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Wallingford's Route 5 retail corridor experiencing a construction "mini boom"

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With its high traffic count, Wallingford's Rte. 5 retail corridor is bucking the trend and undergoing a transformation. A number of car dealerships, a bank and a pharmacy are investing millions in new construction/renovation projects along Wallingford's Rte. 5 commercial spine, significantly improving the commercial landscape. In February, Executive Auto Group opened Fiat of Wallingford, one of only three dealerships in the state, spending close to \$500,000 to renovate and expand a former Dodge dealership on Rte. 5. According to Mark Altieri, director of operations, the dealership will be set up to sell Fiats initially, but will be adding Alfa Romeos and expanding the building to accommodate service on the site. Executive Auto, which also owns Executive Honda on Rte. 5, is banking on the fact that high-end auto dealers and those that diversify into other franchises are faring better during the current economic downturn. Besides the Fiat dealership, Executive Auto also renovated a former Saturn dealership on Rte. 5 and converted it into a Kia dealership.

Valenti Auto Sales is also constructing a 16,888 s/f, \$2.2 million addition to its existing Chevrolet dealership at 399 North Colony Rd. According to the owner, David Valenti, the dealership is tearing down most of the old facility and building new. The project includes a new showroom, service area and offices. Valenti was one of the Chevrolet dealers in Connecticut that was allowed to keep its franchise by General Motors. Like Executive, Valenti is also in the process of renovating and expanding its Porsche & Audi dealership on Rte. 5.

Besides the car dealerships, there is an uptick in commercial construction along Rte. 5 as well. TD Bank is expanding its presence in Wallingford. A division of TD Bank Group of Toronto, Canada, TD Bank is constructing a \$1.8 million branch bank at 928 North Colony Rd., directly in front of the Stop & Shop supermarket. The site was home to a former silver plating operation and had to be remediated prior to the start of construction.

In December, plans were submitted to Wallingford's Planning & Zoning Commission to raze the former Colony Lumber building at 665 North Colony Rd. to make way for a new 15,500 s/f retail plaza with a drive-through bank at one end. Plans for the plaza were originally submitted to Wallingford's Planning & Zoning Commission three years ago but were put on hold by the property's owner, Robert Weidenmann, until the economy showed signs of improving. Also undergoing a complete transformation along Rte. 5 is a newly expanded retail plaza at 920 South Colony Rd. scheduled for completion in September. The plaza, which totals 65,000 s/f, will be anchored by a 30,000 s/f Chef's Equipment Emporium. Preleasing activities have been brisk. New tenants include a 15,000 s/f Club 24 fitness center, an 11,000 s/f specialty food market and a 6,000 s/f Wine Chef. In February, a new CVS pharmacy opened at 865 North Colony Rd. Adding to the Rte. 5 transformation, the site will also include a 14,500 s/f retail store and a 6,800 s/f car wash and oil

change station. The CVS site formerly housed the 95 Gathering Place restaurant and Merriam Motors. Both were razed to accommodate the new development.

Commercial Expansions in Wallingford

Yalesville Veterinary Hospital at 322 Church St. is undergoing a 5,400 s/f expansion and renovation which is expected to be finished by April. The current hospital is located in a 150-year-old building. The vision, according to the hospital's owner Frank Kostolitz, "is to respect the old building" although the addition will have a more modern look. The \$1.2 million expansion project will double the size of the hospital, adding additional offices, an operating room and three examination rooms.

The Connecticut Department of Social Services has awarded Wallingford-based Community Health Network of Connecticut, Inc. a five-year contract to administer several of Connecticut's health care programs including its Medicaid, HUSKY and Charter Oak Plan programs. On January 1st, Community Health Network, headquartered at 11 Fairfield Blvd., began administering health care coverage to over 600,000 Connecticut families and individuals. Community Health Network leased an additional 23,000 s/f of office space at 4 Fairfield Blvd. and began hiring an additional 100 people to administer the contract. The contract is estimated to cost up to \$73 million in the first year alone.

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