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## **Major Greenwich Redevelopment Around Train Station Includes Aspects Darien Faces**

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Touching on subjects that also affect Darien's transportation and business development, Greenwich town officials, state officials and a real estate company on Tuesday announced a \$45 million project to replace the Greenwich train station and buildings around it.

The proposed new train station will be a somewhat grander entrance to Greenwich, have closer access to a new downtown movie theater and other businesses, be located near a new downtown park and will be built with ride services and self-driving vehicles in mind.

— *This article is an adaption of [an article](#) originally published by [GreenwichFreePress.com](#).*

**Comparing Greenwich and Darien**

Redevelopment issues are not identical in Darien and Greenwich, but there are important similarities.

Beyond the redevelopments already approved in downtown Darien and Noroton Heights, more changes in business districts and transportation are bound to happen. For Darienites interested in them, development discussions in Greenwich bear watching:

***On one hand:***

- Greenwich is a much bigger town than Darien, with about 2 1/2 times the population, a much larger business district, a bigger tax base, more wealth (although not per capita income) and in a location closer to New York City.
- The recent major redevelopment projects in Darien are oriented much more toward residential development. The just-announced Greenwich project doesn't appear to include new housing.

***On the other hand:***

- But both high-income towns have very large commuter populations and business districts built around train stations (downtown Darien came into being as a result of the train station built there in the middle of the 19th century).
- Both towns are expected to face the same new trends in transportation — both regionally, with more access to New York City train terminals on the way, and universally, with trends in getting to and from local train stations.
- As in Greenwich, redevelopment of Darien's Noroton Heights train station is being planned.

**Trends: More NYC Rail Access, Ways to Get to Stations**

The Greenwich station, built in a redevelopment 50 years ago, is increasingly used not just by residents commuting to New York City, but for commuters from the city and other stations along the New Haven Line coming to work in Greenwich, said Darrell Harvey, co-CEO of The Ashforth Company, which owns the entire block on Railroad Avenue where the train station is located.

And commuters increasingly are using ride services like Uber and Lyft, he said. Ashforth executives expect those trends to continue into the future.

“The transportation center will appeal to future generations, including millennials,” he said.

### **Changes To and From the Station**

The project includes an entirely new train station to replace the existing one on the north side of the tracks; a new train station on the south side of the tracks; expanded and improved drop-off and pick-up areas for both stations; new pedestrian and commuter pathways; a new, privately-owned public park on the corner of Greenwich Avenue and Railroad Avenue,

Harvey said changes in transportation include more people coming and going from the train station via Uber or Lyft.

“And you have shuttles coming from buildings and people who are biking, and in the future we’ll have driverless cars,” he added. “And there are more people living downtown now. There are more pedestrians and we will make this more pedestrian friendly.”

### **Stronger Rail Connection to NYC, and Within Connecticut**

“There is much more travel now between the cities in Connecticut,” Harvey said. “And there is much more reverse commuting from the city of New York.”

Mr. Harvey said there is a significant coordination between the Greenwich Plaza project, rail in Connecticut and changes in New York City. Completion of the new Greenwich Plaza will dovetail with the new east side access to Grand Central Station, where a new level beneath the station will be constructed.

“The opening up of Penn Station, because the LIRR [Long Island Railroad] where it comes in to Grand Central frees up slots and the New Haven Rail line will be able to go directly to Penn Station from here,” he said.

“That will again change commuting patterns and make New York City more directly accessible and make it easier for people in New York to get out here from a broader part of New York City.”

### **Greenwich Grandeur**

Architect Frank Prial of Beyer Blinder Belle, who is designing the project, said the new train station will incorporate lessons learned from Grand Central Terminal. “It’s a place to gather, a place to celebrate Greenwich,” he said. “We see it as a portal.”

“It will be a generous space,” he said. “It will be tall. It will be a place of honor and civic grandeur but also a very functional place where people can easily access trains. It will also be the lobby to a lovely and extensive multiplex theater.”

“There will also be a new public park on the corner of Steamboat Road and Railroad Avenue,” Prial said, “and a new station on the south side as well to accommodate people commuting in the opposite direction.”

#### **Working Closely with the State, Town**

Harvey said there had been numerous iterations of the project leading up to the display of renderings on easels on Tuesday morning.

He said there was also consultation with and support from Metro-North, as well as the state, including the new state Transportation Commissioner Joe Giletti, who was appointed by Governor Lamont.

“He understands rail travel more than anyone because he used to be president of Metro-North,” Harvey said.

Harvey said his organization has been in direct consultation with the town government over the past five years and thanked First Selectman Peter Tesei, Town Administrator Ben Branyan and Town Planner Katie DeLuca.

Richard Andreski, chief of Connecticut’s Bureau of Public Transportation which oversees the state’s commuter rail and bus services, emphasized the importance of the New Haven Line to the state’s economy.

“Rail service is no longer for commuters,” he said. “We’re seeing increasing interest in rail. This station serves 4,000 people a day. This is the busiest rail line in the U.S. Over 130,000 people a day travel on this rail line, which is the backbone of the state’s economy.”

#### **Closer Connection to Movie Theater, Businesses**

The announcement Tuesday was kept closely under wraps until it was made, but a hint of what was to come came back in March 2018, when Attorney Bruce Cohen, representing Greenwich Plaza, spoke to the Greenwich Planning & Zoning Commission.

Cohen said his client felt the retail strip along Railroad Avenue needed upgrading. He said Ashforth wanted Bow Tie to to move the theater to the second floor, obtain a café permit, and serve both meals and liquor.

“My clients have been working on an upgrading plan for some time,” Mr. Cohen said at the time. “A key component is upgrading the theater.”

On Tuesday, Harvey said, “It’s time to move to modern theaters with reserved luxury seating.” Bow Tie has

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already upgraded seats at its Majestic theater on Summer Street in Downtown Stamford and offers reserved seating there.

**Like Darien, Lots of Redevelopment Coming**

Tesei, the Greenwich first selectman, said the project is one of several improvements taking place in downtown Greenwich, including [the new Bruce Museum facility](#), efforts to maximize and improve the waterfront at Roger Sherman Baldwin Park and the [new Steamboat Road pier](#), which is being unveiled later this week.