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COMPROMISE ON COLUMBUS AVE. RETAIL PLAN

Posted by [West Side Spirit](#) on May 26, 2010 · [View Comments](#)

By [Dan Rivoli](#)

A compromise in the retail expansion proposal that will change the landscape of Columbus Avenue in the West 90s may be near.

The Witkoff Group, the company that owns 248-unit Columbus House, wants to create 4,950 square feet of commercial space with a two-story ground-floor structure. This would extend all the way to the sidewalk, cutting down on the open space between West 95th and 96th streets. The expansion would wrap around the base of the 33-story tower, closing off pathways between buildings.

Community Board 7's land use committee disapproved of the plan, and the full board is slated to discuss the proposal at its June 1 meeting. But a co-chair of the land use committee has drafted a compromise proposal that would preserve some open space between the ground-floor stores and the residential building.

"What makes that block somewhat unique is that there are two stand-alone buildings separated by these walkways. It's sort of a nice feature," said Richard Asche, the land use co-chair who drafted the compromise plan. "We thought it was not a good idea [to close the pathway], and made the block look worse."

Scott Alper, partner at the Witkoff Group, did not respond to requests for a comment.

Board 7's land use committee also wants a proposal that is agreeable with the commercial tenants on the ground floor. The four businesses on that block feared they would have to close or relocate.

"Our approval is conditioned on tenants being satisfied that there is a binding right of first refusal [of the new commercial space]," Asche said.

Anne Cottavoz, who owns Columbus Natural Food, said she delivered more than 3,000 petition signatures from neighbors and customers urging the developer to keep small businesses on the ground floor.

"What I hope to get is that we come to an agreement where we can be comfortable, that we're secure," Cottavoz said.

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