

From the Pittsburgh Business Times:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/print-edition/2011/01/21/former-seagate-building-research-center.html>

Developers plan to convert former Seagate building into research center

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times - by Tim Schooley

Date: Friday, January 21, 2011, 6:00am EST

An ad-hoc group of business leaders and politicians are working on a plan that could transform the former Seagate building into a new applied materials research center.

Under the code name AMBER, a loose acronym which stands for "Advanced Materials Business Creation Education and Research," the plan, which is by no means a final deal and still needs tenants and investors, calls for Monroeville-based [RJ Lee Group](#) to serve as a master tenant for approximately 120,000 square feet of space in the building, including its specialized clean rooms and lab space.

As part of the plan, RJ Lee, a 30-year-old engineering firm involved in a variety of applied materials and environmental practices, would lease space to other tenants in need of quality research space.

Tenants could include: the business development firm 113 Industries; the Green Center USA, a new economic development nonprofit that would operate as a research organization focused on environmentally friendly chemical discoveries; and the Community College of Allegheny County, as well as a variety of other advanced materials and nanotechnology companies, according to the developers involved in the plan.

Alex Sculli, president of RJ Lee, said the project is a transformational opportunity for both the city and the region's economy.

"This is all about Pittsburgh's place as an advanced materials center," he said. "This is sort of a new industrial revolution. It kind of takes the place of what Pittsburgh was before."

He emphasized that RJ Lee is considering other locations for a new office as well, but he acknowledged the rare facilities in the Seagate property present a unique opportunity to pursue a larger goal of bringing a host of companies and research organizations into the same building to create new businesses from academic research.

The plan projects both huge potential gains — upwards of 700 well-paying jobs — and high costs, with an estimated \$18 million needed to bring the building's facilities up to date and convert it into a building that can house the research center.

A key partner in the plan, **Razi Imam**, a principal of 113 Industries, described the project as very early stage, but said the building is a phenomenal asset for Pittsburgh that could help bridge the business potential of academia with the corporations in need of fresh research.

"Larger companies are having difficulty innovating technology and creating manufacturing jobs," he said. "At the same time, our universities, especially in our region, are creating some of the best discoveries in advanced materials."

Larry Rosen, CEO of Strip District-based [Pressure Chemical Co.](#), who is leading the local campaign to establish the Green Center USA in Pittsburgh, said setting up in the Seagate building with RJ Lee as a co-tenant and potential client would help the Green Center save between \$2 million and \$3 million establishing its own facility.

Rosen is hopeful for the plan, which he believes could help create new growing companies that will lead to other new buildings to be developed around it in what he said "could be a most exciting development for the Pittsburgh skyline."

The former Seagate building is located along the Allegheny River in the Strip District near the convention center.

CLEAN AND EMPTY

The opportunity derives from the fact that California-based disk drive maker [Seagate Technology Inc.](#), for whom the building was built and designed, left in 2008, leaving the building mostly empty with a lease that extends until 2017.

The building includes some of the region's only clean rooms, which are built with a vibration-dampening design that allows nanometer-scale precision fabrication in an environment with near constant temperature, pressure and humidity, according to marketing material for the property. The building also offers more than 24,000 square feet of other lab space, as well as plenty of high-tech communication infrastructure and networking equipment designed for collaboration.

Don Reimann, a senior vice president for [Colliers International](#) who represents the property for Seagate, said the building will soon be less empty than it was. He said there are leases out for a tenant of the fourth floor and another could be in the works that would take a total of 60,000 square feet off the market. That still leaves 140,000 square feet left available in the building, Reimann added, including all the lab space that the AMBER plan needs most.

He said there have been back and forth discussions with RJ Lee for some time but no formal agreement, although he said he hopes the AMBER plan comes together.

"It's a great building. We'd love to see the rest of it taken by someone. Hopefully, the RJ Lee group can proceed to a lease and get this done," he said.

The Buncher Co., which owns the building, was not immediately available for comment.

GATHERING SUPPORT

To help garner support for the project, the AMBER group is holding an event in the building on Jan. 21 that will be hosted by Democratic state Sen. **Wayne Fontana** and **Jim Roddey**. The working lunch will include a brainstorming session about how to make the proposal a reality.

Sciulli said the plan is to get potential stakeholders together, whether they're businesses, politicians, foundations or investors, to both gauge interest and ideas. Those invited to the event ranged from groups such as the Allegheny Conference and Innovation Works to [Carnegie Mellon University](#) professors to companies such as Plextronics and ATRP Solutions.

Randy Eager, CEO of ATRP, a recent Carnegie Mellon spinoff that operates in 800 square feet of lab space on the university's campus, has learned first-hand about the lack of lab space in the region from his own recent searches for new space.

"It is very difficult to find high-quality lab space that includes hoods together with wet lab space. Options are limited," Eager said, who added ARTP could be a tenant in the center.

While he said it was difficult to predict whether such a plan comes to be, Roddey said the proposal has generated strong bipartisan political support as well as support from the region's foundation and education community.

"They've been successful; they have a track record of success; and their idea is solid," he said of the AMBER plan. "This one I believe has great merit."

tschooley@bizjournals.com | (412) 208-3826