

N.B. transit village plan approved

Construction could begin in 1 to 2 years for retail, residential spaces

BY JENNIFER AMATO Staff Writer

North Brunswick will see the beginnings of a transitoriented development within the next few years.



A rendering of what the MainStreetNB project will look like when completed. The beginnings of the redevelopment of the former Johnson & Johnson site on Route 1 in North Brunswick will have retail, restaurant, office, hotel and open space. PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH BRUNSWICK TOD ASSOCIATES, LLC On June 10, the Planning Board unanimously approved the preliminary site plan and general development plan to redevelop the 212-acre former Johnson & Johnson site

off Route 1.

“We’ve been working on this for more than five years — the council, the Planning Board, the engineers, everybody. I think this is going to be a great, great asset to North Brunswick. I hope I live long enough to take a ride on the train,” said Daniel DiStefano, chairman of the Planning Board.

“It’s a great moment for North Brunswick in its history, in its progress, in its future,” said Jonathan Frieder, managing partner for Garden Homes Development, which owns the property. “I think the more people learn about it and understand it, the more they will come to realize what a monumental opportunity and a great moment this is.”

North Brunswick TOD Associates discussed the plans for the “MainStreetNB” project, consisting of retail, restaurant and residential space and a bus depot, during two four-hour meetings June 8 and June 10.

“We don’t just meet the requirements of a transit village. ... North Brunswick is going to have an exemplary transit village that is going to be a model for the state in terms of smart growth and sustainability,” said John Taikina, director of planning and development for Garden Homes Development.

Main Street and the associated piazza have been designed after Piazza Navona in Italy, Metuchen, Palmer Square in Princeton, and Crocker Park in Ohio.

“It’s downtown-type single living,” Taikina said. “We like to think we model spaces that are very prevalent in existing places.”

There will be one-bedroom and two-bedroom units and duplex lofts either in residential buildings or on floors above retail and restaurant space. Taikina said the 300 initial Phase 1 units

would most likely be rentals, and the additional 1,575 units, predicated by the approval of a train station, could possibly be for sale.

There will be two freestanding large retail establishments and one large multistory retail establishment; only Costco can be discussed publicly at this time. There will be office space, a hotel and freestanding commercial pads.

“We need to satisfy the demands of large retailers so they are successful stores,” Taikina said of the number of parking spaces needed for the stores, which he said would be broken up by pavement and outdoor areas. “Having successful large retailers is critical to having successful small retailers. ... We’re hoping it’s an old-time place with all the modern conveniences.”

In regard to the architecture of all of the buildings, he said, “We are not looking for cookie cutter [plans]; we are looking for a more authentic-type experience.”

There will also be about 67 acres of open space on the property, and spaces that invite community activities such as central areas, outdoor dining and the open piazza.

“That hustle and bustle, that energy, we think is a critical part of the open space,” Taikina said.

There will be a bus depot at the northern end of the property that will have a ticket area, a waiting area and possibly a coffee shop. The bus will make stops at each large retail establishment, two locations on Main Street and regional areas on its way to New York.

The prospective train station project, which will be called “North Brunswick Station at MainStreetNB,” will be discussed in the future pending N.J. Department of Transportation approval.

The station, if approved, would be at the eastern end of Main Street, farthest from Route 1 north. If and when the train station is approved, and then operating, the applicant would be allowed to construct 1,575 more residences and more retail space.

The expected date for the train station is 2017, though the timeframe is dependent upon approval, funds becoming available for the project, and the completion of the ARC (Access to the Region’s Core): Trans-Hudson Passenger Rail Tunnel.

Frieder said that since North Brunswick has done its part to focus on smart growth, place-making and transit-oriented development principles, “the state must now provide transportation that supports this type of zoning.”

If for some reason the train station is not approved, Taikina said there are no plans yet for the rest of the property. However, Main Street “would be a viable, functioning place that will be closed and complete ... and function as a downtown.”

Also, any roadway improvements to the surrounding highways, throughways and neighborhood streets would be completed by the development prior to any initial construction of the Phase

1/Main Street project, which traffic engineer Dan Disario said “will provide better traffic operations with Phase 1 and with traffic improvements” than the existing conditions of the roadways.

NJ Transit would be responsible for any additional roadway improvements necessitated by the train station development.

Taikina said there has been no discussion yet about an intratransit village shuttle, but that everything within Main Street is about a three-minute walk, and the entire transit village area is about a five-minute walk.

“It’s 212 acres, but because we literally put all of the activities in the middle, you’re not going very far to any one thing,” Taikina said. Since the idea of limiting vehicular traffic and increasing the smart growth principles of pedestrian and bicycle access, the property will be laden with wide sidewalks, bike paths and multi-use paths. The existing Governor’s Pointe and Renaissance housing developments will be connected to the transit village property to accommodate residents there without the use of a car.

The final site plan application could go before the Planning Board by the end of the year, Frieder said. Initial construction could begin within the next year or so, depending on funding and permits. The developer has 10 years plus two one-year discretionary extensions to begin Phase 1, and 20 years to complete the full buildout of the project.

“We’re really excited about this opportunity. We are going to work very hard to make sure we fulfill the promises our application expressed,” Frieder said.

Contact Jennifer Amato at jamato@gmnews.com.