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Elections over, business leaders express optimism about climate going forward

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Notes of optimism are being expressed by business leaders around Fairfield County and Connecticut about what Gov.-elect Ned Lamont's victory might mean for the state's future.

Joseph Brennan, president and CEO of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, said his group had held several meetings with Lamont during the campaign. "He understands the need for economic growth, and the huge burden he's facing," Brennan said. "He's going to need help."

Brennan said the private sector is ready to step up and work with the new administration to reduce the overall cost of government while improving the quality of services. "Lamont has a business background, so he understands the need for economic development and workforce development," he said. "The problems we face aren't going to be solved by a line-item approach or by raising taxes. He certainly understands that, and he seems very open to ideas on how to fix it."

Brennan and others applauded Lamont's initial steps at

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104 Corporate Park Drive could become a pediatric care facility. Photo by Bob Rozycki.

Montefiore Medical Center looks to join Westchester Avenue's 'Medical Mile'

BY RYAN DEFFENBAUGH

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In what could prove to be the latest Platinum Mile shake-up, Simone Development Cos. has filed plans to convert a mostly unused office building at 104 Corporate Park Drive in Harrison to a four-level pediatric ambulatory care facility for Montefiore Medical Center.

The Harrison Planning Board will hear plans from Simone at its Nov. 27 meeting.

The Bronx-based developer would completely renovate and modernize the 118,000-square-foot building as well as expand its first floor. Montefiore would lease the space from Simone.

The move would add Montefiore to the growing list of big-name health care providers building along Westchester Avenue and the I-287 corridor, known as the Platinum Mile. Memorial Sloan Kettering, the Hospital for Special Surgery and Westmed Medical Group each have opened new care centers

in the region over just the past half-decade. The center would also have future neighbors in a Wegmans Food Market grocery store and the Carraway apartment building already under construction on the same street.

For the Montefiore project, Simone would completely renovate the building and outfit it with urgent care space; lab facilities; an imaging suite with MRI, CT, radiology and other technology; behavioral health offices; maternal fetal medi-

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cine; sports medicine; and a children's evaluation and rehabilitation center. The plans are detailed in a cover letter project attorney Seth Mandelbaum wrote to the Planning Board.

Montefiore is also in discussions with White Plains Hospital, which is a member of the Montefiore network, to provide oncology services on the first floor of the building. The proposal from Simone calls for a 4,850-square-foot addition on the first floor of the property that would house a linear accelerator for cancer care. The other piece of proposed construction is a three-level, 85,662-square-foot parking garage with 200 new spaces. The garage would be built over existing surface parking space. The site would have a total of 495 parking spaces.

The 104 Corporate Park Drive building, once home to Malcolm Pirnie Inc., was

purchased for \$7 million in 2012 by Histogenetics, the Ossining-based biotech firm. Histogenetics also bought 102 Corporate Park Drive, a building formerly home to Nokia, that same year for \$12 million. The company announced plans at the time for a research center along the corridor, but they have yet to come to fruition. Simone is finalizing a deal to purchase the 104 building.

Reached for comment, a Montefiore spokesperson said the company looks forward "to sharing more about this plan pending required town review board meetings." Guy Leibler, president of Simone Healthcare Development, similarly said the company is holding off on discussing the details of the project until it can first be presented to the town's Planning Board when reached by the Business Journal Nov. 20.

But he described how the changing nature of the

town's I-287 corridor made the area attractive for both Simone and Montefiore. The region's shift from the Platinum Mile — a home to corporate headquarters — to a "Medical Mile" was jump-started, he noted, by a different Simone project. In 2015, the company built an 85,000-square-foot medical office building for Westmed at the company's Purchase Professional Park that was the first new office construction in the area for decades.

A year before that, Memorial Sloan Kettering spent \$128.8 million to convert a former Verizon research building at 500 Westchester Ave. to an outpatient cancer facility. In 2017, Hospital for Special Surgery opened its first Westchester outpatient center across I-287 in White Plains, inside RPW Group's 1133 Westchester Ave. office complex.

The area's easy access to I-287, the Hutchinson River Parkway, I-684 and I-95 far-

ther east makes it a natural draw for health care providers, Leibler said.

"You have the most amazing transportation network really in the whole county, which serves a solid population," Leibler said. "At Simone Development, we believe real estate is about population and transportation, and so you just look at what you have at Corporate Park Drive."

The growth along Harrison's side of I-287 has been helped by a shift in the town's philosophy. In 2013, Harrison adopted a new master plan that stressed the need to allow a wider range of uses along the Platinum Mile. The area's major corporate anchors were downsizing or leaving town, shrinking the town's tax base.

The town's shift in thinking hasn't only attracted medical developers, however, as the rest of Corporate Park Drive attests. Across the street from 104 Corporate

Park Drive, national developer Toll Brothers is building 421 apartments, marketed as The Carraway, on the site where two office buildings once stood.

Next door to the proposed ambulatory care center, construction crews are laying the groundwork for Westchester County's first Wegmans grocery location. The 120,000-square-foot store will rise on the former site of three other office buildings: 106, 108 and 110 Corporate Park Drive. And just a half-mile from there, Life Time fitness operates a popular 200,000-square-foot mega gym where Gannett Co., publisher of The Journal News, once had offices and a printing plant.

"All of these things are creating a real hub, as the town has recognized the opportunity for mixed-use and finding a way to revitalize this section of the town," Leibler said.

So fast is the town's

corridor changing that the Simone proposal is actually one of two major redevelopment plans the Harrison Planning Board will hear at its November meeting.

One street farther west off Westchester Avenue, on Westchester Park Drive, Boston-based developer Marcus Partners will present a proposal to knock down the empty 3 Westchester Park Drive office building to build two new apartment buildings. The buildings would host 450 apartments and 731 parking spaces.

Marcus Partners purchased the 160,000-square-foot office building at auction earlier this year for \$10.97 million. The building's lone remaining tenant, Business Journal publisher Westfair Communications, Inc., vacated earlier this month.

The projects require environmental reviews, special permits and site plan approvals before moving forward with any construction.