

Creating downtown North Brunswick: First phase of massive project on track

Susan Loyer, @SusanLoyerMyCJ 5:02 a.m. EDT August 14, 2016

New businesses to open at site



(Photo: Mark R. Sullivan/Staff Photo)

NORTH BRUNSWICK – Construction of a massive Route 1 transit-oriented mixed use development, that aims to create a downtown center in the township, is on track and moving full speed ahead for a completion date in 2026..

The new transit village, Main Street North Brunswick, which has been in the works for almost a decade, will soon be home to several new businesses and a new downtown neighborhood. The new additions, which are part of the first phase of the project, will join Costco and Target, which have already opened at the site.

"This is a hugely ambitious undertaking for the township, the council, the Planning Board and the developer," said Jonathan Frieder, managing partner with Garden Homes Development, the parent company for the project developer, North Brunswick TOD (Transit Oriented Development) Associates LLC. "The township will have a Main Street, which North Brunswick currently doesn't have. Building a town from scratch hasn't been done in this magnitude since pre-World War II. It's a huge project and it's very important that we get it right."



A new transit oriented village , Main Street North Brunswick, is being constructed in the township at 2300 Route 1 North. Also Pulte Homes is building the new town homes The Heights at Main Street at the site. Both are photographed on Tuesday August 2, 2016. (Photo: Mark R. Sullivan/Staff Photo)

The 212 acre site is located at 2300 Route 1 North on property formerly owned by Johnson & Johnson. The property was purchased by the developer in 2006. Following a series of community workshops, the township engaged in a lengthy planning and study process. In 2010, a new zoning ordinance was adopted to create the Transit Orientated Mixed-Use Development Overlay zone on Route 1 north.

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"By 2012 we had our first set of approvals, which have been amended over the years, but remain consistent," Frieder said.

If all goes as planned, when finished, the development will boast 1,875 housing units, a hotel and other businesses, as well as spaces for offices and retail stores. All this will be anchored by a new NJ Transit station on the Northeast Corridor, which will provide commuters easy access to such destinations as New Brunswick,

New York and Trenton.

Frieder said he expects the project to be completed within 10 years.

The mixed use community will center around Main Street's Central Business District ("CBD") of shops, restaurants, apartments and the hotel. Just outside the CBD will be several residential neighborhoods of apartments and townhomes.

"Everything is walkable and residents won't even have to get in their cars," Frieder said. "They'll have easy access to train and bus service, shopping and dining."

Development of the future phases of the project hinges on construction of the train station, which due to funding issues with the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF), must still be finalized.

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"NJ Transit has committed to the developer and the township in writing, they are committed to constructing the new station in North Brunswick as soon as possible following the state's renewal of the TTF," Frieder said. "I'm very hopeful that we can move things forward with NJ Transit as quickly as possible because the expectations are very high with the other stakeholders, who have made investments in this project, and with the township to have a train station here in North Brunswick. It would be a great asset for the state, the county and this part of New Jersey that will lead to all sorts of economic benefits."

"The train station and transit village will position North Brunswick to be a vibrant, responsible community far into the 21st Century," Mayor Francis M. Womack said. "The quality of life and enhanced values associated with this project will benefit everyone that calls North Brunswick home."

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The first phase of the project

Phase I of the project, which encompasses about 500,000 square feet of new construction, includes 158 town homes, 242 apartments, as well as Costco, Target and between 15 to 20 other businesses, Frieder said.

Construction of The Heights at Main Street, which is the first section of town homes residences available at the transit village, has begun.



The Heights at Main Street is a new townhome development under construction at Main Street North Brunswick. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Pulte Homes)

Offered by Pulte Homes the four-story, 158 luxury townhome community will feature two and three bedrooms, two to four full baths and one to three half baths. The 2,198 to 2,609 plus square foot townshomes, each with a private two-car garage, will come at a starting price of about \$554,000.

According to Pulte Homes, 40 residences have been sold and the first tenants are expected to move in this year.

The town homes are expected to be completed in 2018.

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"Newly built homes with great home designs and access to transit are key drivers of The Heights early success in the marketplace," said Matthew Roesch, vice president of sales for Pulte's Northeast Division. "We are seeing great interest amongst the move-up homebuyers who want to live in a mixed-use town center that is incorporating a shop, dine, ride and live environment. Our Pulte community will provide the best quality home in an ideal location in close proximity to transit, retail, entertainment, sports and recreation centers."

Each town home will have a 6-foot deep and 16-foot wide deck off the second floor, which will allow for a connection for a natural gas grill, and a fourth-floor habitable attic and fully accessible roof decks on the fourth floor.



An inside look at the new townhome development - Heights at North Brunswick - which is under construction at Main Street North Brunswick on Route 1. (Photo: Courtesy of Pulte Homes)

"It's specifically designed in a contemporary, urban-like design to complement the idea of a train station for people commuting into work in Newark or New York," Michael Hritz, director of the township's Department of Community Development, said.

Hritz said there also is a pending agreement with Coach-USA/ Suburban Transit to establish commuter bus service from the site as soon as the first town homes are occupied.

"That will be the first realization that this is becoming a true transit village," he said.

Also coming in the first phase of the project are The Courtyard Marriott, Greene Turtle Sports Bar & Grille and a bank, whose name has not yet been disclosed.

Construction is already underway at the site of The Greene Turtle, which will be next to the Marriott.

"This will be Green Turtle's first New Jersey location," Hritz said, adding the restaurant is popular in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

"I know the Green Turtle wants to be open for the holidays," Hritz said.

The restaurant will include more than 300 seats. Besides the indoor seating area with 50 TVs and dozens of craft beers, the restaurant also will feature an outside area with two big screen TVs .

Construction of The Courtyard Marriott is expected to start in the next 30 to 45 days, Frieder said.

It will be a six-story hotel with 124 rooms. It will include a bar and bistro in the lobby for the public, as well as an indoor pool and large fitness room for hotel guests. There will also be a 1,600-square-foot meeting room and a small concessions area.

"We expect this to be the tallest building in North Brunswick," Hritz said.

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Also coming to the site in Phase I of the project is Panera Bread which will include a drive-through.

"This will be their first Route 1 Northbound location between Trenton and Newark," Hritz said.

The first phase of the project, which encompasses about 500,000 square feet, also includes rental apartments and additional retail space. A small interim commuter parking lot with 100 parking spaces also is located on the site.

A new NJT train station with the future phases

The future phases of the project will be built in conjunction with construction of the train station and will include the demolition of existing buildings at the site, Frieder said. Future plans for the site also include a kiosk, public spaces on Main Street and other amenities, as well as expansion of the 100-space park-and-ride to a 500-space park-and-ride.

Frieder said the state has been very supportive of the train station.

"We entered into an MOU agreement with NJ Transit in 2013 to proceed," he said. "NJT would do the design and construction of the train station and we would provide the highway and on-site improvements and the parking facility on the property to handle the train station."



A January of 2016 aerial view of Main Street North Brunswick on Route 1. (Photo: ~Courtesy of North Brunswick DOT Associates LLC)

In a 2013 letter, Gov. Chris Christie said he "was proud to recently authorize New Jersey Transit's construction of a new rail station in North Brunswick on the Northeast Corridor line as part of our effort to create jobs, improve our infrastructure and make our state a better place to live, work and commute."

The proposed NJ Transit plan also calls for a a mid-line loop — a new flyover track to improve corridor operations and increase operational efficiencies, off the site's property.

In a recent statement, NJ Transit would only say "the MidLine Loop and North Brunswick Station projects have advanced to preliminary design."

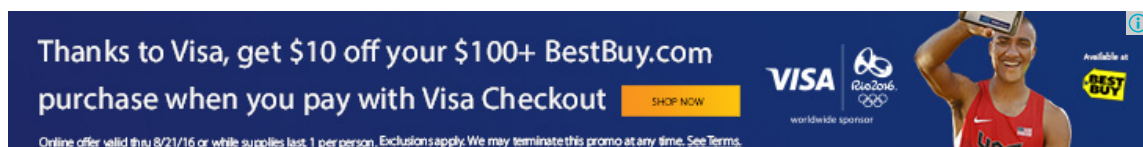
"Like most transportation endeavors in the state today it's awaiting long-term financing," Hritz said. "NJ Transit has already committed significant capital program dollars for preliminary design and engineering, architectural, archaeological and environmental impact studies - all the necessary ingredients that come with a project of this size and scope. The actual construction of the train station platforms is contingent on funding."

Frieder said the train station will be a welcome addition to the community. The proposed station will include a 1,000-foot long platform to handle the 12-car train sets on the Northeast Corridor.

"The stretch between Princeton Junction to New Brunswick is 14 miles," Frieder said. "It's the longest gap between stations on the Northeast Corridor Line. The residents of Central New Jersey and Middlesex County have had a lack of access to NJ Transit because there is no station in the center of this county. The rail line is already here. You put the platforms on the rail, the parking nearby and a building and you have a station."


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