

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

REGIONAL MARKET

New Jersey

Livingston's Old Plaza to Make Way for Retail Hub

By RACHELLE GARBARINE

LIVINGSTON, N.J., Nov. 2 — Livingston Manor Shopping Plaza has long been considered a white elephant in the heart of this sprawling suburb. But soon the dowdy 1920's plaza will be bulldozed to make way for a mixed-use development intended to give Livingston a commercial hub it is now missing.

The development, to be called Livingston Town Center, is to have 50,000 square feet of stores — from boutiques to restaurants and upscale food shops — and 20,000 square feet of offices, with apartments above some of the stores, as well as a 233-car garage. These components are to take shape over the next 15 months on the 3.8 acres occupied by the existing center.

The rest of the planned 114 residences, as well as four small parks, are to rise on 9.5 wooded acres next to the old, mostly vacant, retail strip. Silverman's, a card and newspaper emporium and a local fixture, will be the only tenant to relocate.

The nearly 14-acre, \$60 million project, to be completed by 2006, will be built under a redevelopment plan township officials adopted in 2002 after years of planning, debate and legal wrangling over the future of the strategic site.

The project is planned for one of the busiest intersections in this 14-square-mile community, with a patchwork of small retail strips, scattered stores and, in the southwestern section of the town, an enclosed two-level mall with more than 100 shops, the Livingston Mall.

The developer, designated by township officials last year, is a partnership among three New Jersey

companies: the Eastman Management Corporation of Livingston, Jacobs Enterprises of Clifton and the Roseland Property Company of Short Hills. This month the partners, with financing from Wachovia Bank, will acquire the entire site from Livingston Manor, a family-owned company. Demolition of the old plaza is to begin next month.

Peter E. Schofel, president of Eastman Management, said creating a new town center made sense not only from an aesthetic perspective but a retail and economic one. Some 206,841 people with an average household income of \$141,430 live within a five-mile radius of the site.

Jerry Rockoff, who handles the New Jersey market at the Manhattan retail brokerage firm of Robert K. Futterman, added that the project was in an area where demand for retail space had remained strong and rents had held steady. He said it also reflected "the resurgence of downtowns," a trend in the last five years during which occupancy of retail space has been evolving from local merchants to more regional and even national tenants as consumers prefer to walk to shops in their own towns rather than drive to enclosed malls.

Livingston Town Center will have up to 14 stores, each with 700 to 6,000 square feet of space. George Jacobs

of Jacobs Enterprises said the space would be marketed to retailers not now in Livingston.

Livingston-merchants support the project, said Beth Lippman, executive director of the Livingston Community Partnership Management Corporation, which runs the township's business improvement district. "More businesses bring in more people and more opportunities," she said.

Mr. Schofel said asking annual rents at Livingston Town Center would be in the high-\$30-a-square-foot range, excluding taxes, utilities and maintenance, which Mr. Rockoff and Ms. Lippman said were competitive. Mr. Jacobs said four leases were out to be signed by tenants, two of them national retailers.

Getting to this point has not been easy. After years of seeing the old plaza steadily deteriorate and worrying over its impact on the town's aesthetics, local officials in 2000 declared the plaza site an area in need of redevelopment. The owners filed a lawsuit against the township that resulted in an out-of-court settlement two years later.

The plaza's owner and town officials agreed on the current redevelopment plan and area, which grew to its present size from 3.8 acres, as well as on the developer group. Increasing the project's size, said Ste-



RTKL Architects

A drawing, above, of the planned Livingston Town Center. The \$60 million project, with 50,000 square feet of stores, will be completed in 2006 and will replace the Livingston Manor Shopping Plaza, below.



George Jacobs

phen A. Stanola, Livingston's mayor, elevates it from just another retail strip to a town center that would inject "life and vitality to Livingston's entire commercial zone" and be a catalyst for more investment.

To meet concerns from nearby residents about increased traffic, the developers will widen roads bounding the project, among other road improvements. Mr. Schofel added the project, designed by RTKL Architects of Chicago, also calls for 17 single-family homes to ring the property and buffer the residential neigh-

borhood beyond.

There will also be 24 condominium apartments and 73 town houses. Residences are expected to range in price from \$300,000 to \$1 million, said Marshall B. Tycher of Roseland Property.

The four retail buildings of one or two stories will be clad in red brick and designed to reflect the township's Federal-style municipal building and high school, a mile away. Crowning the main retail structure will be that standard feature of town centers past, a clock tower.



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The Livingston Town Center will eventually cover nearly 14 acres.