadline to submit proposals for the site is Feb. 12.