

# Developer gives Peekskill 40 acres at Fort Hill

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PEEKSKILL - The city has acquired 40 acres of open space in a deal to ensure the preservation of a strategic Revolutionary War site.

Developer Martin Ginsburg's donation settles 15 years of legal battles and failed development proposals for the Hudson River overlook known as Fort Hill.

"Fort Hill is a significant piece of history in the area," Ginsburg said. "It can be developed into an attraction that people can come and visit. It's part of the history of this country."

The deal allows Ginsburg to break ground by spring on The Abbey at Fort Hill, 12 condominiums and 124 townhouses, on adjoining land he acquired in 2003 from the Episcopal Sisters of St. Mary and from developer Cappelli Enterprises of Valhalla.

Ginsburg will limit development to 7 acres by clustering the townhouses. The condominiums would be in the former convent. Prices are expected to start in the \$400,000s.

In 1990, Cappelli's Enclave Development Associates proposed 154 homes on the site and the donation of 20 acres to the city. Lack of vehicle access doomed earlier plans for up to 278 units. Cappelli sued the city in 1998, and a judge ruled that the site was never dedicated as a park. The decision was overturned in 1999.

Cappelli then agreed to sell the parcel to the Open State Institute and the Trust for Public Land, but later reneged.

Fort Hill was the site of a 1777 battle between British and American troops. Gen. George Washington also surveyed British ships on the river from the rocky hilltop.

"This has been on my radar screen for a long, long time," Mayor John Testa said. "So it's very, very satisfying for me to make this a reality, not only for the city but for the whole country."

Interpretive reconstruction of barracks and Colonial redoubts is planned.

The deal also calls for the city to acquire 5 adjoining acres from Westchester County in exchange for an equivalent parcel in the city's south end, Testa said.

"We've been trying for some time to stop the rampant development of this property," said Gene Panczenko, a member of the Fort Hill Homeowners Association, noting that it will

be a local and regional resource. "I've spoken to people who have lived in Peekskill all their lives who haven't been to Fort Hill."