

Newark an example for U.S. 'legacy' cities, group says



Newark Mayor Ras Baraka helps break ground on the \$174 million project.

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NEWARK — A development in New Jersey is a model for the revitalization of historic buildings across the country.

That's the message of a cohort meeting in Newark Tuesday to unveil what it calls an "action agenda" to rehab some of America's oldest cities.

Rutgers-Newark and the city's Hahne building – the long vacant department store that [is being converted into a mixed-use development](#) that includes a Whole Foods supermarket – will play host to planners and politicians from 40 cities Tuesday. The conference is meant to discuss the future of the country's "legacy cities," officials said.

There are about 50 legacy cities – urban centers that have lost at least 20 percent of their populations since the mid 20th century – across the U.S., according to Nicholas Hamilton, Director of Urban Policy for the [American Assembly](#), one of the organizations that compiled the action agenda. Most of those cities were built up on an industry, and have struggled to convert to 21st century economics, he said.

"One of the challenges with these cities is definitely fiscal," Hamilton said in a phone interview, noting common issues like abandoned properties and older infrastructures that must be fixed and maintained.



Officials break ground on project once called Newark's 'Holy Grail'

The sprawling, \$174 million mixed-use residential and retail complex on Broad Street is expected to open in 18 to 20 months

"But you can look at, for example, a city with a lot of abandoned buildings as a liability, or as a place with a lot of available, affordable property...It's about beginning to redefine what an asset is."

The action agenda describes Newark and other cities like it as facing "unprecedented challenges in pervasive disinvestment, widespread abandonment, demolition by neglect, and extraordinarily limited resources. Yet they offer diversity, affordability, and irreplaceable urban character."

The group that put together the agenda, which also includes the national [Preservation Rightsizing Network](#), will join forces with locals to [show off the Hahne redevelopment](#), and the city of Newark, as examples of how to successfully capitalize on a city's history.

The conference, which is expected to draw about 200 participants, is meant to "change the conversation" from the issues that many legacy cities face, to how embracing history can fix them, said Peter Englot, the Senior Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs at Rutgers University – Newark.

The Hahne building, which was shuttered in 1986, is a symbol of the rebirth of these cities, the group said.

The \$174 million project, which is being funded by a mix of public, non-profit and private entities, will include 160 mixed-income apartments, Rutgers community art programs ([known as Express Newark](#)), retail shops, and the Whole Foods.

The development, group members said, is a good example of its nine action items to revitalize ailing cities, which include engaging local residents, reforming policies to encourage preserving historical buildings, and developing new ways to finance building stabilization.

The theory will be in action in Newark soon. According to Jon Cortell, a VP at L+M Development, construction is on track to begin leasing apartments in November or December of next year. Express Newark should open in January of 2017, and Whole Foods in February or March of 2017, he said.

The preservation of some of the building's historical elements, like its concrete structure, has enabled smooth construction, he said.

"It allows for a more efficient execution than ground-up development," he said. "We get to capitalize on what's in place...without having to build it at today's cost."

Cortell and Englot said both Rutgers and L+M are looking for additional historical structures in Newark to redevelop. Cara Bertron, the chair of the Preservation Rightsizing Network, said it soon plans to pilot the action agenda in three yet to be chosen cities across the U.S.

"We are focusing on getting the word out in legacy cities across the country," she said.