



nerej

Nolan explains how New Milford emerges as a major contributor to the regional recovery from the recession

July 14, 2011 - Connecticut

The Town of New Milford is emerging from the recent recession as a major contributor to the recognition of Western Connecticut as the growth region of Connecticut. While not all parts of the local economy have rebounded, several important sectors have experienced dramatic improvement. The New Milford industrial sector has continued to experience significant investment and workforce expansion. The retail marketplace has been quite stable with signs of substantial growth on the horizon. The only lagging segment, as in most of Connecticut and the Northeast, is the residential development market. Included in the Danbury labor market (aka Western Conn.), New Milford has a highly skilled workforce and boasts a markedly low unemployment rate when compared with the rest of Connecticut.

For the uninitiated, New Milford is located just north of Danbury on CT Rtes. 7 and 202, and is the state's largest geographic municipality. A heightened focus on economic development since 2006 has delivered key public infrastructure improvements (\$170 million) which have been followed by private sector investments.

The expansion of CT Rte. 7 by the state 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. The newest additions to that corridor include an Aldi's Grocery Store (expected to open in the fall of 2011) and a recently announced Kohl's (expected to open in March 2012). Kohl's will anchor a 280,000 s/f plaza known as Litchfield Crossings. Other national tenant signings by the developers are anticipated throughout the summer. In addition to the local improvements to Rte. 7, the completion of the Brookfield by-pass of Super 7 in late 2009 has added energy to the retail market. As a result, one can now reach New Milford from I-84 in Danbury in less than ten minutes.

The Rte. 7 improvements, along with a major improvement to the intersection of Res. 67 and 202 near the Village Center, have made all of New Milford easily accessible from Fairfield County, Conn. and Westchester County, N.Y. Consequently, manufacturing and industrial service mainstays like Kimberly-Clark, Neeltran, and Chemical Marketing Concepts continue to grow and are regularly joined by smaller, growth oriented manufacturing companies. Small industrial start-ups are nurtured in a lower cost environment than neighboring regions, while still providing great access to the markets they serve. New Milford continues to maintain an attractive and very stable property tax rate.

Another major economic development initiative is the expansion of our wastewater treatment plant.

Expected to be completed this October, the plant will now boast current environmental technology and allow for the handling of two million gallons of wastewater per day (a one million gallon increase). This \$30 million investment will make hundreds of commercial and industrial acres fully available for new development.

The Town of New Milford has also signaled its desire for new business investment by streamlining its permit process for new development and business expansions. Our Development Service Team (DST), launched in 2010, informally meets with business owners and developers in advance of filing land use and building applications. Led by the economic development supervisor, it includes the zoning officer, wetlands officer, building official, health director, fire marshal, town engineer, public works director and the Sewer Commission. Having all departments involved in reviewing plan feasibility has successfully assisted business projects in moving forward swiftly, saving extensive pre-development costs for businesses.

Another tool developed to encourage business growth is the New Milford Economic Development Corporation. Its role is to facilitate new project development, create and manage revolving loan funds and to provide small business incentive grants. The town has provided seed funds for this corporation along with several local banks and community supporters. A revolving loan fund for façade improvement in the Village Center is preparing to launch at this writing.

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. Preserving our past - Growing our future!

For information on doing business in New Milford, visit newmilfordedc.org.

Vincent Nolan is economic development supervisor for the Town of New Milford.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540