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Rugby revisions of Brickworks passes muster with the Planning Commission

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The Pittsburgh Planning Commission voted to approve the latest revision of Rugby Realty's Brickworks at 21st and Smallman development, a proposal to build a two-building project of seven stories and 390,000 square feet of office space at a four-acre hinge site in a fast redeveloping Strip District.

After the commission set Rugby's development team back to the drawing



RUGBY REALTY CO. INC.

Updated rendering for the Brickworks project in the Strip District, after developer Rugby Realty Co. Inc. resubmitted plans to

board with a continuance on their last design two weeks ago, the Rugby team, including Al. Neyer and Desmone

Architects, presented a revision adding more detail and segmenting to a curved glass curtain wall facade that drew considerable criticism previously by the commission, among a host of other changes.

It was enough to result in six commission votes to approve the \$80 million development project, with abstentions from commissioners Fred Brown and Sabina Deitrick.

Christine Mondor, chairwoman of the Pittsburgh Planning Commission, credited the Rugby team for taking a substantial look on making revisions.

“There’s a lot of decisions per inch, particularly from a pedestrian experience here, compared to what we saw last time,” she said, before voting in favor of the project. “The level of complexity that you’ve given the curtain wall is improved.”

Rugby’s revision was based on four areas of contention, the curtain wall facade, the view corridors surrounding a project with zoning approval to reach 108 feet, the pedestrian experience along Railroad Street, and the context of the design of a project situated between two of the Strip’s most historic landmarks, the produce terminal currently being redeveloped and St. Stanislaus Church just across Smallman Street.

Al. Neyer architect Doug Kramer explained to the commission how the team opted to redesign the curtain wall’s orientation based on the influence of the terminal and other buildings in the nearby vicinity to establish “a series of repetitive elements that have a vertical orientation.”

The new design also calls for building out a more thorough store front with different colored brick on the Railroad Street side of the project, largely dedicated to a project-serving parking garage.

The project also includes more than 30,000 square feet of retail space and

Rugby agreed to continue to work with the city's planning department on potential improvements of the project's retail facades.

Larry Walsh, a principal and Chief Operating Officer for Rugby, which is building its first ground up project in Pittsburgh after owning a host of major properties here for years, took the commission's demands for revision largely in stride.

"Obviously, we're thrilled with the vote," he said, adding that every substantive change in the design has made it a better project.

He didn't expect the design changes to translate into any meaningful increase in the development's cost.

The approval moves Rugby another step forward toward building the project on a nearly four-acre site on a six-block stretch of Smallman currently undergoing a major revamp, with the redevelopment of the terminal and 1600 Smallman as well as of the street itself.

Noting Rugby is consistently getting inquiries from potential tenants about the project, Walsh expressed confidence it will generate the kind of pre-leasing needed to start building, estimating it could be less than 50 percent pre-leased.

Rugby also continues to talk with a prospect interested in taking the entirety of the project's second building.

Tim Schooley

Reporter

Pittsburgh Business Times

