

Developing Commercial Space In The Face of Climate Change

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The newly re-constructed foundation for a new Burger King at the site of Ventnor Plaza. Photo credit: Isaac Linsk.

VENTNOR, N.J. – Sitting on Wellington Avenue between the bay and the marsh that separates it from Atlantic City, the *Ventnor Plaza* has served most of Absecon Island as the closest place to get groceries, go to the gym, or mail a package. However, the plaza's positioning in what was originally marshland leaves it in a vulnerable position when it comes to flooding and other adverse weather conditions that affect the Jersey Shore each year.



Wood framing is strewn about the Burger King construction site after heavy winds knocked them down. Hurricane clips hang on the remaining foundation after the storm. Photo credit: Isaac Linsk.

In 2022, the plaza property was sold to Mark Greco of *MLG Realty* and *4Sale Realty*. As a New Jersey resident and someone that has lived in Ventnor for a number of years, Greco wanted to improve the plaza who's many storefronts had sat vacant for years.

"When we purchased it, it was half empty," Greco said. "There had been vacancy here for years, And in this business, that was an opportunity for us because I know what I can do. You know, I lived in Ventnor. So, while our properties are kind of scattered all over, this is in my backyard. And we shop here. My wife shops in Acme all the time, So we knew what we could do here. It just needed attention. And the previous owner was from out of state and you know, didn't have the same level of focus that we do."

Some of the most notable changes that Greco and his partners in the project have already implemented are things you might not even see, but rather most of the infrastructure that supports the plaza. All of the plumbing, concrete, and other industrial elements that comprise the skeleton of the plaza were more than half a century old.

"Hundreds of feet of at this point," Chris Roesly of Roesly Plumbing, one of Greco's partners on the project, said. "Hundreds of feet of piping underground between the storm, installing new storm systems and inlets and structures to, you know, water services and water mains, sewer mains, sanitary piping, even all the gas piping from from from what was underground to what was up on the roof pretty much has been, you know, sifted through."



A nearly complete construction site sits in the parking lot of the Ventnor Plaza, It will host a Starbucks and a Greens and Grains upon its completion in Summer 2024. Photo credit: Isaac Linsk.

While the plumbing is out of the average shoppers view, the plaza's parking lot and sidewalks have gone through some extensive repairs. The main parking lot out front of the Acme supermarket is being raised several feet to prevent flood risks and over 7000 feet of concrete curb being poured around the property.

Since the purchase of the property in 2022, Greco has already accepted several new tenants into vacant spaces at the plaza.

One of the earliest to open was Provenza, a South American Style restaurant and banquet hall that opened its doors in June of 2023. The building Provenza sits in used to host a Chinese buffet and Hollywood Video movie rental store.

Greco has been hosting weekly meetings with his partners at Provenza to discuss the status of the project. The building has been standing for over half a century and serves as a testament to the kind of improvements that Greco is trying to implement around the plaza.

"This is an unusual construction," Greco said. "The building that we're sitting in right now is up on pilings. It doesn't sit on the ground. So even if the place were to flood and all the sand under the parking lot washed away and you know, (weather) catastrophes, the building is literally sitting on pilings suspended. So there is actually a gap underneath of the floor that we're walking on. There's a gap underneath of there between the actual ground and the top of the pilings that the floor is sitting on, and this building's been standing for 60 years."

Two of the most notable additions to the property that Greco and company are installing are two new buildings in the plaza's parking lot. One is going to host a Starbucks and a Greens and Grains which is a local health-food chain. The other is going to become a Burger King.

The construction on the Starbucks/Greens and Grains building is nearly finished but the Burger King building has recently faced a bit of a setback.

During the heavy storms in early March, sustained heavy winds caused the partial framing of the Burger King site to crumble.

"I've been building for decades and I've never seen it before," Greco said. "I was really shocked when it happened. But just talking to the building inspectors here evidently that happens. They were telling us horror stories about homes that were going up and came back down and things like that."

Luckily for the team, it only took a short three day period for the wood to be removed and replaced from the site.

In order to prevent further framing faults, hurricane clips were added in order to keep the site structurally sound. Even with the clips installed, shore towns like Ventnor face construction risks as a result of the often stormy weather.

"It's the entire structure that locks everything into place," Roesly said. "So if you're midway and you have high sustained winds, it starts rocking...and then it's just like a battering ram. You have one truss that comes loose and that one truss like dominoes."

Construction is expected to wrap soon on both of the new buildings with the Burger King having a projected opening in May and the Starbucks in the early summer.

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