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Redevelopment Proposal Draws Criticism in St. Pete

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The Field of Mars is in an area slated for redevelopment from 2013 to 2018.

The program for the preservation of St. Petersburg's historical center will be completely revised, according to a spokesman of the Committee for Economic Development, Industrial Policy and Trade, which is in charge of the program.

The program was initially planned to be implemented in seven zones within the city's Central and Admiralteisky districts between 2013 and 2018 and involve the restoration of cultural heritage sites and the renovation of buildings, planting and redevelopment of other sites, the reconstruction of engineering infrastructure, traffic mitigation, reconstruction of bridges and embankments and enhancement of the areas' appeal to tourists.

"These spheres, as well as the funding of the program, are likely to be reconsidered," the committee's spokesman said.

The initial amount of 400 billion rubles ($12.3 billion) estimated for the program to be completed was later cut to 300 billion rubles.

"The proposed funds would be enough to cover only infrastructure and traffic projects," said Alexei Kovalev, deputy chairman of the St. Petersburg branch of the International Council on Monuments and Sites.

It was announced earlier that complete funding would comprise money from the federal budget and city and investment funding. Alexander Karpov, head of the ECOM environmental assessment center, said St. Petersburg must apply to receive funding from the federal budget this September to be considered for the allocation of 2013 budget funds.

"I think it's quite reasonable to have the program operate in the city center as a whole and at the same time to divide it into model territories, as it allows us to test how the program should work within the areas of transportation, ecology, housing, business, tourism and public spaces," Karpov said.

Two areas — Konyushennaya (which includes the area around the Field of Mars and Konyushennaya Ploshchad) and North Kolomna (the area around New Holland Island) — were designated priority areas, and a contest for redevelopment ideas was announced at the beginning of May. Eleven projects were submitted as part of the contest, the winner of which will be chosen in September after taking into account public discussion.

Litvinov Architectural Association has received the most criticism so far for its project, which proposes redeveloping the Field of Mars — which is currently classed as a monument of federal significance and is the burial place of those who died during the 1917 February Revolution — to resemble a Greek amphitheater.

"Plaza Lotos Group, whose contractor is the Litvinov Architectural Association, has already bought the Pavlovskiye barracks next to the Field of Mars," said Alexander Margolis, head of the St. Petersburg branch of the National Society for the Protection of Cultural and Historical Monuments.

"Experts have determined that the area is of historical and cultural importance, but the company declined to accept this report. They want to build a five-star hotel on the land with a view of the Field of Mars. I have no doubt that they will succeed in carrying out their project," he said.

Experts agree that another area of criticism is camouflaging reconstruction by calling it preservation.

"Every time we look carefully at the terminology, all the insincerity becomes clear," said Margolis. "There is a fundamental disparity between preservation and reconstruction. I think in this case we are talking only about reconstruction."

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