

BUSINESS VIEW

Suburban transportation: Let the discussion begin

Recently, the city of Marlborough has begun consideration of an innovative zoning bylaw to address some of the vacant properties that exist along the Interstate 495 corridor. In particular, the city is considering a bylaw to reposition the former Hewlett-Packard campus into a thriving and vibrant mixed-use project to consist of office, retail, multifamily housing and hospitality uses.

While the city has initially embraced this concept and is enthusiastic about working through the issues to ultimately advance a zoning initiative that is responsive to current market conditions, the city council has also used this proposal as an opportunity to bring to the forefront one of the more pressing issues facing suburban commercial properties: interconnective transportation. During recent hearings, Councilor Edward Clancy

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raised the prospect of using these redevelopments as a challenge to the city, the developer and the state to finally address a pressing problem — transportation in the suburbs.

Clancy is spearheading a rational discussion of responsive transportation initiatives designed to facilitate a connection from public transportation nodes (e.g., suburban commuter rail stations) to employment destinations. In this discussion, the Marlborough City Council is saying that attention should begin to focus on providing transportation options to employees. The council recognizes that while improvements have been made with suburban commuter rail lines moving people to central locations, distribution to the surrounding employment centers is lacking.

The state can play a very effective role by working with the communities, as well as the private developers, to think strategically with respect to transportation options — perhaps regional shuttle services.

Rather than having developers fund programs that are not working, attention should be directed at trying to develop programs that do work such as local, coordinated transportation systems.

There seems to be a benefit for all concerned — the community, the developer, the employer and the state — from rethinking the model that heretofore has apparently failed to jump-start these outlying properties.