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MALL OF DUTY

By Tom Topousis

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The Kingsbridge Armory, once the world's largest military drill hall, will be turned over to a private corporation for a \$310 million makeover into a massive retail center intended to jumpstart the North Bronx economy, city officials are announcing today.



Manhattan-based Related Companies won the project, ending a frustrating 12-year effort to find a new use for the historic armory, which was turned over to the city by the National Guard amid military cost-cutting and the escalating expense of repairing and maintaining the huge structure.

Under Related's plan, the 575,000-square-foot site will become home to an "anchor" department store, up to 35 smaller shops, a number of restaurants and a movie multiplex.

"It's going to be catalytic for the neighborhood," said Seth Pinsky, president of the city's Economic Development Corp.

Pinsky said Related, which built Manhattan's Time Warner Center and won the right to redevelop the Bronx Terminal Market into a retail center, plans to recruit a destination-type department store for the project.

Called "The Shops at the Armory," the development will also include an "affordable youth recreation facility." A day-care center and a "business incubator," are also in the works.

"I'm very happy this project is finally moving forward. It's been a long time coming," said Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión, who said his next effort will be to ensure that a fair share of the work goes to local contractors and workers.

Councilmember Maria Baez said "the project will serve as an economic stimulus" for her district.

But she added that she would continue to push for construction of two schools adjacent to the armory.

The city dropped an earlier requirement that developers include two new schools in the project after the Department of Education determined there wasn't a need for additional schools in the district, Pinsky said.

Related was one of two bidders left in the running for the armory project. It wound up beating the Atlantic Development Group, which had proposed a retail center, movie theater, two schools and a YMCA.

Pinsky said there will be almost no change to the exterior of the building, which has soaring towers and turrets, crenellated parapets and enormous arches.