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The Metro Hartford region is ready for the spring thaw and a new direction for business development - by Rebecca Nolan

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Rebecca Nolan, MetroHartford Alliance

It is always good to get out of the office. I find it helps bring alternative perspective and clears my mind, giving me the opportunity to think about a new direction for business development.

As I began writing, temperatures were hitting the low 70s in greater Hartford – and it was only February! In the shadows of spring sunshine, we eagerly await the Dunkin' Donuts Park opening in Hartford, the new crown jewel of the Hartford Yard Goats. Minor league baseball will come to the city April 13th. While the project has seen its share of wrinkles, it, along with many other projects in the region, are ready to contribute to the economy.

During an annual State of the Town, hosted by the Newington Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Roy Zartarian provided an economic development update, siting expansion projects of existing business which all contribute to grand list growth. Several particularly interesting sites on the Berlin Turnpike offer retail opportunities, among other business development. A third Starbucks has opened its doors in town and there are many more acres available for development.

Windsor Station - Windsor, CT

Looking further north, the Bradley Development League (BDL), a partnership between the towns of East Granby, Suffield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks who all surround the Bradley International Airport, have experienced additional growth in the aerospace industry sector. With decades of experience in aerospace, many industry suppliers are increasing production and expanding real estate footprints.

Many companies within the four towns are part of the approximately 200 Connecticut companies supplying Pratt & Whitney, and these entities are “filling up the available real estate,” according to Windsor’s economic development director, Jim Burke. “An example would be the 600,000 s/f Addison Corporate Center which has reached near full occupancy thanks to several aerospace engineering firms. Engineering firms and aerospace component manufacturers are coming to or expanding in the BDL towns in part to support the contracts with United Technologies Corporation. Vacant industrial space is becoming hard to find. This is something we have not heard for years!

The Windsor Station apartment project with 130-units next to the commuter rail train has received a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) for the first 90 units and the remaining units are expected to receive the CO by April 1. Several local businesses have submitted applications to expand facilities. New retail pads are available and the 1st Phase plans for the 700-acres of mixed-use redevelopment, are moving forward at Great Pond Village, in Windsor.

Addison Corporate Center - Windsor, CT

Projects are also moving forward in East Granby, including the expansion of new office space, manufacturing, and warehouse spaces, some of which have taken advantage of the Bradley Development Zone Incentive. Several projects are going through the planning and zoning process and moving through to construction.

If you're a fan of microbreweries, the Broad Brook Brewery will open a new manufacturing facility and tap room just off Rte. 75 in Suffield (Mach One Industrial Center). Mach One still offers additional parcels for development. The Four Season Farm LLC, an international greenhouse developer will take ten acres for hydroponic farming. As announced by the Governor's office early in February, the farm plans to create 40 new jobs. Hydroponic farming is not new to Connecticut, as shown by the Israeli-based company H2O Farm, who continues to expand production in Guilford. And, at long last, along Rte. 75 in Windsor Locks, the Sidewalks Construction project has received DOT approval to install. This has been a life and death issue for the town, without exaggeration! Look for a posting of the RFP for bids this coming spring. And going back to microbreweries..., Windsor Locks has also approved new brewery regulations and has already seen prospects evaluating the town.

Dunkin' Donuts Park - Hartford, CT

There is no shortage of opportunities in the Bradley Development Zone. Did you know manufacturers and other airport-related businesses may qualify for incentives under the Bradley Airport Development Zone including a 5-year, 80% local real estate tax abatement and 10-year, 25% state business tax credit?

Connecticut and the greater Hartford region continue to see new development opportunities. From foreign direct investment to local business expansions.

Winters grip is pulling me back, but I'm ready for a spring thaw and know many partners are working diligently to further opportunities for expansions, new developments, and foreign direct investment. Rebecca Nolan, EDP, is vice president, business development | MetroHartford Alliance and president, Connecticut Economic Development Association (CEDAS), Hartford, Conn.

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