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The Town of Colchester rezones 700 acres of land for commercial and business park land use

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The Town of Colchester has recently rezoned almost 700 acres of land for commercial and business park land use. These parcels are adjacent to three major roadways and encompass the main area planned for water and sewer expansion.

Commercial builders in Colchester have been seeking these zoning changes for several years. "The majority of lots serviced by water and sewer in the town had been smaller older lots, most of which were not vacant," said town planner Adam Turner. "This led to the market demand being suppressed because there were few parcels large enough to support modern projects. There are now several large parcels zoned for commercial and business park. We have had proposals from many interests that have not proceeded forward because they could not get land large enough to support their plans."

The town has also been developing mixed use regulations to provide maximum flexibility for proposed projects. "We are looking to move away from parking lots surrounded by building. We feel confident that we can provide enough development potential to make the projects economically feasible with all of our design and character concerns met." The town also enacted a zoning plan that provides a defined growth boundary within which municipal services such as water and sewer are provided and outside the growth area is rural. "Colchester is characterized as much by the natural environment as by the built," Turner said. "We are working on economic development in agricultural enhancement as well as rehabilitating our downtown. All are part of a multi focused smart growth approach."

"There has been growing concern over the need to relieve Colchester residents of an increasing tax burden," first selectman Linda Hodge said. "Colchester residents are shouldering a much higher tax burden than residential properties statewide mainly due to the lack of new non residential development." Hodge expressed her willingness to move forward on these economic development proposals. "For many years most residents have agreed that we need to develop commercial/business parcels to increase the tax base. Now we are working with developers to ensure that they are developed in ways that benefit the developer as well as the town."

Turner summarized the support for the rezoning "To develop the community alongside the economy is essential to Colchester's resident's quality of life." Turner believes that the proposal considers the community as a whole not in terms of only tax revenues but services, jobs and the retention of character. "The economic improvement of Colchester has been listed as top priority for many years now with little success. Our vision is one of economic development in a manner that benefits the entire community," he said.