



nerej

Windsor is positioning for the challenges and opportunities ahead

March 18, 2009 - Connecticut

In our current hard economic times, many of us are reflecting on a few truisms. "Return to fundamentals." "Position yourself for the right deals after the turnaround."

So how does a suburban New England town with a significant business community use this down time to be ready for the rebound? For Windsor, the answer is by reconnecting with our existing businesses, improving all aspects of our transportation system, and planning for sustainable development.

Windsor is a regional employment center strategically located on I-91 between Hartford and Bradley International Airport. Since 2000, over four million s/f of new retail (300,000 s/f), office (1.2 million s/f), and industrial/distribution (2.5 million s/f) space has been constructed here.

Reconnecting with Existing Businesses. Last year, Windsor initiated a visitation program to reconnect with existing businesses. This effort includes face-to-face meetings, collection of basic information and follow-up on any issues or opportunities. So far, some 167 companies have been visited. These companies employ more than 12,000 workers in manufacturing, financial services, distribution, software development, and hospitality.

The town is learning what is important to business. In response to a question about what attracted them to Windsor, a majority of businesses cited proximity to I-91 and the airport, availability of a skilled workforce, competitive rental rates, readily developable sites, speedy local approval process, and the ability to provide parking for workers. These companies also gave high marks to local landlord services and to town services, in particular, local public safety.

The town is also learning about what is needed. Companies report that their employees want more restaurants, convenience retail, ATMs, sidewalks, and enhanced public transportation. The smaller companies are looking for lower cost internet/telecom service, help with recycling, and access to skilled labor.

Windsor's business visitation program has been well received. It has provided an exchange of useful information and a number of opportunities to provide assistance. Most significantly, it has strengthened communication between town government and local businesses.

Improving the Transportation System. Working with the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the State of Connecticut, Windsor is also planning for an improved transportation system to insure that the area remains a convenient and attractive employment location and a great place to call home.

A corridor study of Rte. 305 from I-91 exit 37 west to Rte. 189 is in progress. This effort is intended to reduce delays and improve safety in the corridor and at I-91 exit 37, to provide for future, orderly growth and development, and to evaluate the feasibility of extending Rte. 305 from its present terminus at Rte. 187 to Rte. 189 in Bloomfield. The study is expected to be completed in mid-2009.

Already, improvements to Day Hill Rd. and the I-91 interchange area have been identified and efforts are underway to move these projects forward. In 2008, the Connecticut Bond Commission approved funding for design of a much needed northbound fly-over connection at Exit 38. The Department of Transportation is currently establishing the scope for the environmental assessment for the project.

To address public transit needs, CRCOG is studying improvements to bus service to the Day Hill Road Corporate area. Results of a survey of employee commute patterns and analysis of existing bus service will be used to design transit system improvements. Preliminary recommendations now under review include development of a transit hub for the Day Hill Rd. area, modification of existing bus routes, addition of express bus and shuttle services, and consideration of a transportation management association.

Planning for Sustainable Development. In addition to reconnecting with existing businesses and improving the transportation system, Windsor is taking steps to be certain that further development will be sustainable. Recently, the town Planning and Zoning Commission updated the Day Hill Road Corporate Area section of the Plan of Conservation and Development to encourage the provision of workforce housing in master-planned, mixed-use developments. The Planning Department is now drafting a new zoning provision to implement this strategy.

In Windsor Center, planning has begun for transit-oriented development in anticipation of the planned commuter rail service from Springfield to New Haven. The Windsor Redevelopment Agency is following up its success with the first Town Square condominiums with a plan to convert the last industrial uses in the Center into new housing.

Windsor is positioning for the challenges and opportunities ahead. It's the bottom line in 2009.

James Burke is economic development director for the Town of Windsor.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540