

COVER STORY

The Changing Face of Milwaukee: Post office rehab, other projects to transform downtown (Video)

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Developer Matt Garrison wants to turn the streets around Milwaukee's downtown U.S. Postal Service building into a 24/7 neighborhood where new towers can grow out of the ground.

Garrison, managing principal of R2 Cos. in Chicago, released details about an eventual redevelopment of the roughly 1-million-square-foot building on West St. Paul Avenue. Its first floor facing the sidewalk would become retail space. Its back facing the river would have restaurants, bars or event space with outdoor seating. Its top floor would become "creative office" space with access to a green, rooftop deck.

Eventually, glass towers with offices, apartments or hotels could be built near the river east and west of the building.

"You don't just work there, you also hang out there after work," Garrison said. "Maybe some of the people live there. There are a lot of different reasons to go there, so you don't go to the downtown on a weekend and it's a ghost town."

Major projects like that are popping up across downtown Milwaukee to transform forsaken blocks into places that bustle both day and night. There are a few places that

are already that animated, like the 3rd Ward and some blocks of North Milwaukee Street. In the years to come, more parts of downtown could become areas where, in the words of developer Rick Barrett, once people get there, "they feel like they've arrived somewhere."

Barrett-Lo Visionary Development's 44-story Couture apartment tower will help enliven the downtown lakefront when it opens in 2019. It will have apartments for more than 500 residents, retail space and a street-level public transit concourse. The Couture will replace the Downtown Transit Center building at 909 E. Michigan St., which generated little to no activity.

"It gives people from the outlying counties a destination at the lakefront," Barrett said of the Couture. "I see that as a bustling area. I think that's probably what the Downtown Transit Center was initially intended to be. It just never was created in the right way. Where we're changing that, in a lot of ways, is we're creating a residential piece, a density piece."

Projects also are in the works to add density and destinations to a block of Van Buren Street that currently is mostly a place people pass through.