

New York State Metropolitan Planning Organizations: Expression of Interest in the Case Studies Program for Transit-Supportive Development

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1. Project Description

a. The project is an ideal site for transit-oriented development, probably the best such site in the metropolitan New York City region. It is the 850-acre campus of a defunct state mental hospital that is bisected by a commuter railroad station with direct service to Grand Central Terminal and a major state highway, NY State Route 22. The property has existing water and sewer facilities and is zoned for transit-oriented development, with a special overlay district in the zoning law providing a streamlined approval process for a project that satisfies the TOD criteria for compact smart growth. The Town's vision for the property is a mixed-use town center that includes a commuter train station. This compact center would be surrounded by large areas of contiguous open space in the environmentally sensitive Great Swamp wetlands, nearby marble knolls, and steep hillsides.

b. The Town's initiative for the property could be significantly advanced by this project in the following significant ways:

1. There is currently a stalemate concerning the development plan between the developer who owns the property (Dover Knolls LLC) and the Town. The intervention of a neutral third party with expertise in TOD could help break this stalemate and enable the project to move forward and fulfill its potential.

2. The Town of Dover already has implemented transit-supportive zoning, and this project is an opportunity to show what is possible with the right combination of zoning and infrastructure. Dutchess County has been very supportive of the Town's approach to this project and considers this to be a very important site, both in itself and as a model of what can be done.

3. There is a need to involve the public in a constructive way to move the project forward. Because this is the largest single proposed development in the history of Dutchess County, it is important to build public understanding and support, while benefiting from a public involvement process in the design of the site.

2. Planning Context

There is broad support for this project in the community, which has never recovered economically from the closing of the state hospital facility in 1993. The community is especially eager to see commercial and mixed-use development on this site to create jobs, increase the tax base, provide local shopping opportunities, and create a vibrant main street district with a sense of place. The current stage of the project is that there has been

a conceptual development plan under review for over three years, which has been modified several times in response to suggestions from the Town and its consultants. The project is currently in the SEQR process. A SEQR scope has been adopted, but the DEIS has not been submitted. Part of the DEIS is supposed to be an alternative that meets strict criteria for transit-oriented development. The developer has apparently stopped work on the project because of differences with the Town over the plan and the planning process. The Town is eager to get the project back on track and hopes that the developer will continue to make progress toward satisfying its zoning requirements for a genuine TOD.

3. Nature of Transit Service

Metro-North's Harlem Valley-Wingdale commuter rail station is in the center of the site, with service to Grand Central. It is a station along the diesel-powered Wassaic extension of the electrified line that ends at Southeast (formerly Brewster North). It is anticipated that ridership on this line will increase as a result of this and other developments in the area. There is a good possibility of reverse commuting if this site were used for "back office" or other high employment development scenarios.

According to Metro North officials, there are 118 weekday and 155 weekend inbound rail trips per day from the Harlem Valley station. The July 2007 schedule indicates that 13 trains per weekday, 11 trains on Saturday and 12 trains on Sunday are running from the Harlem Valley station to Grand Central. Currently, Metro North officials are upgrading the Harlem Valley Station to improve safety and have discussed future expansions to address ridership needs based upon the Dover Knolls Development application and the demand for additional services it will produce. Metro North officials have indicated to the Town of Dover and to Dover Knolls LLC their willingness to collaborate on a TOD and to dedicate funds to expand rail service and parking. There are currently two bus routes available at the Harlem Valley Station provided by Dutchess County Loop. A significant TOD at this site offers the possibility of increased feeder bus service.

4. Description of Potential Transit-Supportive Development Area

The area within ½ mile of the station area consists primarily of vacant buildings, several of which have historical significance, parking lots, and other disturbed land, as well as a 9-hole golf course, a river and extensive wetlands that are part of the Great Swamp. NY State Route 22 passes very close to the station and runs parallel to the railroad tracks. North and south of the site are patches of strip commercial development with some residential development off of Route 22. The anticipated change in land use is the construction of a cohesive mixed-use town center that embodies all of the best practices of traditional neighborhood design and transit-oriented development. The anticipated land use changes have been identified in the Town's Master Plan and are required by the Town's zoning law.

5. Technical Resources

There is an extensive amount of technical data on the site, its environmental characteristics, and some of its built features. Much of the data about the physical facilities is in the hands of the owner. The DEIS requires an extensive amount of data

collection, but this has apparently not been undertaken yet. Additional technical studies will be needed in the areas of market analysis, financial analysis, infrastructure analysis, building analysis, and traffic analysis, and these are called for in the SEQR Scope. However, there is sufficient technical information available for conceptual planning and public participation in decision making.

6. Your Organization and funding

In addition to the Town of Dover, the project involves primarily the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, New York State Department of Transportation, and Dutchess County in the public sector. There are a number of active civic associations in the area including the Friends of the Great Swamp, Duel Hollow Association, Dover-Wingdale Chamber of Commerce, Dutchess Land Conservancy, Town of Dover Lions Club and Friends of the Harlem Valley Center (<http://www.friendsofhvc.com>). The Friends of Harlem Valley Center is a citizen's group with the mission to promote sustainable development of the former center and to protect the historic, ecological and rural heritage of the community.

The Town of Dover's website (<http://townofdover.us>) maintains a separate webpage with links containing applications, correspondence, community newsletter articles, and document submissions to regularly inform residents of the project status.

The Town of Dover has already contributed a significant amount of time and money in the retention of an outstanding team of professional consultants in the fields of planning, architecture, engineering, hydrology, landscape architecture, ecology, market analysis, and law, who have been working on this project on behalf of the Town. The Town is prepared to continue this and to retain other consultants as needed.

The Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development has also provided significant services to the Town, primarily in the form of urban design assistance. Department staff have participated in and facilitated meetings between Town officials, residents, Metro North, and Dover Knolls LLC and its consultants.

The possibility of receiving case study services through the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) would be transformative in facilitating the Town's and Developer's abilities to resolve perceptual difference in the vision of a transit-supportive development. Additionally, the expertise of the NYS MPO's services for the project may offer an opportunity to develop a statewide model and process to foster transit-supportive collaborations between towns, developers, county governments and citizen's groups. We thank you for your consideration this unique and unparalleled case study project.