



June 2009

Q&A

Frequently Asked Questions About the Redevelopment Plan

Q. Why does the Township need a Redevelopment Plan? Why not let the market decide what kind of development — or redevelopment — will take place in the area around the train station?

A. New Jersey's Municipal Land Use Law leaves it to private developers and their investors, not towns and their residents, to initiate plans for growth and development. Towns, through their planning and zoning boards, can *react* to proposed projects, but they are not *proactive* in initiating desirable projects themselves. The state's Redevelopment Law, on the other hand, allows towns to take control of their own destiny, first by designating underutilized property as an area in need of redevelopment, then by crafting a redevelopment plan to improve it and teaming up in a public-private partnership with one or more redevelopers to implement the plan.

In choosing to take this path, West Windsor Township assures itself that the improvements to the 350-acre Princeton Junction Redevelopment Area will be those sought by the Township and its residents for the public good. Moreover, the Township will control both the pace and scope of redevelopment, phasing it in over time and limiting the total amount of new construction. Perhaps most important, without the Redevelopment Plan, more than 3 million square feet of office, retail and research & development space would have been allowed to be built in the redevelopment area — more square footage than Quakerbridge Mall, Mercer Mall, Nassau Park and Market Fair combined.

Q. What will redevelopment mean for taxes?

A. The first goal of the Redevelopment Plan adopted by the Township Council states: "The Redevelopment Plan will be tax positive or tax neutral consistent with the desires of the residents of West Windsor." There are several steps the Township will take to ensure this goal is met. First, the redevelopment will include a balance of uses — retail, office, civic and residential — that can pay for desired traffic and public improvements. Second, each phase of implementation of the plan will be evaluated to assure that it will generate sufficient tax revenue to pay for the municipal and school services it will require. Third, a fiscal impact report is required to articulate future demand on services. Fourth, the Township will work closely with the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District in assessing the impact of increased student enrollment from the redevelopment area. Fifth, a financing report will be provided to define, review and analyze the financing mechanisms for achieving the economic goals of the

Council adopts plan; What happens next?

The West Windsor Township Council voted March 23 to adopt the Princeton Junction Area Redevelopment Plan. While this adoption was the culmination of a four-year process to craft a vision and plan for the 350-acre redevelopment area, it is just the beginning of what will almost certainly be an even more extended period of implementation.

With the plan in hand, the Township can begin to negotiate with state and county agencies, as well as property owners, to secure road and infrastructure financing and begin to lay the groundwork for implementation.

At the same time, a Request for Qualifications and Proposals (RFQP) will be prepared and issued to potential redevelopers. The Township will then review the credentials of all qualified redevelopers interested in working with the Township to carry out the Redevelopment Plan, and select one to join in this public-private partnership.

Together, the Township and the redeveloper will then prepare specific, detailed proposals for redeveloping the site, along with all of the required analyses of fiscal, environmental and social impacts required under the Redevelopment Plan. Site plans for all redevelopment activities proposed for the site will be subjected to the same public review and approval process that is required by New Jersey law of all projects significantly affecting land use in the state and its municipalities.

The Redevelopment Plan stipulates that all projects planned for the area be phased in, so as not to overburden the infrastructure, services and support systems (including schools) required to sustain them. Thus, it may be a few years before the first shovel hits the ground — and many years thereafter before the last one is laid to rest.

Redevelopment Plan. There are also significant sums of state and federal money available in the form of grants that will allow for major infrastructure and transportation improvements to be made without the expenditure of municipal tax dollars.

Q. Why does the Redevelopment Plan have to include a residential component? Couldn't the redevelopment be accomplished without any housing units?

A. The area around the Princeton Junction train station could be redeveloped without including any new housing — but the result would be less desirable for the community

both economically and socially. Economically, a mix of retail, office and residential uses creates a vibrant neighborhood that can be entirely self-sufficient, enticing developers (rather than taxpayers) to construct common infrastructure and provide for important public amenities with private funds. Socially, a mixed-use neighborhood creates a sense of place, a traditional downtown where shops, restaurants, offices, banks and other conveniences, as well as necessities, are all within walking distance.

Q. Who would want to live in housing at the train station?

A. Many West Windsor residents already live very close by — in the Penns Neck, Long Meadow, Sherbrooke, Berrien City and Windsor Haven neighborhoods. There are also homes located on Wallace Road, and several units in the Heritage Collection at the Estates at Princeton Junction, which are adjacent to the railroad tracks. All of these residential properties are in high demand.

Moreover, developers and Realtors are reporting even higher demand for new housing that is within walking distance of transit. Memories of last summer's gasoline prices, combined with growing awareness and concern about greenhouse gas emissions, have inspired young professionals entering the housing market, as well as empty-nesters downsizing from single-family homes, to seek housing in mixed-use neighborhoods near transit, allowing them to be less reliant on their cars.

Q. Speaking of cars, what's going to be done about parking at the train station for West Windsor residents?

A. This question will be addressed in greater detail in the next issue of the West Windsor Redevelopment Newsletter — but the short answer is this: Under the Redevelopment Plan, the number of parking spaces designated for West Windsor residents will more than double, from the current 935 spaces to 1,885. Working with NJ Transit and the West Windsor Parking Authority, this would be accomplished by building a new parking garage on the Township-owned compost site or another suitable location to accommodate up to 950 vehicles. The garage would be fully funded by private sources. The Township-owned surface lot on Wallace Road will remain as it is.

Q. What impact is the redevelopment going to have on traffic?

A. This, too, will be addressed in detail in the next issue of the newsletter. The most important feature of the Redevelopment Plan with respect to traffic is that adoption of the plan positions the Township to

take maximum advantage of state and federal funds designated for transportation improvements. For example, the extension of Vaughn Drive from Route 571 to Alexander Road (and New Bear Brook Road) running west of the train tracks, and for the extension of Station Drive east of the tracks, will be eligible for state, federal and private funding. In addition, the state Department of Transportation — which removed the Penns Neck project from its list of high-priority projects because the Township did not have a redevelopment plan in place — may now return this project, critically important to relieving traffic congestion along the Route 1 corridor, to its priority list.

Q. What impact will the redevelopment have on school enrollments and property taxes to pay for additional students?

A. The Redevelopment Plan currently allows for construction of 487 dwelling units, but recognizes that this number may change after consideration of the economic feasibility of the project in light of the provision of amenities, infrastructure, affordable housing and the fiscal impact on the community. Studies of similar mixed-use developments in transit-oriented neighborhoods indicate that the residential component will yield approximately 28 school-age children per 100 units. At 487 units, the Township's redevelopment project would result in an additional 136 school-age children. A 2007 study by the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District found that the district schools could accommodate upwards of 700 new students by 2014 or 2015 without requiring any new construction.

It is interesting to note that single-family housing attracts more than four times the number of school-age children as does housing in a mixed-use redevelopment project — 125 per 100 units as opposed to 28. Construction of fewer than 600 single-family houses would push the school district beyond its current capacity.

In terms of property taxes, the marginal cost of providing municipal and school services to residences in the redevelopment area will be far lower than for single-family houses, and should be offset by their contribution to the tax base of the community.

About this update

This update follows publication of the first newsletter produced by the Township of West Windsor regarding the Redevelopment Plan for Princeton Junction. Subsequent newsletters and updates will describe the progress of the Plan and answer frequently asked questions about it. The newsletters, updates and other public education and outreach activities are being funded by a grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and are being prepared under the auspices of the Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey. No Township funds are being expended in the preparation or dissemination of these materials.

**In the next newsletter ...
Traffic and parking**