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Location, location, location: Opportunities for businesses beckon in Fairfield, CT - by Mark Barnhart

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Location, Location, Location. It's what drives real estate decisions. Strategically located along the densely populated northeast corridor in the heart of Connecticut's Gold Coast, Fairfield is the ideal choice for many businesses. Just 50 miles from New York City, Fairfield affords easy access to I-95 and the Merritt Parkway, both regional and international airports and an impressive commuter rail system. Aside from its coveted location and unparalleled access to major transportation hubs, Fairfield possesses strong income demographics, a highly educated workforce, nationally acclaimed schools, top notch public services and an enviable quality of life. Fairfield is fortunate to be home to two outstanding private universities, adding to the town's diversity and rich talent base. Consistently ranked by various statewide and national publications as one of the best places to live, Fairfield continues to have a strong and diverse local economy, with businesses ranging from well-established companies such as R.C. Bigelow Tea to many smaller local establishments and entrepreneurial start-ups. It's easy to see why over 2,400 businesses have chosen to call Fairfield home.

Building upon these assets, Fairfield has embraced the principles of smart growth and transit oriented development. Nowhere is this commitment more evident than in the town's investment in Fairfield Metro Center, a 1.1 million s/f world-class, transit-oriented and mixed use development, anchored by a contemporary Metro North rail station, one of three in Fairfield. The first new main line station in nearly a century, Fairfield Metro, which opened in 2012, features platforms that can accommodate up to twelve rail cars as well as at grade parking for over 1,300 vehicles. A fully enclosed sky-bridge, with elevator service, allows easy passage between inbound and outbound platforms.

The new station and planned commercial development is fully integrated into a 35-acre site that offers panoramic views of nearby Long Island Sound and also includes a 10-acre waterfront nature preserve and park with public walking trails. As a leading example of smart growth and transit oriented development, Fairfield Metro Center is designed to provide a unique workplace and urban lifestyle environment in an attractive suburban campus setting. The Concourse Building, for which footings and foundations have already been completed, will feature a Metro North ticket office and commuter waiting area, 175-key hotel, a marketplace with grab & go eateries, full-service

restaurants and convenience retail.

The town recognizes that a major shift is occurring in how people want to be able to get to work. This is especially true for the next generation of rising talent. Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 are driving less and using public transportation more. Fairfield Metro Center, with its unique combination of onsite rail, car sharing and overall support for car-free living, is well positioned to take advantage of these trends, and to help businesses attract and retain the next generation of young talent that leading companies covet. Tenants will be able to walk from the train to their desks in minutes. Attracting and retaining top talent demands amenity rich, vibrant environments that integrate work with modern life.

Fairfield Metro Center is the centerpiece of a much larger economic development strategy for the area in which it is situated. Once the town's manufacturing and industrial hub, the area is already home to a diverse array of commercial, residential and industrial uses, and the town is actively encouraging the shift toward mixed use and transit-oriented development. New zoning regulations permit a broad range of commercial uses as well as higher density residential in close proximity to the new train station and lower on-site parking requirements in recognition of the availability of mass transit. This focus on transit-oriented development has already spurred new investment activity, high-lighted by a new 5-story, 140,000 s/f mixed-use development with 101 apartments on the doorstep of the new commuter rail station. A similarly-sized second phase is already in the works.

The town's Economic Development Department has been at the forefront of these efforts, and oversaw construction of the public portion of the Fairfield Metro Center development. The department offers siting and other technical assistance, and works proactively with businesses to successfully navigate the permitting and regulatory approval process.

For more information about commercial opportunities and how you can become a part of this dynamic and forward-thinking community, please contact the Fairfield Department of Economic & Community Development at mbarnhart@fairfieldct.org.

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