

# Race to build Upper West Side's tallest tower

Extell Development wants to reach 775 feet on West 66th Street, but getting to 670 feet is proving difficult enough

BY TOM ACITELLI

**O**n Nov. 27 Extell Development Co., one of the city's more prolific developers, unveiled plans for what would be the tallest tower on the Upper West Side: a 775-foot residential spire on West 66th Street between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West.

But the neighborhood's City Council member, Helen Rosenthal, quickly labeled the plan a "classic bait-and-switch." She was referring to Extell's earlier plans for a 25-story building on the site, which it assembled through a partnership with another landowner on the block and through \$202 million in air-rights deals with the Jewish Guild for the Blind, at 15 W. 65th St., and The Walt Disney Co., which owns properties in the area.

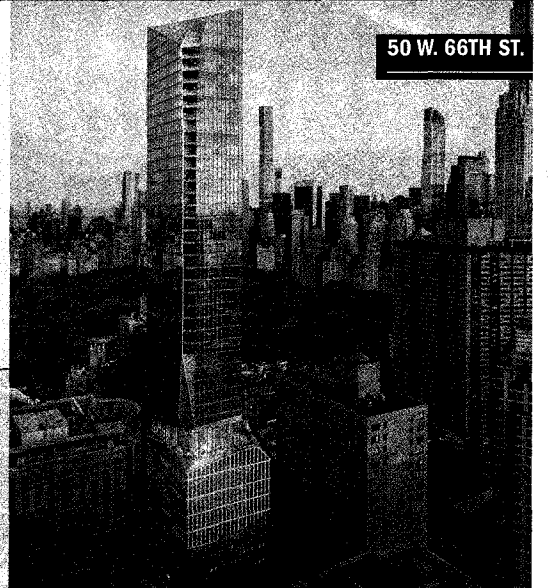
"At 775 feet, this building is far too tall for the context of our neighborhood, overshadowing nearby buildings and Central Park," Rosenthal said in a Nov. 29 statement. "It is 175 feet taller than the highest building in the area, located at 69th and Amsterdam."

The height of Extell's project—50 W. 66th St.—would surpass even the proposed height of 200 Amsterdam Ave., a few blocks northwest. At a planned 670 feet, that condo tower had been slated to become the Upper West Side's tallest building.

As with Extell's building, the scale of 200 Amsterdam is only possible through air rights—including some from West End Avenue, one long block away. The acquisitions allowed developers SJP Properties and Mitsui Fudosan to expand their tower's zoning lot to 100,000 square feet even though its footprint would be 10,800. (Both buildings' assemblages involved deals with local synagogues.)

The Amsterdam building faced strong opposition from elected officials and some residents concerned that the developers had violated building codes and failed to provide sufficient open space. The Buildings Department halted construction in July as a result, though a subsequent audit cleared the way for the project to proceed. That decision is likely to be appealed.

Will 50 W. 66th St. face similar obstacles? Extell did not respond to requests for comment about its timeline on the project or Rosenthal's opposition. It has yet to file its plans formally with the city. ■



**200 AMSTERDAM AVE.**  
Lincoln Square Synagogue's Orthodox congregation sold what was then a 12,000-square-foot site that included 200 and 208 Amsterdam Ave. to Manhattan-based ownership group American Continental Properties for \$27.7 million in 2007. The sides also swapped parcels across West 66th Street. Using air rights, American Continental assembled a development site of about 100,000 square feet.  
It was that site that New Jersey-based SJP Properties, the private development firm that Steven Pozycyki founded, and Japanese developer Mitsui Fudosan acquired for \$275 million in 2015. The pair plans to build a 670-foot, 112-unit condo tower with views of Central Park and the Hudson River.

**180 AMSTERDAM AVE.**  
Lincoln Square Synagogue acquired this site from American Continental Properties for \$10.8 million in 2007. A new synagogue opened in 2013.

**47 W. 66TH ST.**  
The 14-story, nearly 434,000-square-foot building is one of a handful that Walt Disney Co. subsidiary American Broadcasting Co. owns in the area. Others include 147 Columbus Ave., 77 W. 66th St. and 54 W. 67th St. The building at 47 W. 66th St., which serves as ABC News headquarters and which in 2014 was named for Barbara Walters, went up in 1979.

**36-40 W. 66TH ST.**  
Manhattan-based Megalith Capital Management, which Sam Sidhu founded in 2009, bought this trio of office buildings from Disney for \$85 million in 2014. They totaled 16,746 square feet. In late 2015 Megalith filed plans for a 262-foot, 160-unit apartment building in place of the properties. That has since morphed into a proposal for a 775-foot tower in partnership with Extell Development.

**44 W. 66TH ST.**  
In December 2014 Extell Development bought this 12,537-square-foot synagogue from Congregation Habonim for \$45 million. Extell has partnered with Megalith Capital on what would be the Upper West Side's tallest tower. A synagogue will be incorporated into that development.

**15 CENTRAL PARK WEST**  
With the financial backing of Goldman Sachs, developers Arthur and William Lie Zeckendorf in 2004 bought the land for this condo, which then included the Mayflower Hotel, from the Goulandris shipping clan for \$401 million. Construction started the following year on what became one of the most expensive and remunerative condo buildings of the pre-recession era. Fifteen Central Park West opened in 2008, just as the real estate market crashed.

**1865 BROADWAY**  
Real estate investment trust AvalonBay beat out about 25 other bidders in early 2015 for the nearly 175,000-square-foot, 12-story building that was then the longtime headquarters of the American Bible Society. The society used the \$300 million that AvalonBay paid to relocate to Philadelphia. The REIT is building a 416-foot, 160-unit condo tower in its place. It's supposed to be finished before the end of 2019.

GOOGLE MAPS, SNOHETTA.COM