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Bristol's Centre Square is redefining downtown: 15-acre development site includes medical office facility - by Justin Malley

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The City of Bristol is excited to partner with developers and business owners on the development of Centre Square in the heart of downtown Bristol. Centre Square is a 15-acre development site that will soon host a 60,000 s/f medical office facility employing hundreds of medical professionals while drawing scores of patients to downtown Bristol. An adjacent portion of the property is being reserved for a mixed-use development project currently under discussion.

Approximately 6 acres of the property is available for development, with an ability to comfortably accommodate a variety of projects – residential, mixed-use, large sports/recreation projects, and other developments consistent with a downtown environment designed to be the hub of a progressive mid-sized city in Connecticut. As one example, the 6 acres could host 250,000 s/f of residential/retail/office space in addition to a multi-level parking structure. Log on to www.bristolcentresquare.com to learn more.

Centre Square is a redevelopment project several years in the making, with a strong development plan that focuses on what is both best for Bristol and best for developers and business owners on the site. Approximately 10 years ago the city purchased the shopping mall that formerly occupied the Centre Square site and quickly demolished the structure to enable downtown redevelopment. The city soon partnered with a private developer on a dynamic plan for redevelopment that included several mixed-use buildings with strong residential and retail components. Many in the community rallied around this plan, with hundreds signing up for pre-leases on apartment space and several new businesses popping up around the site. Unfortunately, the project, not unlike many others in the last several years, had trouble securing competitive financing during the economic downturn. Ultimately, the developer and the city agreed to part ways.

The city is now partnered with Bristol Hospital – a true anchor institution for the community, as one of the city's major employers and caregivers – on a dynamic ambulatory care center for Centre Square. As the deal with Bristol Hospital took shape, the city began an ambitious “master plan” project with the assistance of Milone & MacBroom (M&M), a highly regarded planning and civil

engineering firm. M&M was particularly adept at obtaining and incorporating the public's feedback into the master plan. What results from the city's collaboration with M&M is an all-encompassing Centre Square master plan that will guide planning and, importantly, private development on the site for years to come.

The city is currently constructing an access road for the property, with underground utilities, attractive streetscape, and other features one would expect in a modern downtown thoroughfare. Following the initial roadway construction are plans for a new streetscape surrounding the site, at least one additional internal roadway that can be tailored to best meet the needs of future development on the property, an internal parking area that can accommodate "spillover" parking needs of Centre Square and the surrounding area, and more.

In addition to its commitment to build infrastructure on the site, the city of Bristol is focused on supporting developers and business owners through a package of tax breaks and grant incentives. In addition to traditional incentives, Bristol is in the process of establishing a tax increment financing (TIF) district encompassing the site as an additional tool to encourage development on the site – both as a method of financing public infrastructure improvements and, importantly, as a way to offer private developers and business owners the possibility of attractive financing options for their projects.

This is the dawn for a new downtown in Bristol. The kind of downtown of which residents, businesses, and visitors can be proud. Positive changes are underway. There are dozens of properties surrounding Centre Square that are slowly improving, hosting new businesses interested in the energy that the Bristol Hospital project and future projects will soon provide downtown. As one example, a long-vacant restaurant space will be rehabbed to host a new grill and bar – one of the first new, independently owned food and drink establishments to locate downtown in several years. When the city gauged public opinion on the Centre Square site through a survey process, it found that what respondents desired most of all is the type of downtown that Bristol once had – buildings designed in a tasteful way to honor the past while remaining affordable to build with the ability to accommodate modern businesses and residential spaces.

Simply put, Bristol residents want their downtown back! Please contact the Bristol Development Authority to learn how you can participate.

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