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Transforming a Skyline

Residential Tower in Fort Lee, N.J., commands the Skyline

By RONDA KAYSEN AUG. 17, 2016



Ben Solomon for The New York Times

For the last two years, drivers stuck in traffic on the George Washington Bridge have watched a slender bluish tower rise at the edge of Fort Lee, N.J. Now, they might have a better way to stay put: They could just live in it.

Leasing began last month at the Modern, a 450-unit rental near the entrance to the bridge. The 47-story tower — the first of two identical buildings planned — dwarfs the surrounding structures, offering residents in the penthouse floors unobstructed views of

the Hudson River, the New York City skyline and the green canopy of northern New Jersey, along with Westchester and Rockland counties.

From the lower floors, some residents will have a view of the now-infamous access lanes to the bridge that were mysteriously shut for several days last year, ensnaring drivers in gridlock and the state's governor in a political scandal. Rising 800 feet above the Hudson, the Modern is the tallest building in Fort Lee, a borough of 36,000 residents. It is also the first build-

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ing to open in a 16-acre redevelopment area that will eventually include a second Modern tower and Hudson Lights, a mixed-use development by the Tucker Development Corporation together with Ares Management and the Kushner Real Estate Group, which will have retail, a movie theater, a hotel and rentals.

The mayor hopes the developments will mark a new chapter for Fort Lee, which sat on the sidelines as dazzling residential towers rose in recent years along the trendy Gold Coast waterfront to the south. “It’s really the crowning jewel to what I believe to be a renaissance for our town,” said Fort Lee Mayor Mark J. Sokolich.

The Modern’s developers, SJP Residential Properties, in partnership with the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company and Prudential Real Estate

Investors, are counting on Gold Coast hopefuls to give this last exit in New Jersey a closer look. Amenities include an outdoor infinity pool, an indoor golf simulator, a pet spa and a screening room. Perhaps most important, apartment windows are soundproof. To make up for scarce transit options, the building offers \$200-a-month resident parking and free shuttle rides to the 175th Street subway station in Manhattan.

“It’s like a resort,” said Allen F. Goldman, the president of SJP Residential. “That’s what we were trying to achieve.”

Some Fort Lee residents have raised concerns that the redevelopment area — a \$1 billion investment that will eventually include new restaurants, a hotel and nearly 1,400 units of housing in total — could burden schools and worsen traffic. But the developments’ sup-

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porters point to new traffic lights that will ease congestion and apartments that appeal more to singles and empty-nesters than they do to young families.

“Whether we redevelop one of the most valuable pieces of property in North America or whether we let it sit there like a war zone, we’re going to have the same traffic problem,” Mr. Sokolich said.

The site has already developed a storied history, which includes a group of zealous developers in the 1970s who enlisted an organized crime representative to bribe the borough’s mayor, Burt Ross. But Mr. Ross wore a wire, the developers went to prison, and the episode was immortalized in the 1976 book “The Bribe,” by Philip Ross. The developer Harry B. Helmsley later owned the parcel, but his vision for a complex he hoped to call Helmsley Palisades never materialized, and in 2005 Town and Country Developers bought the tract from his estate. Its plans for a hotel and condo complex were abandoned during

the economic downturn. SJP Properties eventually acquired the eastern portion of the site and Tucker bought the western side.

The Modern will add high-end options for renters. Of the 153 rentals available in Fort Lee in early October, the median monthly rent for a two-bedroom was about \$3,000, according to Ila Kasofsky, a broker associate at Prominent Properties Sotheby’s International Realty. The priciest rental listing was a \$9,000-a-month four-bedroom in River Ridge, a luxury condo.

Monthly rents at the Modern start at \$2,105 for a studio, \$2,700 for a one-bedroom and \$3,925 for a two-bedroom. Prices have not yet been set for three-bedrooms or for any of the 78 units located on the top eight penthouse floors. New tenants will get two months’ free rent when signing a 14-month lease.

The Modern has “huge buzz,” said Ms. Kasofsky, who is also a member of the borough council. “It’s brand new. It’s exciting.”