

## A New Newark Moves Closer to Reality

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[NEWARK](#), Feb. 22 — Cities across the country have struggled to reinvent their waterfronts as manufacturing uses dropped off drastically, but few cities have struggled longer and harder than this one. Decades after redevelopment began on industrialized waterfronts from Baltimore to Oakland, Newark is just now seeing the start of a transformation along the Passaic River, where the city was founded in 1666.



The first part of Minish Park is under construction; it will ultimately become a 2.2-mile riverfront promenade linking downtown with Ironbound, a vibrant Portuguese and Brazilian neighborhood. A new light-rail line will open this summer, connecting Newark's Pennsylvania Station to Riverfront Stadium, the home of the minor-league Newark Bears baseball team, with a stop at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Other long-planned improvements — like the refurbishment of the McCarter Highway along the river and of the Amtrak bridge over the Passaic — are in various stages of completion.

Marko Georgiev

Commercial development is already on the drawing board for this lot next to 1 Riverfront Plaza in Newark.

All of this public investment is attracting private investment as well in an area that is mainly vacant and is cut off from downtown by the McCarter Highway.

Eight acres of long-vacant waterfront land owned by the Matrix Development Group will become the site of a mixed-use commercial development. Phase 1 includes a 14-story 430,000-square-foot commercial tower, 2 Riverfront Center. It has already secured an anchor tenant, McCarter & English, a Newark-based law firm with a long history in the community. The groundbreaking is expected later this year, and the law firm expects to move in in 2008. Later phases call for 550 units of residential housing in four low-rise buildings interspersed with green space and a 150-room hotel next to Penn Station.

"This is a transformative investment," said Richard F. X. Johnson, senior vice president of Matrix. "It's an opportunity to bring the city to the water. Two and half acres, almost a third of the entire site, will be open space and accessible to the public."

Other property owners along the Passaic River, which ultimately empties into Newark Bay, site of the Port of Newark, are hoping that a transformation is imminent, but are not yet ready to move forward. Edison Properties, which owns about an acre of land east of the Amtrak bridge, commissioned a waterfront study two years ago, but has yet to formulate any concrete plans.

"You have to have a long-term vision," said Douglas Sarini, vice president of Edison Properties, which is based in Newark. Having owned property since 1981 along the High Line in the West Village in [Manhattan](#), which is soon to be the site of a major redevelopment project, the company is known for buying land and sitting on it until the market catches up.



Mr. Sarini says Newark is only now beginning to understand its potential, which is largely driven by its transportation infrastructure, including close proximity to Newark Liberty International Airport; New Jersey Transit, Amtrak and PATH trains; and major highways, many of which converge along the waterfront near Penn Station.

"Newark has the infrastructure to attract a combination of entertainment, residential and commercial to the waterfront," Mr. Sarini continued. "It's going to take time, but you'll see a unique waterfront on both sides of the Passaic River, with residential in Harrison and more mixed-use on the Newark side."

Indeed, the city of Harrison — just across the river, which is about 400 feet wide and is traversable by two pedestrian bridges — is further along with its waterfront redevelopment plans.

The MetroCentre development in Harrison, when completed, will encompass three million square feet of Class A office space, 500,000 square feet of retail space and about 4,000 housing units. At the center of the initial phase are a new 20,000-

seat soccer stadium, which will be home to the MetroStars, and 900 units of housing; these projects are to start this year.

"When we got involved in this project, the confidence in the market wasn't as strong as it is now," said Greg Senkevitch, chief operating officer of the Advance Realty Group, the developer of the site in Harrison. "The vibrancy of Newark has increased dramatically."

Norman Baker, managing principal of Newmark Knight Frank, leased more than 16,000 square feet of office space in Newark to the MetroStars and its parent company, AEG New York Soccer Inc., at 2 Penn Plaza East, which overlooks the stadium site across the river.

"They'll construct a private box similar to what they're trying to sell at the stadium; that will be a showpiece" for sales of stadium accommodations, said Mr. Baker, who has worked in Newark since 1972. "But until the esplanade along the river is done, they're a ways off from breaking ground on residential on the Newark side."

Getting more people and activity along the waterfront cannot happen soon enough for Lawrence Goldman, president and chief executive of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, which opened near the waterfront in 1997 after a decade of planning.

"The whole reason we are here is because of the Passaic riverfront," Mr. Goldman said. "The idea was to reconnect Newark to its historic beginning. The key is activating the waterfront and giving people a reason to come out of Penn Station and move along the river." According to a study conducted by the Trust for Public Land, Newark has only 2.9 acres of park per 1,000 people, whereas [New York City](#) has 4.6 acres, and the national average for urban areas is 7.5 acres per 1,000.

Mr. Goldman hopes to announce plans to build a pedestrian bridge from the arts center over the McCarter Highway to the riverfront within the next few months. "Not your garden-variety crossing, but a crossing that will be a magnet of activity," he said. "We're working hard on a design and surrounding amenities to link it downtown and to the riverfront. This is Newark's one shot to really bring that river back to life."