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Image by "dbox"

Image of the new building and visitor's center from York and Jay streets.

# Watchtower's DUMBO plans revealed to Brooklyn Papers

**By Deborah Kolben**
*The Brooklyn Papers*

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society certified plans with the city this week to build a four-apartment-building complex at the edge of DUMBO and Vinegar Hill.

The Department of City Planning has been working with the Watchtower Society, the corporate entity of the Jehovah's Witnesses religion, for the past year and a half to develop an appropriate design for the massive project a half block from the Manhattan Bridge.

Its world headquarters blocks away, the Watchtower is looking to consolidate many of its smaller residential facilities, which house thousands of volunteers.

The new development — on an immense, vacant plot of land bounded by Jay, Front, York and Bridge streets — would include 1,000 one-bedroom apartments divided between four towers reaching 20, 18, 16 and 14 stories. The tallest of the planned towers would be 220 feet. Four courtyards within the complex will be gated, but remain open during the day.

The plans include a three-story assembly hall with a seating capacity of 2,500, a 1,600-person dining facility and an 1,100-space underground parking garage.

The Watchtower Society expects to complete the massive construction project in 2006.

"We're very anxious to share this with the public and get reaction," said Watchtower spokesman Richard Devine.

The certification of the plans starts the clock on the city's rigorous land use review process, with public hearings before Community Board 2, Borough President Marty Markowitz, the City Planning Commission and the City Council.

Currently zoned for manufacturing, the Watchtower Society originally planned a printing facility for the site and even began demolition that has left the plot vacant for the past 12 years.

But the organization this year shifted its printing facilities 90 miles outside the city to upstate Wallkill, N.Y., and decided to use the site for apartments instead.

The new Jehovah's Witness visitors' center would also be included at street level at the corner of York and Jay streets. Some 60,000 to 70,000 people visit the headquarters each year.

Area residents opposed to the plan have started circulating petitions and have already collected more than 1,200 signatures, according to Christy Nyberg, a Vinegar Hill resident who wants the plan scaled back.

"We're going to have transient residents who don't have any interest in our neighborhood," said Nyberg, who lives on Bridge Street, and who started the Web site 85jaysreet.org to keep other residents informed about the development.