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How have new regulations in Simsbury put high quality development on the fast track?

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Simsbury has adopted two new regulations intent on bringing high quality development to town. These two new regulations, a form-based zoning code for town center and a planned area development zoning regulation (PAD), allow for proposals with high density housing combined with retail, restaurants and offices.

The Simsbury Center Code is the first customized, form-based zoning code in the state. Unlike traditional or conventional zoning, form-based uses physical form as the organizing principle for the code (Form-Based Codes Institute). This zoning code was created as part of an intensive, community-consensus building process called a charrette. The charrette created a shared community vision for the center, which was then codified.

The Center Code streamlines the approval process, allowing developers faster approvals for applications that follow the new requirements. This provides predictability for developers, making applications for Simsbury Center less costly for them as well as the town. And people are already taking notice - the town was the recipient of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association's Implementation Award as well as 2011 Honorable Mention from the Congress of New Urbanism New England chapter, recognizing it as a model for future design and implementation. "Simsbury has positioned itself for growth and development so that we can take advantage of the improving market to steer development the community desires our way," remarks Town Planner Hiram Peck.

Construction can already be seen in town, with Grove Capital LLC making improvements to Drake Hill Mall. They have built a 3,000 s/f bank building with double drive-through and 1,984 s/f of retail or food-related use. While there is serious interest in both, they are currently available.

Adjacent to the center is another exciting project, The Grist Mill, by Landworks Development LLC. The first PAD approved site, this innovative project features the renovation of an historic grist mill for a restaurant, Landworks Realty office, amenities for residences and additional leasable space. Adjacent to the mill will be townhomes and rental residences.

North of town center is one of the largest projects to come online, Dorset Crossing. Pioneered by The Keystone Companies LLC, Dorset Crossing will be anchored by Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center. There will be Class A medical office space as well as residential apartment, office, and retail.

These two new regulations are only the latest in a long list of reasons to choose Simsbury for headquartering a company, starting a business, or relocating. Simsbury has consistently positioned

itself as a premier town with all the amenities desirable to any workforce. Named by CNN Money as one of the Best Places to Live 2011, First Selectman Mary Glassman knows that "Simsbury continues to be a vibrant community where today's families can live, work and play, while preserving Simsbury's centuries-old charm."

Centrally located between Boston and New York, Simsbury is home to the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and the International Skating Center of Connecticut, where Olympians such as Michelle Kwan have trained. The proximity to the river and designation as Connecticut's only Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Cyclists shows the abundant opportunities for recreation. And for tourists and residents, Simsbury is the first and only town in Connecticut to be named to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Dozen Distinctive Destinations, which recognizes dynamic downtowns, attractive architecture, cultural landscapes and a commitment to sustainability and revitalization.

"Companies and site finders look for many factors in deciding where to locate," said Richard Correia, a veteran of commercial real estate and senior vice president of R.M. Bradley. "It's about the combination of a quick approval process combined with first class amenities that can make one community more attractive than another. We have that environment in Simsbury."

While there are many redevelopment opportunities throughout Simsbury, there are also two large parcels within town for new construction. Within town center is a 14-acre site targeted for high density housing, owned by Girard Brothers Corporation. And along a major commercial road, Rte. 44, there is a more than 18-acre site in Simsbury which can host a mixed-use project that also includes high-density housing.

Currently, Simsbury is in the process of creating Design Guidelines for Town Center, which will complement the new Center Code by synchronizing the design review process with the new zoning standards.

For more information on Simsbury or any of the sites mentioned, please contact Town Planner Hiram Peck.

Mary Glassman is first selectman for the Town of Simsbury, Conn.

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