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A safe home away from home

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THE RECORD
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Demolition crews have turned an aged office building in Clifton into rubble, clearing the way for what a developer plans as Wall Street's next data center in North Jersey.

Home to an office for Automatic Data Processing Inc. until the company left in late 2008, the property at 201 and 205 Main Ave. is on track to become a critical facility serving the country's financial sector.

Data centers have quietly sprouted up in New Jersey in recent years as Wall Street looks across the Hudson River for space to house data-rich computer and backup offices should disaster strike Manhattan. Among notable North Jersey data centers is one under construction in Mahwah for the parent company of the New York Stock Exchange.

As with most data centers, whose locations companies try to keep secret, people associated with the proposed Clifton data center will say little, if anything, about the project. But Clifton officials expect the tenant to be Credit Suisse, the giant Swiss investment bank.

Two representatives from Zurich-based Credit Suisse, which has offices in Manhattan, met with Clifton's Economic Development Committee this fall, according to Mayor Jim Anzaldi and Councilman Joe Cupoli, who attended the meeting.

Ed Russo, president of Hackensack-based Russo Development, which is behind the Clifton project, declined to comment on a prospective tenant. In response to written questions about possible tenants, Russo would only say: "The project is currently speculative."

(The Mahwah data center also is a Russo project. The development company says it owns about 1.5 million square feet of New Jersey's roughly 6 million square feet of data center and backup office space, or 25 percent.)

A Credit Suisse spokesman said the bank hadn't settled on a location in New Jersey, New York or Connecticut for a new data center and declined to comment further.

Key to data centers' locations are access to lots of power — since the large computer rooms need massive amounts of air-conditioning — and fiber-optic networks for super-fast communication.

Based on the meeting with the bank's officials, Anzaldi said Credit Suisse's eventual arrival is a "pretty definite thing," and Cupoli said he was "left with the impression that it was a done deal."

Documents filed in Clifton by Russo Development, which bought the property from ADP this summer, refer only to a nameless "tenant." The two-story facility of 280,500 square feet will house rooms of powerful computer servers, batteries and air-conditioning equipment, as well as "emergency office" space in the event of disaster ("displacement event") in Manhattan, 12 miles away.

The facility "will be one of their largest and most important mission-critical facilities in the world," Russo Development said in documents supporting zoning variances for the property. A hearing is scheduled for Nov. 18.



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Russo even submitted a transportation plan outlining how this unnamed tenant, invoking protocols of "Business Continuity Planning," would transport 465 additional "critical staff" members from Manhattan via bus, mini-bus and limousine to the Clifton facility, which under normal circumstances would have only 25 employees.

The Clifton property at Main Avenue and Allwood Road has supported various commercial uses for at least a century, according to documents filed by Russo. A hotel was on the site in the early 20th century. General Electric and DeCamp Bus Lines Inc. used the property until ADP took it over the 1970s for use as back offices and check processing.

Anzaldi called the proposed data center a "big win" for Clifton. Not only would the data center bring a "wonderful, wonderful corporate name" it would generate significant tax revenues for the town but not congestion.

"Even though it doesn't create lots of jobs," Anzaldi added, "it doesn't create a lot of traffic."

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