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South Bronx to get huge shopping complex

By Daniel Roberts

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Merchants and officials in the south Bronx are abuzz that a new shopping center, unlike any other in the area, may be coming soon.

And the buzz is true. The complex, which is called The Crossings, is set to go in at the intersection of Hunts Point Avenue, Southern Boulevard, and Bruckner Boulevard. The spot is directly across from the Hunts Point IRT #6 train stop.

Work on the site will begin midway through 2011, and developers are hoping to have it open by early 2013.

The Crossings, which will cost about \$35 million to construct and will have at least two floors. On the upper level, instead of huge, upscale stores, there will be a string of "mid-boxes," which could mean chain retailers like Old Navy, though no specific stores are official yet. On the street level, developers plan to put in smaller stores (they called them "the little guys") in order to maintain a neighborhood feel.

Meanwhile, The Crossings won't just be a retail center, but might have housing as well. "We're working with HPD and the community, and we want it to be some sort of affordable program, but not necessarily low-income. Maybe mixed-income," said Rohan Mehra of Prusik Group LLC, the site developer. Prusik plans to have around 138 housing units above the second floor of the complex.

Currently occupying the outdoor space is a large BP gas station.

John Robert, district manager of Community Board 2, said no one will be sad to see the station go, and that the entire circle is an eyesore anyway — one that may be improved by a shopping complex.

"That corner is such a problem. There's a bus stop right there, and when the buses pull up, they block the sidewalk," said Robert.

"The entrance for cars [at The Crossings] will be on the service road of Bruckner Boulevard," he said, "so there won't be any of the same trouble in front that there is now, none of that mess."

Local merchants are excited as well. Initial concerns were that the complex would take away business from local stores, but the Southern Boulevard BID now feels that the building is visually attractive and will pull shoppers from all over the Bronx.

At least, they hope so. "We are very excited about this, and hope it does happen," said Media Sadiq, executive director of the Southern Boulevard BID. "I'm hoping it attracts people from all parts of the borough. In terms of stores, I'd like to see a nice medium-sized chain, maybe like Marshall's. I think that would attract more small stores to go on the bottom floor."

Mehra, speaking with his design partner Andrew Katz, said that Prusik also wants the building to be as green as possible.

"It's a little early in terms of the design process to nail it down, but we are looking at options," he said.

Mehra also stressed that the housing comes second to planning the retail element.

"For us, pretty much anything we do or look at is driven by the retail," he said. "So while the early numbers appear to be greater for the housing, as compared to the stores, this is a retail-driven property."

The developers most recently went before CB 2 on Monday, August 2, and received unanimous approval to move forward.

Next, they'll present The Crossings to city council.

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