West Windsor Township
Redevelopment

UPDATE

August 2009

Q&A

More Frequently Asked Questions About the Redevelopment Plan

Q. How will the Township ensure that property taxes won't go up as a consequence of the redevelopment project?

A. The very first goal in the Princeton Junction Area Redevelopment Plan states: "The Redevelopment Plan will be tax positive or tax neutral." No component of the Redevelopment Plan will be approved, and no project will be undertaken in the Redevelopment Area, unless it has been demonstrated that the revenues derived will equal or exceed the expenditures required.

There are several ways the Township can ensure that this provision is honored. Many of the preliminary expenses associated with assessing the traffic, parking, financing and other impacts of the Redevelopment Plan are already being covered by state grants (see box). Additional state and federal funding is anticipated as the Plan moves toward implementation.

Most important, no redevelopment can occur without a contract negotiated with the Township. Together with the redevelopment attorney, the Township will negotiate specific, detailed proposals for redeveloping the 350-acre site, and will require that all necessary improvements be paid for by the private developer or developers chosen to do the site work. Other major expenditures are specifically identified in the Plan as the responsibility of federal agencies, the state Department of Transportation, NJ TRANSIT and private companies such as Sarnoff Corporation.

Finally, the Plan will be phased in over several years so as not to overburden the infrastructure, services and support systems (including schools) required to sustain them. And the mix of uses planned for the Redevelopment Area — retail, office, civic and residential — is designed to produce more than sufficient tax revenues to cover any additional Township or school district expenditures.

Moving from concept to reality; What's happening now?

Taking the first major step to move the Princeton Junction Area Redevelopment Plan from the drawing board to a work in progress, the Township has retained Edward J. McManimon III of the Newark-based firm of McManimon & Scotland to serve as redevelopment attorney.

McManimon & Scotland, one of the state's leading law firms specializing in public and private financing, tax, contractual and regulatory aspects of development and redevelopment, also serves as the Township's bond counsel.

To begin the process of coordinating redevelopment activities with the appropriate state and county agencies, the Township has formally submitted the Redevelopment Plan to the Governor's Office, Office of Smart Growth, Economic Development Authority, NJ TRANSIT, the state departments of Transportation, Environmental Protection and Community Affairs, Mercer County planning officials and the county Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Several studies of key components of the redevelopment effort — including traffic, parking and financing — are already under way. The Township has received more than $60,000 in funding from the Department of Environmental Protection to conduct a preliminary assessment and investigation of potential contamination at two sites in the 350-acre Princeton Junction Redevelopment Area in preparation for cleanup: the compost site on Alexander Road and the school bus depot on Wallace Road.

In addition, the Township has received a $150,000 state grant for adding pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly features on Wallace Road, and a $200,000 grant to improve pedestrian and bicycle access between the Princeton Junction train station and the Municipal Complex on Clarksville Road.

Q. Will the Township use its power of eminent domain to acquire sites in the Redevelopment Area?

A. The Township does not anticipate acquiring any properties in the Redevelopment Area through the exercise of its eminent domain powers. A sizeable portion of the 350 acres is designed to remain as open space; many parcels cannot be developed due to environmental constraints, while others will remain in their natural state.

A significant percentage of the land to be redeveloped is already in public ownership, particularly the properties immediately adjacent to the Princeton Junction train station. NJ TRANSIT has major holdings in the area, as does the Township. Sites designated for parking garages and for major retail, office, civic and residential development are already zoned for the intended uses of redevelopment called for in the Plan.

Moreover, pending state legislation will limit the authority of New Jersey municipalities to exercise eminent domain powers in furtherance of economic development or redevelopment projects. The Township supports this effort to prevent the potential misuse or abuse of eminent domain powers, and to allow these powers to be used only as a last resort — and only if affected property owners are fully compensated at fair market value.

Q. What's happening with the site for the new Rite Aid pharmacy on Route 571?

A. One of the more challenging aspects of redevelopment is finding ways to see the vision of the Redevelopment Plan reflected in projects that were approved before the Plan was adopted. The Rite Aid project on Route 571 is perhaps the most visible example of this challenge.

Before the Redevelopment Plan was formally adopted by the Township Council in March 2009, Rite Aid had already received variance and site plan approvals from the Zoning Board to build a new pharmacy, accompanying stores and eating establishments across from the PNC Bank on Route 571 — the heart of the "Main Street" envisioned in the Plan.

Township officials have since encouraged the owner of this property to knock down the old garage and retail strip that now occupy the site, in order to remove this temporary community eyesore. Beyond this initial step, a more exciting prospect looms, with the Township and Rite Aid engaged in ongoing, productive discussions about how to best incorporate the new pharmacy and adjoining establishments into the streetscape of the Township's rejuvenated "Main Street."

This kind of public-private partnership, leading to a mutually beneficial outcome, is one of the cornerstones of the redevelopment process.

Q. What's going to happen at the Acme shopping center?

A. Like the Rite Aid property, the Acme market and its adjoining shopping center are located not only within the Redevelopment Area, but along the Route 571 "Main Street" that is such a core component to the Redevelopment Plan.

The market is now closed, and the shopping center is in the process of being acquired by a developer. This presents the Township with a unique opportunity. If the property were located in any other part of the community, the new owner would decide, subject to Township approval, how the property would go about meeting the minimum zoning requirements necessary to re-open the shopping center. But because the property is located in the Redevelopment Area, the Township will be able to work in partnership with the owner at the earliest stages of the planning process to achieve an outcome that satisfies both public and private needs and expectations.

For example, a major goal of the Redevelopment Plan is to improve pedestrian and bicycle access throughout the community. Another important goal is to enhance the visual appeal of significant community sites, including civic institutions, commercial establishments and popular gathering places for residents. Working cooperatively in the spirit of the Redevelopment Plan, the Township and the new owner can take the steps necessary to make the shopping center that once housed the Acme market friendlier for pedestrians and bicyclists, and greatly enhance its visual appeal to make it more inviting for all residents.

In the next newsletter ... Affordable Housing

About this update

This update follows publication of the first two newsletters produced by the Township of West Windsor regarding the Redevelopment Plan for Princeton Junction. The next newsletter will examine the impact of the Plan on the Township's affordable-housing obligations. 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 direct Township funds are being expended in the preparation or dissemination of these materials.