

## Jersey City Planning Board approves 500-unit 'Scholars Village' portion of SciTech Scity

Daniel Ulloa : 8-10 minutes : 7/12/2023

The Jersey City Planning Board unanimously approved (5-0) the 500-unit “Scholar’s Village” portion of the \$300 million [SciTech Scity](#) project, which does not include affordable housing.



Scholars Village rendering via Microsoft Teams.

By Daniel Ulloa/Hudson County View

Attorney Chuck Harrington said it’s the [third component](#) of SciTech Scity after the proposed Liberty Science Center High School, a part of the Hudson County Schools of Technology, and Edgeworks incubator office building have received approvals.

The property will consist of a garden and two, 12-story residential buildings that a lobby will connect, along with 150 parking spots.

“The applicant and developer is a lessee of the property. They entered into a ground lease with the SciTech Scity LLC. The project will be 100 percent union,” Harrington said.

He said construction would start next year and there have been at least two community meetings held on the topic.

“Not everyone agrees with what is being represented,” Harrington admitted, nonetheless calling it a transformative project in an area that has been underutilized.

Engineer Len Savino noted the site was previously controlled by the Jersey City Municipal Utilities Authority (MUA) and that an onsite building has already been demolished. He also noted it's in the flood plain so it will be elevated properly to avoid issues.

"Where does the developer's obligation to construct these bike lanes begin and end?" Harrington asked.

Savino noted they would be connected to larger lanes and that the plan was fluid.

"There's further discussion with the city?" Board Chair Christopher Langston asked, to which Savino replied there will be.

"I certainly don't want to see lanes just start and end. That's a recipe for disaster," Langston continued.

Architect Rustam Mehta noted the Liberty State Park Hudson-Bergen Light Right stop nearby to prioritize "pedestrian circulation."

There will be ten stories of residential units in each of the 12-story buildings, with parking and commercial space on the remaining two. In addition, there will be a luxury amenity level on the top floor with a game room and kitchen.

"The building has no back or front: The whole idea is to make the public be part of this," project design architect Runit Chhaya argued.

Mehta added there will be 111 studios, 223 one-bedroom units, 130 two-bedroom units, And 36 three-bedroom units for a total of 500 units.

"I believe there were 150 parking spaces. How many bike spaces is in the building?" Langston asked. Harrington replied that there are 250.

"Shared parking is recommended," interjected traffic engineer Gary Dean.

He also said the Edgeworks incubator and LSC High School parking would be vacant when residents could park there after work.

"If a tenant wants to park inside the building, they'll be charged, correct?" Langston later asked.

"I would assume the shared parking there's not going to be a charge for that. What's the incentive for tenants to park inside the building?"

"We're going to charge everyone for parking," Alpine Residential Managing Partner William Rosato said.

He added that they'd rent spaces from Liberty Science Center and charge tenants as well.

"So, the spots internally, are they assigned? Is it a flexible parking situation?" Langston asked.

"We'll assign the spaces. Once we understand we need to exercise the overflow option, we'll exercise that option," Rosato responded.

Planner Charles Heydt argued that the variances they sought were minor and technical.

“With the variances that they’re seeking, do we know how many additional units they’ll be getting?” Ward F Councilman Frank “Educational” Gilmore asked during the public comment period.

“My primary concern is affordability. I understand the jurisdiction of this board does not address affordability. I think it’s a good idea we’re using union members.”

“There are no additional units that would be provided. This redevelopment plan doesn’t have a density standard,” Harrington argued.

Gilmore’s aide, Erica Walker, followed up by asking what each unit will cost and also expressed dismay about the name.

“How much is it going to cost for each unit? Why is it called ‘Scholars Village’ if it’s not for scholars? I feel that’s false advertising. Luxury apartments aren’t available for everyone. Please stop using the term ‘everyone,’” she expressed. “A simple green space is not enough for a giveback. The public should have access to the amenities. A better community giveback ... would be another light rail station or another Bayview Bridge.”

Harrington explained the proposed rents for studios would be \$2,700 a month, a one-bedroom would be \$2,900 to \$3,600 a month, a two-bedroom would be \$3,400 to \$4,000 a month, and a three-bedroom would be \$4,500 a month.

He added that Edgeworks entrepreneurs will live there and the high school students will work for them.

“I’ve been a longstanding resident of the neighborhood. It’s supposed to be a commuter lot. Do you ask community members when you do these surveys? Parking is a mess. I just want to know how the light rail is the default,” Evelyn Ibarra questioned.

She was cut off due to a technical error and could not finish her testimony.

“I think we’re talking about a different lot,” Langston said.

“We’re defaulting to the onsite parking overflow lot,” Harrington said.

Former Ward B Councilman Chris Gadsden, who voted against transferring city-owned land to the Jersey City Redevelopment Agency as part of the SciTech Scity project [back in 2017](#) (the measure passed 6-3),

“It seems as though it (the proposal) has shifted with market-rate housing on land dedicated for a not-for-profit. Who’s responsible for this project?” he questioned, noting this is not included in the plan in 2017.

“I have a problem with city-donated land with no affordability,” Gadsden added.

Harrington said Alpine Residential Development will be responsible for it.

“It’s always been the intent to have a residential component ... that generates revenue that helps SciTech Scity develop Edgeworks. It’s all tied together,” Harrington argued.

“I do support this project. The developer decided to go with responsible bidding language. There will be union members working there,” Samuel Conaway said.

Carpenters Union Local 253 President Tom Hurley spoke in favor of the endeavor, noting that they are utilizing union labor in an overlooked part of the city.

“This project is a marquee, a landmark project for that area. The area forever has been abandoned land. As the president of Local Union 253, I’m excited Alpine will be using ... men and women of Hudson County.”

Hudson County Building Trades President Pat Kelleher later expressed support for the project as well.

Rafael Torres, a Friends of Liberty State Park board member, had concerns about the bike lanes and said he had not heard about the community meetings.

“Are there concerns about the affordability of the housing? We were concerned if that property has affordable housing,” he said.

“With regard to the meetings, there was dissemination by Councilwoman Ridley’s office, and June Jones disseminated flyers and emails. As far as affordability, it was never part of the program,” Langston responded.

“This site is in the Science and Technology District of the Liberty Harbor Redevelopment Plan. At that time, the standards were adopted they did not include affordable housing. Staff recommends approval,” Jersey City Supervising Planner Matt Ward explained.

“I’m very excited about this project. We’ve been hearing about this for a long, long time. It is going to be transformational,” Vice Chair Dr. Orlando Gonzalez said, recognizing that some member of the public had valid concerns.

“I share a lot of concerns of the public on the affordability aspect. It’s not under our purview,” Langston reiterated before the measure passed 5-0.