

The Berkshire Eagle NEWS

Thomas Krens envisions project that includes model railroad museum, Mohawk Theater renovation



The Mohawk Theater on Main Street in downtown North Adams is set for redevelopment, according to a development plan released by the city.

Posted Friday, December 4, 2015 4:02 am

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NORTH ADAMS — A multi-faceted development plan unveiled by city officials on Wednesday features a model railroad and architecture museum at Western Gateway Heritage State Park as well as redevelopment of the Mohawk Theater.

The three-pronged proposal, spearheaded by Mass MoCA visionary Thomas Krens, also includes the construction of his previously announced Global Contemporary Collection and Museum at the city's Harriman-West Airport grounds.

The full details will be announced during a special event at 10 a.m. Saturday at the park featuring former Massachusetts Govs. Michael Dukakis and William Weld. Architect Richard Gluckman will also be on hand.

“There's a ton of horsepower behind this, and I think that's one of the many things makes it so compelling,” Mayor Richard Alcombright said when reached by The Eagle on Wednesday.

The museum at Western Gateway Heritage State Park — to be housed in the park's largest building, just past the Freight Yard Pub restaurant — is described in the press release as an “extreme model railroad and contemporary architecture” museum.

It's the first major announcement regarding redevelopment of the park, a former freight yard controlled by the North Adams Redevelopment Authority, since negotiations with the group of investors known as the Greylock Market fell apart earlier this year.

The railroad and contemporary architecture museum would not affect current tenants like the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Visitors Museum or the North Adams Historical Society's North Adams

Museum of History and Science, Alcombright said.

The nature of a model railroad museum offers a “connectivity to our industrial past,” said the mayor, who noted that the redevelopment of Western Gateway Heritage State Park has been a “passion” of his since shortly after he took office.

The Mohawk Theater, which first opened on Main Street in 1938, has been closed since 1991 but is often a subject of discussion regarding revitalizing the city's downtown. The press release does not elaborate on the plans for its restoration and reuse.

Krens, a Williamstown resident and former director of the Solomon Guggenheim Foundation in New York City, announced his plans for a global contemporary museum at the airport in August. The plans, unveiled at a city airport commission meeting, outlined a privately funded, 160,000-square-foot collection of some 400 works of art.

“The basic concept is to work with a group of essentially investors to put together a world class collection of contemporary art,” he said at the time.

The development plans, according to the press release, align with goals set out by the city's Vision 2030 Master Plan and nonprofit North Adams Partnership's Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Krens seeks to create a “cultural corridor” in the valley that connects North Adams and Williamstown with his developments complementing the existing institutions of Mass MoCA, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, the Williamstown Theatre Festival, and the Williams College Museum of Art.

Former governors Dukakis and Weld are noted in the press release as each having an instrumental role in the creation of Mass MoCA. The Dukakis administration provided the initial burst of state funding for Mass MoCA and Weld crafted “the blueprint and economic model that led to full public and private funding for Mass MoCA,” the press release stated.



Old train cars and a caboose, historic fixtures at Western Gateway Heritage State Park in North Adams, may soon get a new neighbor. A multi-faceted development plan unveiled by city officials on Wednesday features a model railroad and architecture museum at the park as well as redevelopment of the Mohawk Theater.



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