

CT BUSINESS

"Preserve the onion dome and tower. The rest of the place is nothing special. The development is too big for that area to be a success."

Outch at courant.com/readerspeak on the Colt Gateway project's new developer

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DOWNTOWN HARTFORD

Plans For Broadcast House Offices Advance

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Developer Seeking Property Tax Breaks From City



Islam

It's likely to attract tenant interest from as far away as Boston or New York because it is so different from a conventional tower, Meehan said. Most buildings in the downtown business district traditionally draw tenants who are already in the city.

"We believe the advantage here is that this is a unique property and therefore has the makings for a very successful project, even in today's turbulent financial markets," Meehan wrote in a March 30 letter to Islam.

Meehan's letter is among the documents that will be submitted by Islam today to the city of Hartford as he seeks property tax breaks for the project.

The letter doesn't guarantee financing but is a strong indicator that the money should be available when it's needed and could also give a boost to the application for tax breaks. Construction is expected to begin in September, Islam said, after Broadcast House is demolished, beginning in early May.

Islam hopes construction will be completed in late 2010 or early 2011.

The project, announced last December, has been viewed skeptically at a time of rising office vacancies, recession and strict lender underwriting.

Islam said Tuesday he expects to finance \$30 million, with the balance coming from his funds and other equity investors.

Meehan said Tuesday that "the financing

for the property is looking imminent."

Normally, construction of a new building in times of rising vacancies would surely get turned away by lenders, and Meehan said it would have been a "major concern" for him.

The fact that Islam's company, AI Engineers Inc., now based in Middletown, is leasing two floors and has a leasing agreement with another tenant helps to show demand for the space, Meehan said.

Islam wouldn't name the other tenant, except to say the company is in the professional consulting industry and is now in Greater Hartford.

Meehan said the possibility of tax breaks from the city — one option is phasing them in over seven years — and other "green building" incentives also help with the economics of the project.

Office vacancies for prime space in downtown Hartford are hovering near 20 percent — double what would be considered a healthy market.

But that isn't considered a likely obstacle to financing a new, \$40 million, 12-story office tower planned for the old Broadcast House site on Constitution Plaza, according to a New York commercial mortgage brokerage hired by developer Abul A. Islam to secure financing for the project.

Kevin P. Meehan Sr., president of First Commercial Mortgage Inc., said Tuesday that the building will be distinguished from others downtown because of an innovative vision for using "green" technology.