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The town of New Milford preserves its past while growing its future

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Mid way through 2010, the town of New Milford is poised for an economic development expansion rivaling that of any municipality in Connecticut. When it began, over 300 years ago, New Milford epitomized the new frontier in Connecticut. Stradling the banks of the Housatonic River, it represented the future for Connecticut's agrarian and 18th Century industrial economy. Now in its fourth century, New Milford still values its farming roots but has repositioned itself as a community with an entirely different economic future. Changing demographics over the past decade, as well as significant infrastructure improvements by state and local government, have created an economic platform where numerous business sectors can thrive.

Located in western Connecticut just north of Danbury, New Milford is the state's largest geographic municipality, with a strong manufacturing sector, a stable and growing retail sector, a solid service economy and a steadily rebounding residential development market. A heightened focus on economic development since 2006 has delivered public infrastructure improvements, followed by private sector investments.

The expansion of CT Rte. 7 by the state DOT is perhaps the most significant of the public improvements. Two lanes have been added from the New Milford/Brookfield border to Veterans Bridge, leading into the town's Village Center. For half of that five mile distance the new four lane highway is median-divided, providing a corporate campus feel to the entryway into New Milford. Just beyond the Candlewood Valley Country Club, the median disappears as you enter the regional retail corridor that New Milford hosts for surrounding communities. In late 2009, the state opened a long-awaited extension of Super 7, by-passing the Four Corners section of Brookfield. As a result, one can now reach New Milford from I-84 in Danbury in under ten minutes.

These improvements to Rte. 7, along with a major improvement to the intersection of Rtes. 67 & 202 near the Village Center, have made all of New Milford easily accessible from Fairfield County and Westchester County in New York. The residential market in New Milford is consequently in prime position for significant rebound, which will further increase the demand for additional retail expansion. Manufacturing and industrial service mainstays like Kimberly-Clark, Neeltran, Stratus Foods and Chemical Marketing Concepts continue to grow and are regularly joined by smaller, growth oriented companies in the production segment of New Milford's economy.

The town recently embarked on another major economic development initiative; a one million gallon expansion of the existing wastewater treatment plant. This \$30 million project was authorized by voters and construction began in late 2009. Once completed in 2011 the plant will be upgraded to current environmental technology and allow for the handling of two million gallons of wastewater per day. This will make hundreds of commercial and industrial acres fully available for new development.

In addition to infrastructure investment, the Town of New Milford has signaled its desire for new business investment by streamlining its permit process for new development and business expansion. In late 2009, a Development Service Team (DST) was created to informally meet with business owners and project developers in advance of filing land use and building applications. The DST is led by the economic development supervisor and includes the zoning enforcement officer, wetlands enforcement officer, building official, health director, fire marshal, town engineer, public works director and sewer commission superintendent. Having all departments involved in reviewing plan feasibility has assisted numerous business projects in moving forward swiftly, as well as saving extensive pre-development costs for business owners.

New Milford's Economic Development Commission continues to focus on new opportunities and creating tools to spur development. Their strategic plan has fostered the creation of an economic development corporation to facilitate new project development, create and manage revolving loan funds and providing small business incentive grants. The town council has included seed funds for this corporation in the current budget. The town also continues to maintain an attractive and stable property tax rate.

Growing the economic future of New Milford is the top priority of mayor Patricia Murphy, the town council and the EDC. Preservation of New Milford's historic and quintessential New England aesthetic remains a co-equal priority. In addition to the town's many remaining farms, the jewel of New Milford is the classic Village Center with its many restaurants, shops and community services all located around the longest town green in Connecticut. Visitors to New Milford's Village Center have observed that it is "Where New England Begins".

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