

## More details on New Brunswick's \$215 million arts center

New Brunswick Mayor Jim Cahill and DEVCO head Chris Paladino detailed more of the city's redevelopment plans, including a \$215 million arts center, a transit hub and a county park

[Bob Makin](#), @ReporterBMakin Published 6:02 p.m. ET Feb. 7, 2017 | Updated 3:38 p.m. ET Feb. 8, 2017

New Brunswick Mayor James Cahill and the city's nonprofit developer Christopher Paladino have been envisioning a state-of-the-art arts center for 10 years, but now that plans are in place for the \$215 million, 25-story multi-use property, they have to "rush," Paladino joked during a presentation Tuesday at Crossroads Theatre.

As soon as the current seasons end for Crossroads on March 31 and its Livingston Avenue next-door-neighbor, George Street Playhouse, on May 21, their more than 25-year-old buildings will be torn down to meet a timetable to bring them into the new space by the fall of 2019. American Repertory Ballet and New Brunswick Cultural Center also will be tenants, whose leases partially will be paid for by yet-to-be-determined naming rights, said Paladino, president of New Brunswick Development Corp. or DEVCO.

"We're on such a tight schedule that George Street will be moving out while they are presenting their last show," he told about 200 assembled city residents and business leaders

"We have renewed our commitment to our arts district in a way that will allow us to realize its full economic, tourism and cultural potential," added Cahill, the city's mayor for more than 25 years.

While these long-gestating plans are nearing their start, the two also discussed another multi-million-dollar plan for a four-acre mix of retail, residential, office and public space to replace the nearby Ferren Parking Lot, which has been demolished over the past few months.

As part of its ongoing Meet the Mayors series, the Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce kicked off its new season with "New Brunswick 2017, The Arts & the City," a special gathering that featured only Cahill and Paladino at Crossroads.

Paladino shared how three rehearsal spaces as large as the New Brunswick Performing Arts Center's two stages will allow for more than 100 additional annual company performances or

other productions, while greater production space and stage mechanics will net more opera and ballet performances. An additional 39,000 patrons are expected, Cahill said.

“This will allow our arts groups to share their offerings with wider audiences than ever before and reinforce New Brunswick and Middlesex County’s standing as a desirable tourism destination and even more exciting place to be,” the mayor said.

### Excitement for sharing

Funding for the arts district project stems from a number of public and private entities, including \$6 million from the county and \$40 million raised by state tax credits, Cahill said. In addition to the arts center’s 485- and 250-seat venues, the mixed use of the property will include 250 residential units, 20 percent of which offer affordable housing; 15,000-square-feet of office space, and a parking garage, Paladino said.

The adjacent State Theatre will not be part of the redevelopment, but is planning a revitalization of its own, Cahill said. Nearby restaurants, such as Stage Left and Catherine Lombardi, will not be affected, the mayor said.

Both George Street and Crossroads will utilize interim space for the next two seasons. George Street Managing Director Kelly Ryman said the theater is finalizing a move that will allow it to remain in Hub City. The 2017-18 season and its location will be announced within in the next two months, Ryman said. George Street expects to be able to continue to present five annual productions, she said.

“It’s important for us to stay right here in the city,” Ryman said. “We’re so grateful to the city, the county freeholders, DEVCO and everyone else who made this project possible.”

With a shorted season from four to three shows, “Crossroads on the Road” will bring the company to venues throughout the state, including Rutgers University’s Mason Gross School of the Arts, where Artistic Director Marshall Jones III is a theater professor.

Jones said he was excited to work professionally with his students and delighted by the prospect of collaborating with George Street in their new shared space.

“We have a great relationship, but we don’t share art much,” he said. “We tend to march to our own beat just because we’re busy and focused. But if we can find ways to share more at the creative level, that would be very exciting. We’re all sharing one big building so the possibility for that is more organic.”

Crossroads still is in negotiations with other host venues, which will be announced with the 2017-2018 season at the end of March, Jones said.

## Other projects

Cahill and Paladino also discussed a forthcoming transit hub and a recently envisioned Middlesex County Park.

A four-acre mix of retail, residential, office and public space, the \$710 million Hub at New Brunswick will replace the demolished Ferren Parking Deck on Albany Street across from the train station. The park will be constructed once the Wolfson Parking Deck on Paterson and Church streets at Nielsen is torn down. A timetable for when the construction will begin has not been established, and the funding for it was not detailed.

“The reason for all of this is for our residents to enjoy,” Cahill said. “It will be good to have a green space in the middle of downtown.”

Despite raising nearly \$1 billion for the arts complex and the transit hub, Paladino said that the city can’t afford to spend another \$5 million on a hydraulic system that would retract seats to create a space for all-ages rock and hip-hop shows.

More than a dozen national acts grew out of the city’s internationally renowned basement scene, such as Screaming Females, Thursday and Bouncing Souls. But only two venues, the Scarlet Pub and In the West recording and rehearsal studio, consistently present local music acts outside of the city’s many illegal basement shows.

“We will have plenty of dates to fill,” Paladino said. “I would like to get in touch with the bands to see what we can do. The Yard also seems like a good place for them.”

Opened in September, The Yard is a mix of a public square, including a massive viewing screen that shows movies and sports games, plus dining, retail, and college housing. DEVCO constructed the space on the site of a Rutgers parking lot.

The Chamber’s Meet the Mayors series will continue Feb. 28 at Starland Ballroom, Sayreville, with Brad Cohen of East Brunswick, Owen Henry of Old Bridge, and John Krenzel of South River. An Emerging Leadership Summit will be conducted on March 23 at the Heldrich Hotel & Conference Center in New Brunswick. Visit [www.mcrcc.org](http://www.mcrcc.org).

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