

# City, residents want Orange train station open

By Halley Bondy/For The Star-Ledger

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ORANGE -- Leaders and community activists in Orange want to revitalize the city's downtown, making its historic main train station the crown jewel in an upgraded plaza.

But the station's building is rarely open, and commuters and neighbors lament the lack of an indoor community space. The city has a plan to open the doors of its downtown station, but the site's historic designation has slowed the process, leaving many commuters out in the cold.



David Gard/New Jersey

Local News ServiceOrange officials say the appearance of the crumbling train station is crucial for revitalizing the fallen city, and are trying to open it more often to commuters and the public.

The buildings at the Tony Galento Plaza and Highland Avenue stations were first closed in the 1950's, according to the Orange Bicentennial

Journal, a publication compiled by the city in 2006. Since then, NJ Transit has kept a skeleton staff of ticket sellers for about four hours on weekday mornings in the station downtown, and the Highland Avenue buildings have been shut down completely. The stations attract almost 1,400 commuters on weekdays, according to New Jersey Transit spokesman Dan Stessel.

"We'd like them open so we don't have to freeze outside," said Karen Wells, an Orange resident. "We pay the same fare that South Orange pays. We should have the same services."

Wells said that, for years, she has been asking the city for shelter from the cold. Stessel said the train stations, which opened in the 1830's, are recognized as state historic sites and would take time to alter.

"Changes would cost a lot, and take a lot of time," said Stessel. "But the station is older than we've been around, and there are some building limitations because they're historic."

Deputy director of planning and development Chris Mobley said the city is negotiating with NJ Transit to open a welcome center inside the downtown station's building. The center would serve as an information hub for visitors. and would extend the building's operating hours to the afternoons.

Mobley said he hopes that any progress at the downtown Orange station would spark development at Highland Avenue, which is located in the city's Valley neighborhood, an up-and-coming arts district.

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