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East Granby approves first mixed-use development in the newly adopted Village Center Zone

September 18, 2008 - Connecticut

As the "Western Gateway to Bradley International Airport" the town of East Granby looks to build upon the expansion and development around the airport. Rte. 20 carries over 20 thousand vehicles a day and is a major connector to the airport and I-91 corridor. The town center has been situated at the center of East Granby at the intersection of Rtes. 20 and 187. In 2003 surveys were sent out to businesses and landowners to gauge their feelings about the town. The surveys showed the town received high marks in delivering a positive experience in most key categories. The town then sent out a second survey to residents to see where they did their shopping and to see what type of development they would like to see in their town. From these surveys came the 2004 update of the Plan of Conservation and Development, the master plan guiding development and future land use decisions within the town. The plan looked at many issues and concerns including the impact of the airport, preserving and conserving natural resources, and the development of a town center. Throughout the plan update it was clear that business owners and residents felt the development of a true town center would help expand and create business opportunities while providing local services to the town residents. The plan's major objective is to preserve the rural character of the town, while creating a quintessential New England village center that would serve as a proper backdrop to the small town and create a sense of place as the Western Gateway to the airport.

The town continues to implement the recommendations from the Plan of Conservation and Development. This included a major rewrite of the zoning regulations in 2007 to establish a Village Center Zone along School St., the renaming of the Industrial Park Zone to Commerce Park to better establish the type of development wanted in that zone, an expansion of the Business Zone along Rte. 189, and a regulation that allows the adaptive reuse of historic structures in a residential zone to be used as a business in an attempt to provide additional incentive to preserve our historic structures. The town has also allowed higher density residential development in areas around the center. With the existing business activity in the newly named Commerce Park Zone and the higher density residential properties around the town center, it will provide the concentration of people and pedestrian traffic needed to develop a successful quintessential New England village center.

In August 2008 the Planning and Zoning Commission approved the first mixed use project, School Street Square, in the newly adopted Village Center Zone. The commission is encouraging School St. to be developed as a New England style Main St. The developer received approval for three mixed-used buildings on the three-acre site, with 18,000 s/f of retail/office on the ground floor, and a total of 23 village center apartments on the second floor. Some of these luxury apartments will include loft areas on the two and half story buildings.

The developer hired architect Paul Bailey, and landscape architect from the office of Blades & Goven, who paid close attention to detail following the Village Center Zone Design Guidelines

contained in the Zoning Regulations. It is this close attention to detail and high quality design that is going to help make the Village Center Zone successful.

Village center areas need to be dense, filled with character, and give you a sense of place. The proposed residential units will help provide more pedestrians to help make the Village Center Zone economically viable, while providing the town of East Granby with more diverse housing options other than single family homes which are often priced too high for our young adults just out of college to afford. The developer hopes to start construction this year with a completion date set for the end of 2009. Details like on-street parking still need to be reviewed and accepted by the board of selectmen. The developer looks to present on-street parking plans to the board of selectmen in this fall.

Gary Haynes, CZEO is director of community development for the Town of East Granby.

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