

The Rutherford Report



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Borough of Rutherford NJ

July 2, 2021

From the Desk of Acting Mayor Mark Goldsack

At Monday's Mayor and Council meeting, the Council voted 4-1 to adopt the redevelopment plan for the Williams Center Redevelopment Area, without the Planning Board's recommendations.

Let me be clear, I respect the residents who voiced concerns about this, but I feel it's important to continue to address the inaccuracies and misconceptions that were spoken, as I did on Monday night.

First, as stated by the Borough's redevelopment attorney at the meeting, the inclusion of a 9 story building in one redevelopment plan does not automatically grant another builder's demand for the same building height in a different redevelopment plan. All redevelopment areas are treated differently, taking into account both their unique characteristics and the aesthetic qualities of the particular area. Additionally, as it relates to the Williams Center Redevelopment Area, nine stories is only a part of the discussion if, and only if, the Newman Theater is preserved.

Second, I think one of the facts that has gotten lost in a flood of understandable emotions is that legally, a redevelopment plan must be adopted to allow us to be in the position to entertain any 11th hour serious parties who may want to purchase the property prior to it going to auction. Plan A is, and always has been, securing a buyer that understands Rutherford and is willing and able to work with us to develop a project beneficial to our community. This is the top priority of the governing body at this point in time. But, time is running out on us and I would rather have an adopted redevelopment plan that provides for a theater component and also incentivizes a buyer to preserve the Newman Theater than have no redevelopment plan at all.

Everyone is hoping for the right buyer. But hope is not a strategy. Hope is not a plan. It's imperative that actionable strategies and plans are put into place, now. This redevelopment plan also supplies a Plan B, which gives us the flexibility to better negotiate if Plan A doesn't happen. Failure to execute Plan A would prove that potential buyers are not willing to be boxed into narrow requirements, and to not be ready for that would be irresponsible. Yes, the Newman Theater is a singular issue for many people. But it's also a larger issue that affects the town and the Downtown economy as a whole.

Third, it's important to remember that Rutherford does not actually own the property. What we put into this redevelopment plan is simply a request on the part of the Borough for a future buyer. Imagine if your neighbor were selling their house, but you insisted that as a condition of the sale the buyer is required to build a pool that you are able to use. That would obviously limit the amount of buyers even willing to entertain the purchase and give any reasonable buyer pause before moving forward with negotiations.



Every Wednesday
with Thursday Rain Dates



Wednesdays & Saturdays
July 7 through October 30
Williams Center Plaza

Summer Concert Series @ Lincoln Park
Thursdays 8pm!

Department News

REC [RecDesk Comprehensive Online Registration System Now Open!](#)

TAX COLLECTOR [Third Quarter Estimated Bill have been mailed. Payments are due August 1 with a 10 day grace period to August 10 without interest.](#)

Fourth, it needs to be understood that despite what so many residents have claimed, the Borough of Rutherford has no "deal" with the Amazon Corporation. Rutherford officials spent years negotiating with Linque Equities while they sought to build on property east of Route 17. Linque Equities is a property owner that has leased their property to Amazon. There is no direct relationship between Amazon and the Borough through which the Borough could negotiate regarding the Williams Center.

Finally, I'd like to address the unfortunate truth that this topic has brought us to a point where it seems we can no longer agree to disagree. This issue has bred unnecessarily hurtful comments. Just because we may disagree does not mean your elected officials are corrupt. This is something some of my colleagues and I have been repeatedly accused of lately. My wife's family has been here for over a hundred years. Don't think for one second that I, personally, do not carry the burden of past generations of Rutherfordians as I make decisions that will impact this community for future generations, generations that include my own children. Don't think for one second that as a father and a taxpayer, I'm not doing everything possible to keep Rutherford a wonderful place to live. Why would I want to "destroy" the town I'm choosing to raise my children? We, as a governing body, are tasked with trying to preserve Rutherford's history while making it thrive in the 21st century. Striking that balance is not an easy job, but it is one that we must accomplish, together. I'm hoping we can have more civil conversations in the future as we continue to move forward and make important decisions that will impact our community for years to come.

Sincerely,
- Acting Mayor Mark Goldsack



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Council Reports

Councilman Ray Guzmán

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The Meadowlands Museum The Meadowlands Museum, which is the regional history museum for the Meadowlands area and is located in Rutherford, is looking for individuals willing to help out as volunteers and possibly future Board members. All skill sets will be considered. Please send an email to meadowlandsmuseum@verizon.com if you are interested in history, old building and property maintenance, non-profit grant writing, non-profit publicity and other aspects of Museum administration.

Williams Center:

It's quite evident the residents and the governing body are in agreement that a performing arts theater is important to the community. We all want to see a home at which the arts can thrive in Rutherford. The question is: How do we make this happen? I supported the original plan, without the restrictive amendments from the Planning Board, in order to attract a buyer for the Williams Center property. As a member of the governing body, I had to ask myself "What happens if a restrictive plan scares away potential buyers?" The idea of an empty and stagnant property in the heart of our Downtown, and the impact it would have on our local economy, is very concerning to me. I understand why people are passionate about the Newman Theater. I share a love and appreciation for the history of Rutherford. But it would be irresponsible of me to allow that love and appreciation to blind me to the realities of business and the economic impact a property of that size has on our Downtown.

I've lived here 26 years. I married a young lady who was raised here and we chose to raise our children here. I understand why emotions are high, and rightfully so. I pass the Williams Center daily. I can only imagine what it was in its heyday. But the Williams Center as many choose to remember it hasn't existed in decades. That doesn't mean any of us WANT to see it go away. But we may need creative solutions to preserve our memories of it, and if that means attracting a buyer willing to use the most treasured components of the theater rather than freezing it exactly as is, then I can live with that.

I respect each and every one of my fellow residents. But on Monday night I heard some people make some very irresponsible accusations insinuating my colleagues and I are "on the take" simply because they disagree with us. It's sad that it's gotten to this point, but I'd like to go on the record to state I did not want to become a member of the Council in pursuit of being a corrupt politician wanting to ruin this town. I wanted to become a member of the Council to help make the rational decisions that will continue to guide Rutherford for years to come. And based on all the facts, I believe the original redevelopment plan is the most rational decision that we can make right now for our community.

Councilwoman Stephanie McGowan

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Recreation Liaison:

- Summer Camp is under way! With just under 200 campers for the summer 2021 season, our Recreation Department has ensured a wonderful half-day outdoor opportunity for socialization, play, and enjoying our open spaces!
- Track & Field for ALL ages: Beginning July 14th, the Recreation Department will be offering an introduction to running, long jump, and turbo javelin to residents of all ages from 2nd grade to adult! Please visit Rec Desk at <https://rutherfordnj.recdesk.com/community/home> to sign up.
- Calling all Young Actors! A new musical theater class for ages 8-12 will take place on Saturdays, from July 17- August 14th between 12-1pm. Please visit Rec Desk at <https://rutherfordnj.recdesk.com/community/home> to register today.

Thoughts on the William Center

Thank you to all the residents who attended our last Mayor and Council meeting, as well as those who have spoken to me individually, to express their concerns, thoughts, and wishes for the existing William Center property. I will continue to advocate for the best opportunities for the residents of this Borough and explore every viable and legitimate opportunity presented to us.

Councilman Tom Mullahey

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I'd like to thank my colleagues and Planning Board members for all they've done during the Williams Center redevelopment process. I started off my time as liaison to the project stating that we would collect all public input and weigh it with what our engineer, planner, financial planner and redevelopment attorney understand to be a viable concept.

After 2 public hearings and countless discussions I've had with residents, I believe we've heard everybody's wishes. But wishes alone simply do not create a viable plan forward.

I know people who are much better versed in theater and real estate than me who have tried to find a party wanting to save the Newman Theater and to date that has not happened. Each of my colleagues have had conversations with people that want to save it, want to have a plan but at the end of the day, when it comes to the point of seeing a business proposal and specific financial backing, the conversation stops. We're continuing to try to find buyers and have met with parties as recently as this past week.

I appreciate everything everyone has done and this is the best we can do with a property we don't own, and I will continue to meet with any interested parties until we run out of time.