
city's plan for livable, affordable downtown

Matt Fagan [NorthJersey.com](#)

Published 4:10 a.m. ET May 20, 2021 | Updated 10:52 a.m. ET May 20, 2021

Plans to redevelop Passaic's downtown are blossoming along Main Avenue and its side streets. Even during the pandemic, the business district has been bustling with development.

At perhaps the epicenter of the downtown renaissance is the 711 Main Avenue project, a soon-to-be mixed-used apartment, retail and professional building.

Situated on the site of the former Montauk Theater, a notorious adult movie house that was demolished in 2011, the building will sit next to the newly built Sonia Sotomayor School 21.

In January, the City Council adopted its redevelopment plan for the downtown with projects like 711 Main Avenue in mind. The downtown is now littered with one-story buildings and businesses with underused second and third floors.

New zoning

The new zoning allows for residential units to be built or renovated where previously only commercial units were permitted.

"The goal is to create a diversity in types of housing," said Passaic Business Administrator Rick Fernandez. "I can think of 10 projects along Main Avenue off the top of my head."

Alex D. Perez, a third-generation Passaic landlord, said his family bought the 711 Main lot at auction for \$850,000.

He was drawn to the city for a few reasons. "Bergen County has closed out. There's not much to develop there," Perez said, "and the taxes are crazy."

Mayor Hector Lora said his marching orders have been to reduce red tape and have building officials do their best to have permits issued and inspections performed in a timely manner.

EARLIER: Redevelopment plan OK'd for heart of Passaic's downtown. Here's what it means

At 711 Main Ave., the Perez family plans to build a multi-use complex with eight 1,100-square-foot stores on the bottom floor, eight 1,100-square-foot professional offices and 15 apartments on the top two floors.

It will join the family's inventory of about 1,000 rental units in the city. And they plan to build more.

"We've bought in, 100%," Perez said. "Passaic is a great town."

The 711 Main apartments, which Perez says will have amenities like washing machines and granite countertops, should fetch about \$1,800 a month, which he says is about 60% lower than Manhattan rental prices.

"People tell us that for that price, it is worth taking a bus," he said.

Bringing in young people

The building is surrounded by supermarkets, clothing stores and restaurants, some of them built by the Perez family, which converted a former factory and car dealership at 822 Main Ave. into a series of small restaurants and other services.

Fernandez said the plan is to make the city livable again — to bring in new residents but also to entice natives who've left to pursue education to return and raise families.

"You ask the mayor and he'll tell you we want our young people to go and get an education and then come back," Fernandez said.

Story continues below the gallery

The new zoning includes the stretch of Main Avenue between Pennington Avenue and Monroe Street and would permit as many as 11 10-story mixed-use buildings and encourage smaller properties to rehabilitate buildings and add apartments to upper floors.

Fernandez said a 10-story building would be harder to pull together, because it would require roughly 12,000 square feet of footprint

Rather, the city hopes to encourage smaller parcels like 711 Main to redevelop.

contain two- or three-story units that have underused upper floors.

That's because the prior zoning permitted only commercial uses. The new redevelopment zone encourages building above the single-story or renovating older commercial spaces for residential use.

The desired effect is to shore up the economic base by upgrading and increasing the housing stock, which makes businesses more sustainable.

Developments that do not have enough parking must contribute \$7,500 to a fund that will go toward building a parking deck.

Matt Fagan is a local reporter for NorthJersey.com. For unlimited access to the most important news from your local community, please subscribe or activate your digital account today.

Email: fagan@northjersey.com

Twitter: [@fagan_nj](https://twitter.com/fagan_nj)