

Greenwich Time

SERVING THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1877 - WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2006

Old-style armory slated for high-style makeover

By Hoa Nguyen
Staff Writer

A downtown military building constructed nearly a century ago will likely be converted into nine of Greenwich's swankiest townhouses.

The owner of the former National Guard Armory at 230 Mason St. and an adjacent parking lot is seeking Planning and Zoning Commission approval to build the luxury units on one of the most desirable downtown locations.

"For in-town living, it's like a brownstone in New York," Town Planner Diane Fox said.

It's too early to say what the asking prices will be for the units, said Bradley Nitkin, president of the Greenwich-based HB Nitkin Group, which owns the armory. The firm's plans, though, indicate it is investing millions into transforming one of the oldest vestiges of the town's military past into one of Greenwich's most upscale living accommodations.

"We're going through tremendous effort to architecturally preserve the armory," Nitkin said. "We are doing this with tremendous care."

The old brick building at Mason and Havemeyer streets was last considered for renovation in 2002, when the town looked at renovating it for use as a new public safety complex. At the time, Nitkin offered to sell the armory to the town for \$4.5 million. Those plans were scrapped



Helen Neafsey / Staff Photo

The armory on Mason Street may be converted into townhouses.

when the town decided that fixing and upgrading the building would be too costly.

The armory was built in 1907, when the state approved the land purchase and armory construction for \$45,000. For the next six decades, the National Guard Battery B, 2nd Battalion of the 192nd Artillery occupied the armory. The National Guard eventually moved to a new armory in Norwalk and the property was sold to private interests. At the time, in the early 1970s, newspaper articles marked the move as the first time in 200 years that there was no local militia in Greenwich.

Nitkin acquired the armory and adjacent office building in 2001 for \$26.66 million, and rented space in it to offices and a dance studio in recent years.

Nitkin's latest plans to build townhouses call for a historic restoration of the armory's

street-side brick facade in exchange for permission to construct a bigger and bulkier structure. The plans also feature extensive gardens throughout the development. The project, which has received positive response from town land use boards, is slated to go before the town zoning commission again in June.

The nine three-bedroom units would range in size from 2,371 square feet to 3,233 square feet. Each townhouse would feature a private elevator providing direct access to two reserved underground parking spaces.

While one level of underground parking will have 25 parking spaces reserved for townhouse residents, another level of 91 parking spaces also would be constructed to make up for parking now available on the site that would be lost. Workers from a nearby office building now park at the

armory site and adjoining lot. Building the garage alone could cost \$2.3 million, said Greenwich Chamber of Commerce president Mary Ann Morrison, who based her calculations on the \$20,000-per-parking-space formula town officials used to estimate the cost of building public downtown parking garages.

Morrison said that well-heeled individuals should find the townhouses appealing.

"It's going to be people who are probably not going to live there year round," she said. "It's probably going to be people who are downsizing or somebody who maybe doesn't have children, but wants a nice place in Greenwich."

The armory townhouses would offer especially plum amenities, with top restaurants, high-end shops and express trains to Manhattan just steps away. The townhouses would be designed by the New York City firm of Robert A. M. Stern Architects.

With downtown townhouses commanding asking prices of \$3.5 million and higher, Stephen Banker, managing principal at the Greenwich office of Newmark Global Real Estate Advisors, said he wouldn't be surprised to see these units sell for more.

"A lot of these townhouse projects that have sold for big numbers are in lesser locations," he said. "I'd be bullish."