



30-story tower would link station, Rutgers campus

Building to house university facilities, condominiums

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The New Brunswick Development Corp. announced plans yesterday to build the city's tallest building, a 30-story tower next to the train station that would function as a transit hub and gateway into Rutgers University's College Avenue campus.

The university will serve as the major tenant in the retail and office portion of the \$125 million project, which will be built at the northeast corner of Somerset Street and Easton Avenue.

The 600,000-square-foot building is part of a plan by Rutgers and the city of New Brunswick to convert College Avenue into a pedestrian thoroughfare with a lush parklike plaza at its center, and add a new academic building, student housing and a centralized transportation hub to the campus.

The city also has long-range plans to build two parking garages, expand its shuttle service and build newer and safer housing in the city's 5th and 6th wards, where a large number of students rent older homes together, Mayor James Cahill said during an editorial board with The Star-Ledger.

Construction of the 330-foot tower could begin within 12 months, said Chris Paladino, president of the New Brunswick Development Corp. (Devco), which is coordinating the project.

The tower would be built on 1.3 acres near the historic St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church and across from the university's Old Queens in an area the state designated last week as a transit village.

When completed, the tower will be the city's tallest building, a designation currently held by the 14-story Johnson & Johnson building. One Spring Street, a 257 1/2-foot luxury residential tower under construction next to Middlesex County Courthouse, will be the city's tallest building for a short time when it is completed at the end of this year.

The ground floors of the building would house the Rutgers University bookstore, the Rutgers Club, Rutgers University Press and a university visitors center. The upper floors would have about 200 market-rate condominium units. A parking deck with 550 spaces would also be built.

But to get the redevelopment project going, a handful of businesses would have to be relocated. Some owners said they had heard rumors about plans to raze the buildings they are housed in, and all said they hoped to be relocated and move back into the new tower when its done.

Paladino, said most of the retail and office space would be taken up by the university. However, there may be some left over space for one or two other businesses. All affected property owners would get relocation assistance.

Cahill said he hopes to avoid the use of eminent domain, whereby the city would force property owners out.

"I always thought if they were that serious then I would have been notified," said Bobby Kwak, a 28 year-old Rutgers graduate who leases space for his business, First Class Notes, on Somerset Street.

"Everybody knows about it, we just didn't know when it was going to happen," said Alen Avshalumov of East Brunswick, who owns the Allpage Wireless store next door. "Hopefully, they'll give us first option to move back in. That would be a plus. I mean, this is my livelihood. There's no stores available in this town and, if there is, the rent is too high."

The city gets a half-million visitors each year with Rutgers as their final destination, Cahill said. He called the university a "key economic engine" for the city, offering 8,000 part-time and full-time jobs.

New Brunswick and Rutgers will now begin soliciting input for the project, which still must get approval from the city council, planning board and redevelopment agency.

Devco would own the office and retail portion of the project, while the New Brunswick Parking Authority would own the parking garage. Devco intends to announce a developer for the project within the next 60 days.

The proposed building would have an "urban park," an outdoor landscaped promenade that connects to the train station platform, bridging over Wall Street behind it so that passengers could exit the train and walk directly across Somerset Street and onto College Avenue, Rutgers' main campus in the heart of downtown New Brunswick.

"This truly gives people a place to meet," Paladino said.

Cahill added: "What a way to come into town. You get off the train and boom, you're right there."

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