

Editorial for Fall 2000 Preview

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This past spring, the Hawleyville area of Newtown, located off exit 9 of I-84, underwent its third of four major rezoning efforts. One hundred and forty acres of land immediately adjacent to I-84 were changed into the Planned Commercial Development M-2A zone while other lands were changed into the Hawleyville Center Design District. The new zones permit mixed-use central business development, research and development, offices, light industry, a hotel and conference center and age-restricted housing as well as accessory support uses. The changes are intended to encourage large tract commercial development that will result in a stronger economic base in Newtown.

The Hawleyville area has been zoned to encourage major economic development projects that will help off-set the strong residential market that Newtown has experienced for the past eight years. The economic development of the area is expected to occur in conjunction with expansion plans that the CT DOT has for the I-84 corridor and local infrastructure improvements that will bring public water and sewer into the district.

Hawleyville is projected to support 200,000 square feet of medical office development, 600,000 square feet of corporate office development, 300,000 square feet industrial, a 250 room hotel/conference center, 50,000 square feet of research space 555 units of housing for the elderly, and up to 130,000 square feet of retail space. Because of limitations on the size of retailers, the retail space will be located in small centers designed to support the neighborhood and the office and research development. The build out of Hawleyville is expected to take place over a twenty year period with major infrastructure improvements to be accomplished as the district grows.

The planned commercial or corporate park "Area C" is located immediately adjacent to I-84 at the northeastern intersection of Routes 6 and 25. This 140 acre area is expected to support a corporate campus having four major office buildings and the hotel/conference center. The land is in private ownership with two groups owning the largest development parcels.

As plans for the development of Hawleyville move forward, talks between the State of Connecticut and the Town of Newtown regarding the disposition of the Fairfield Hills Hospital campus are also proceeding. The State is selling the former hospital campus which includes 185 acres and about 1 million square feet of floor area. The campus is located in central Newtown right off Exit 11 of I-84 and Route 25. The Town expressed an interest in purchasing the campus from the State after an extensive RFP process netted three developers who proposed major residential developments. The three proposals proved to be heavy on residential development and too light on economic development causing the Town to enter into negotiations with the State.

Should the Town successfully negotiate the purchase, the Town's Economic Development Commission will support the redevelopment of the property with economic development as the major focus for reuse.

The Economic Development Commission actively promoted the economic benefits that Newtown and the State of Connecticut could reap if the campus is partially reused for commercial development. The Commission supports the recommendations of the Fairfield Hills Committee who suggest that the Town's purchase could guarantee that Newtown's economic development goals would be achieved.

Combined, Hawleyville's development and the reuse of the Fairfield Hills Hospital will have major impacts upon Newtown's economic development potential and future growth.