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Project of the Month: GGP begins construction on The SoNo Collection - a \$525 million ground-up retail center in Norwalk

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Norwalk, CT GGP has begun construction on The SoNo Collection, a \$525 million ground-up retail center located in the revitalized downtown area. The project includes just over 700,000 s/f of retail including its two main anchors Nordstrom and Bloomingdale's. This will be Nordstrom's first store in southern Connecticut, and for Bloomingdale's this will be their first in the state.

In addition to the two anchors, it will include a mix of national, regional and first to market stores, as well as 40,000 s/f of food-and-beverage tenants. The project is roughly 60% leased and will open in October 2019 when construction is complete.

The highly visible site is located adjacent to the heavily traveled I-95 where it meets Rte. 7, Rte. 1 and the Metro North commuter railroad. Located in the center of Fairfield County, it is expected to draw regionally. It will become an integral part of Norwalk's existing downtown which includes the Maritime Aquarium, Stepping Stones Museum for Children, Lockwood Mathews Mansion Museum and Waypointe district. It is adjacent to the waterfront and a short walk to the historic SoNo area and its existing collection of restaurants and local retailers.

The SoNo Collection has been designed to be a 21st century retail center and not a traditional fortress mall. Classic brick materials found in the local architecture are utilized in a contemporary way to complement rather than mimic or clash with the surrounding buildings. Transparency is built into the structure with street storefronts, upper level windows, and multiple on-street entrances used to encourage interaction between the street and the interior of the center. This design will encourage visitors within the center to also explore the surrounding neighborhood and attractions.

Included in the building is 85,000 s/f of public realm area including plazas, indoor/outdoor sculpture garden, and rooftop green space. True street retail will serve to activate West Ave. and North Water St. and provide a direct link to adjacent properties.

The project also has 3,000 structured parking spaces that have been designed with the visitor in mind. The latest parking technologies will be employed and valet parking will be provided for convenience. The garage design includes clean ceiling finishes and a 60-foot structural grid to reduce columns that restrict visibility. GGP has also contributed \$550,000 towards the establishment of a convenient circulator system that will allow visitors to The SoNo Collection and the surrounding attractions to move around without driving and parking at multiple locations.

City and state support was also critical to getting construction started. Under the leadership of mayor Harry Rilling and the common council, the city provided a seven-year enterprise zone tax abatement for the project which was important in attracting GGP to the area. The state's Department of Economic and Community Development, headed by deputy commissioner Tim Sullivan, provided \$4 million from their Brownfield fund to assist with soil remediation.

This support is expected to pay dividends. "The construction of The SoNo Collection is going to have a significant economic impact to the area," said Timothy Sheehan, executive director of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency. Impacts will include 2,500 permanent jobs generated by the center, as well as an additional 2,000 construction jobs while being built. This is significant to Norwalk and its population of 88,000. In addition to jobs, retailers at the center are expected to generate \$23 million in annual sales taxes to the state.

"The SoNo Collection's location and design will not only serve Norwalk's growing downtown population, but also make it a destination and draw people from 10-15 miles away," said Doug Adams, senior development at GGP. Its draw, combined with Norwalk's existing attractions and assets, will create more business for everyone.

"It's bringing in a lot of retail traffic into the area that otherwise wouldn't be coming to Norwalk," said Sheehan.