

Ronkonkoma Hub \$600M redevelopment to break ground



James L. Coughlan, left, and Robert Loscalzo, principals at Tritec Real Estate, with a model of Phase One of the company's Ronkonkoma Hub project. Photo Credit: Newsday / John Paraskevas

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A developer is set to soon break ground on the Ronkonkoma Hub — a \$600 million complex of apartments, stores, restaurants and offices that officials have said will transform a struggling downtown near the hamlet's bustling train station.

When it is completed in about a decade, the Hub is expected to have as many as 1,450 apartments and 545,000 square feet of retail and office space on 50 acres.

The project has won broad support from government, business and civic leaders, as well as residents. They say it will revitalize a neglected section of the hamlet, provide

badly needed affordable housing and create new shopping options for thousands of Long Island Rail Road commuters who use the Ronkonkoma station daily.

“I think it’s a perfect project for where it is,” said Martin Cantor, an economist with the Long Island Center for Socioeconomic Policy, an independent think tank in Melville.

“Everyone’s going to get a benefit from it,” Cantor said in an interview. “It brings economic value to a community, and that’s more money to spend in the local shops, [and] that benefits the merchants. It creates permanent jobs.”

East Setauket-based Tritec Real Estate plans to start construction within weeks on the Hub’s first phase, a complex of 489 apartments along Mill Road, with construction to be completed in about 2 1/2 to three years.

The area near the train station currently is the site of aging storefront businesses and parking areas.

In their place, Tritec plans to construct 4- and 5-story buildings with street-level stores and upper-level offices and apartments.

William Cho said added housing would help businesses like his family’s Railroad Avenue liquor store.

“More foot traffic. That’s what this place needs,” Cho, 21, of Bayside, Queens, said as he stood alone in the store. “There’s a lot of businesses closing. . . . Changes would be good.”

Some Ronkonkoma residents have expressed concerns about the Hub generating increased traffic. But others say they would welcome more traffic.

“On the weekend, it’s dead,” Joe Ennis, 50, an insurance adjuster, said of the business district two blocks from his Garrity Avenue home. “A lot of the stores, they turn over so quickly, and I think it’s because they don’t get enough business to keep them afloat.”

Bordered by highways, railroad tracks and parking lots, downtown Ronkonkoma is an island, cut off from the rest of the hamlet and neighboring communities.

Efforts to revive the neighborhood started in about 1986 when Brookhaven Town commissioned a study of the already aging downtown. Those plans languished for 25 years.

Brookhaven officials named Tritec the project’s master developer in 2012. Since then, state and Suffolk County officials have lined up to support the project.

“It cleans up that whole Ronkonkoma area, which has been kind of a mess for a long time,” said Frederick C. Braun III, chairman of the Brookhaven Industrial Development

Agency, which earlier this month closed on a \$3 million package of tax breaks for the Hub's first phase. "There are a lot more rental properties now than there were a few years ago, but you hear it all the time, that there's a shortage of rental housing to keep young people" on Long Island.

Empire State Development, New York's primary business aid agency, in June awarded \$50 million to build parking garages at the Hub. In March, the county legislature approved a \$26.4 million deal to connect the Hub to the Southwest Sewer District.

Tritec officials said the Hub would be about five times the size of the company's New Village residential and retail development in Patchogue, one of several projects credited with the village's rejuvenation in recent years.

Like New Village, the Hub is designed to attract a diverse assortment of residents, including single people and young families, and seniors seeking smaller homes, Tritec principal owner James L. Coughlan said, adding that shops and restaurants will be within walking distance.

"They want to have some retail nearby," Coughlan said. "They don't want to have to get in a car."

Ronkonkoma residents said it's finally their turn to see the kind of rebirth experienced by other Long Island communities.

"Patchogue has turned out good so far," said Joan Kienast, 70, a retired banker. "They're doing well. You can hope we can turn out that well."