

NEW JERSEY RAIL STATION SPURS
TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT



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The Vista Center Tower (left) would rise as one of several new projects near the Trenton train station (below).

there's basically no risk for the tenants because they can move in close to rent-free."

It was precisely that credit that solidified Brenna's plans to build the Vista Center. The site close to the station came with other challenges, however. Historically, development in Trenton has taken place near the capitol, about a mile away from the station. Brenna knew that if he wanted to create the kind of Class A office space he envisioned, his building would have to be something special.

To that end, Brenna is not only planning the city's tallest building, but also its most sustainable, with the hope of achieving a LEED Platinum rating. Brenna aims to attract tenants with green credentials, or those seeking them. "They become [green] the minute they move into this building," he said, "and at 60 percent of the cost of other markets."

While Brenna awaits financing for his project, he's no longer the only one with big plans. On the opposite side of the station, another local developer, Nexus Properties, is developing One Station Plaza, a 20-story, 500,000-square-foot office complex, and two blocks away, Cranbury-based Matrix Development Group has proposed a mixed-use, midrise complex, including office and residential space. (Calls to those developers were not returned.) Carten, who has seen both projects in public presentations to the city, figures that both are taking a wait-and-see approach based on Brenna's success.

"Initially, we wanted a new train station to improve the city's image," Carten added. "Everyone said, 'We've got to do something about this, we're the capitol city.' But now, it's turned into so much more."

MC

Trenton On Track

Having grown up blocks from Trenton's rail station, Dan Brenna has taken the train thousands of times since childhood. At some point over the years, the developer realized there was something not quite right about his hometown stop. "When you get off the train in other cities, there are buildings, people, action all around you," Brenna recently said. "Not Trenton. There's nothing but empty buildings, parking lots, and weeds. I thought, 'Either I'm missing something or there's a real opportunity here.'"

Brenna is now one of three developers jockeying to build atop those weed-choked lots adjacent to the station, where he plans to develop the Vista Center, a 25-story, 700,000-square-foot office tower designed by RMJM. Those plans have in turn been driven by the station itself, where the finishing touches are being put on an \$80 million renovation and expansion that has transformed what many locals once joked was nothing

more than a Roy Rogers with a rail platform attached.

But the new station, designed by New York's di Domenico + Partners, is not the only thing that makes the surrounding neighborhoods ripe for redevelopment. As the sixth busiest stop on the busiest train line in the country, Trenton provides ample access to regional markets, plus light-rail to Camden and Philadelphia and access to Route 1 and I-95. "Trenton has a greater ridership than either Wilmington or Baltimore, and yet those cities have far more corporate tenants," Brenna noted.

What may finally start attracting such tenants to Trenton is a state program passed last year to provide tax incentives to businesses that locate near mass transit. The program provides credits that essentially allow tenants to pay no rent for the first ten years of their lease. "The urban hub tax credit really seals the deal," said Andrew Carten, Trenton's planning director. "Now,



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