



Topgolf rendering courtesy Aria Group. Other renderings courtesy Gensler.

3. RIVER DISTRICT

The first shovel hit the ground on Nov. 29, 2023, to signify that “New Orleans is rising at the River District,” said Louis Lauricella, co-managing member of the River District Neighborhood Investors, LLC. RDNI was the team selected in 2021 by the Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Convention Center Authority to develop a mixed-use neighborhood and community on 40 acres of riverfront property adjacent to the Convention Center. River District will include entertainment, hotel, restaurants, retail, office space, 900 mixed-income condos and apartments (450 affordable and workforce housing), district-wide stormwater management, centrally located park, resilient power grid, and next-generation digital infrastructure and green spaces.

River District has received a commitment from Shell’s Gulf of Mexico operations and its 800 employees to anchor the 142,000 square foot, multi-story Class A office building. Topgolf has committed to open a 67,000 square foot facility on Tchoupitoulas Street. River District is expected to generate \$43 million of net new annual tax revenues, more than \$1 billion in economic activity, 9,000 construction jobs, and 6,000 projected permanent jobs.

“The result of a bold vision and three years of intentional planning, the River District reflects the time-honored New Orleans connection points of resiliency and inclusiveness and will serve as a national model of how neighborhoods can be responsibly built,” Lauricella said.

Construction projects will kick off after 15 months of infrastructure work, which includes new roads and sewer and utility lines, followed by traffic improvements and a transportation system that will feature bus rapid transit, rideshare, taxi drop-off and pick-up locations, space for pedestrians and cyclists. Parts of the River District development are slated to open in early 2025.

RDNI has pledged at least 30% participation of small



and emerging businesses (SEB) and disadvantaged business enterprises (DBE) in development, construction, design, professional services, and goods/services. A total of \$1.5 million has been spent with SEB-DBEs through 2023. “Equity and community impact are at the heart of our planning for this historic development. We are committed to meet a minimum of 30% SEB/DBE participation,” Lauricella said. “There will be numerous opportunities for partnership within this new neighborhood.”

RDNI has participated in 67 community, general outreach, stakeholder, and public meetings with residents, minority and women-owned businesses, and business groups for regulatory approvals, direct requests, and general information sessions. But the transparency of the group came into question when the New Orleans City Council raised concerns at its Jan. 4 meeting.

Among the concerns were rushing through a \$22 million property tax break to the River District developers for Shell’s office building, and a 35-year agreement authorizing the New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority Economic Growth & Development District and the River District Neighborhood Investors Subdistrict to raise sales and hotel taxes by up to 2% and use revenues for infrastructure development. The approval bypassed City Council.

The controversy spurred RDNI partners to author an open letter addressing the controversies.

“We’ve been criticized of late for ‘rushing’ consideration of a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Property Taxes) tax incentive on the new LEED-certified office building that is part of the development. The reality is that we worked for months and finalized with city and state officials in May 2023 a process for consideration of any PILOTs. We have followed to the letter the processes and procedures for review and approval in the most recent request, consistent with other PILOTs awarded in the City of New Orleans. While the office building PILOT will forgo an estimated \$21.6 million in property taxes (based on construction cost estimates) for the first 15 years, right now that same undeveloped and fallow property delivers \$0 in property taxes. Further, once built, the office building will generate approximately \$24.7 million in new sales taxes from company expenditures, the 800+ office workers’ spending, visitor spending, and a restaurant operating in the building.”

The open letter was signed by RDNI LLC partners Shawn Barney, CLB Porter; Robert Boh, Boh Bros.; Brian Gibbs, BG Development; Lauren Gibbs, Gibbs Construc-

Project description: River District is a 40-acre, mixed-use, riverfront neighborhood development adjacent to the Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Convention Center. It will feature entertainment, greenspaces, hotel, restaurants, retail, offices, and mixed-income apartments and condos. A 142,000 square foot, Class A office building will be anchored by Shell’s Gulf of Mexico operations. Topgolf has committed to the development as an anchor sports and entertainment venue on Tchoupitoulas Street. River District is expected to generate \$43 million of net new annual tax revenues and more than \$1 billion in economic activity.

Project cost: \$1 billion

Start date: Groundbreaking, Nov. 29, 2023

Expected completion date: 2025 (For updates, visit <https://riverdistrictnola.com/>)

Owner/developer and project manager: River District Neighborhood Investors, LLC (RDNI)

Construction, design, finance, investor, and development teams: Lauricella Land Company; Cypress Equities; JCH Properties; AMG Properties; CLB Porter LLC; Webre Consulting; VPG; Gibbs Construction; Boh Bros. Construction; Gensler; Broadmoor; Aria Group; BG Development; Manning Architects; Stantec; Stratum Engineering; and several others.

tion; Tara Hernandez, JCH Properties+; Louis Lauricella, Lauricella Land; Chris Maguire, Cypress Equities; Michael Meredith, VPG Construction; and Nicole Webre, Webre Consulting.

The letter continued: “In sum, we have led and continue to lead with equity. This project is a net add for the City of New Orleans and its residents. We are creating a community. It is the result of years of intensive planning, discussions, public meetings, input, and investment. This is not the time to succumb to political divisiveness, scare tactics, or misinformation. This is the time to come together to make our beloved New Orleans even greater. New Orleans is rising at the River District.”

-CityBusiness Staff Reports