

THE PLAIN DEALER

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Flats rebirth?

*Wolstein's housing, retail and entertainment vision
would link with downtown, Warehouse District and future*

Developer Scott Wolstein has spent years planning, laying the groundwork and lining up support for his grand vision of a \$225 million mixed-use development in a now-seedy section of the east bank of the Flats. When those plans were unveiled Monday, one day shy of a year since his father and fellow Flats dreamer Bart died, it was clear that Wolstein had used that time well.

We leave it to others to critique particulars of what Wolstein and his architectural team propose, but the broad outlines are exciting, the kind of investment that can help transform this city and raise the spirits of its browbeaten citizens. Wolstein wants to build more than 300 units of rental and for-sale housing, sprinkling them among shops, restaurants, nightclubs and amenities such as a grocery store and a movie theater. He plans a boardwalk along the Cuyahoga River, a public amphitheater and dock space for transient boaters.

The idea is to create a new neighborhood that links the waterfront to the ongoing revitalization of the Warehouse District and to a downtown that, for all its problems, also has pockets of rebirth. This is the kind of development you see in vibrant cities — the kind of development that enables them to compete for the creative, young talent that fuels an Information Age economy.

But Wolstein's proposal is more than pretty drawings and big ideas. It is backed by cash — first and foremost, his own: Wolstein plans to raise nearly two-thirds of the money for the project. To supplement those dollars, he has lined up an impressive array of public-sector partners that would help clean up the 14-acre site and install new infrastructure, including sewers, waterlines and streets. The Cleveland-

Cuyahoga County Port Authority would help pay for those projects with bonds backed by new tax and parking revenue that the development would generate. Cleveland has seen such broad community cooperation all too rarely in recent years, but it is a must if the city and the region are again to flourish.

The Port Authority also has offered to donate land north of the East Bank area to build a new headquarters for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. Local business and political leaders plan to appeal a Defense Department proposal to close Cleveland's DFAS center, in part by arguing that they can cut overhead costs. If that appeal succeeds, having 1,000 well-paid office workers next door would boost Wolstein's project; if it fails, the willingness of the port to part with land surely will attract others eyeing a waterfront address.

There was much talk at Monday's announcement about the Flats' place in Cleveland history. Wolstein spoke barely 100 yards from where Moses Cleaveland came ashore in 1796. The area along the river bustled with industrial activity in the decades that followed, and its continuing vitality was confirmed by the train and boat traffic that muffled some speeches. By the late 1970s, the Flats had emerged as an entertainment district and symbol of Cleveland's renaissance. But today, the party's all but over. Peeling paint, boarded-up windows and cracked concrete predominate in the 14 acres Wolstein wants to level and rebuild.

This latest vision of the Flats is still no sure thing. Cooperation in principle has to be turned into cooperation in reality. But thanks to Scott Wolstein, a national developer eager to leave a mark on his hometown, the future of the East Bank again looks bright.