

The 2015 Stamford Master Plan analyzes and acknowledges the significant inventory of vacant office space and depressed leasing activity and net absorption of available office space in Stamford. For this reason, it is replete with policies, goals and implementation strategies related to the need to adaptively reuse and redevelop our suburban office parks. It also continuously and repetitively recognizes the Downtown as the regional center and the appropriate location to “concentrate regional office, retail and entertainment uses and high-density residential development....”<sup>1</sup> Collectively, these provisions direct the Zoning Board and property owners to “[a]mend zoning to allow for redevelopment of office parks outside Downtown for mixed-use”<sup>2</sup> without infringing on the Downtown’s recognized status as the regional center.

For your reference, applicable provision of the 2015 Stamford Master Plan supporting the above proposition are attached. Copies of articles recognizing the challenges of suburban office parks as a national trend are also included.

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<sup>1</sup> 2015 Stamford Master Plan, pages 3, 6, 69 and 112

<sup>2</sup> 2015 Stamford Master Plan, page 4

### Support a Diverse Economy

- Retain existing corporations
- Attract new and diverse companies
- Capture job growth in expanding sectors including technology, education and healthcare
- Concentrate regional office and retail development in the Downtown
- Continue to pursue a balance of uses that promote vibrancy and economic vitality
- Enhance the Stamford Transportation Center as a welcoming gateway to the City
- Increase workforce readiness

### Improve Regional and Local Mobility

- Advocate for regional roadway and rail improvements to address traffic congestion
- Improve intra-city mobility for all modes- vehicles, mass transit, pedestrians and bicyclists

Key projects to be undertaken by the City and its partners over the course of the next 10 years in support of these goals, as discussed in this Master Plan, are as follows:

1. Market existing and create new incentives to attract small business
2. Encourage modernization of office space and allow for adaptive reuse
3. Explore the feasibility of the development of a convention center in the Downtown
4. Create a model “cradle to career” education program to educate and train the resident workforce for jobs in emerging sectors
5. Implement the City’s Economic Development Plan

## **B. Growth Management**

Directing growth toward appropriate locations is key to supporting Stamford’s position as a regional center, encouraging neighborhood revitalization and maintaining neighborhood character and quality-of-life. The vision for Stamford’s future described in this Master Plan calls for concentrating regional office development and high-density residential uses in the Downtown, as well as promoting transit-oriented development (TOD). Encouraging compact, walkable, mixed-use development with jobs and housing in close proximity to transit will enhance the vibrancy of the Downtown, providing the density and street life necessary to its strength as a thriving retail, restaurant and entertainment district. TOD at Stamford’s Springdale and Glenbrook train stations will support those neighborhoods’ visions of enhancing their roles as compact, walkable communities. At the same time, directing growth to these areas will relieve development pressure on other City neighborhoods that wish to limit commercial growth and retain lower-density development, guided by the following goals:

- Concentrate regional office and retail development as well as high-density residential uses in the Downtown
- Promote transit-oriented development

Key projects to be undertaken by the City and its partners over the course of the next 10 years in support of these goals, as discussed in this Master Plan, are as follows:

1. Amend zoning to allow for redevelopment of office parks outside Downtown for mixed-use
2. Encourage reuse of vacant Downtown office space for housing
3. Allow higher-density residential development in close proximity to transit
4. Encourage neighborhood-scale commercial and mixed-use development at transit-served locations
5. Reduce parking ratios in close proximity to transit
6. Strongly advocate for inclusion in the decision making process for the State's TOD proposal at the Stamford Transportation Center to ensure that the proposed development is appropriately scaled and pedestrian-friendly

### C. Transportation and Mobility

Addressing regional traffic congestion and improving intra-city circulation for all modes, including vehicles, transit, bicycles and pedestrians, is essential to promoting economic growth in Stamford. At the same time, enhancing a sense of place by encouraging active street life where people can comfortably walk and bicycle, particularly in the Downtown, is essential to supporting Stamford's evolving role as a dynamic and vibrant city that attracts young professionals and jobs in emerging sectors. Achieving the vision of a robust, multi-modal transportation system that serves all users will require significant capital investments in both regional and local transportation infrastructure, guided by the following goals:

- Address regional roadway congestion and improve commuter rail
- Improve intra-city mobility for all modes

While investments in regional roadways and rail are not within Stamford's direct control, if the City is to realize its vision for the future, it must be a vocal advocate for improvements to the regional road and rail systems that bring people to the City. Traffic congestion on I-95 and the Merritt Parkway hampers Stamford's ability to attract investment. System failures and capacity issues on Metro-North's New Haven line and the lack of coordinated and efficient transit service between the Stamford Transportation Center and the City's employment centers discourage transit use, which exacerbates traffic congestion on regional roadways. Over the course of the next 10 years, it will be essential for Stamford to partner with like-minded organizations, including the Regional Plan Association (RPA), the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WCCOG, the successor agency to the South Western Regional Planning Agency as of December 31, 2014) and the Business Council of Fairfield County, to lobby for State and Federal funding for the following priority capital investments, which are vital to address these pressing issues:

- Bring Metro-North's New Haven line into state of good repair
- Reduce travel times between NYC, Stamford, New Haven and Hartford
- Build a fourth lane on I-95, where possible



standing residents and preserving the character of existing residential streets. As this occurs, it will be increasingly important for the Downtown and the South End to cultivate a symbiotic relationship, capitalizing on the synergies between them in order to maximize the potential of both neighborhoods, guided by the following goals:

- Maintain and augment Downtown's standing as a regional center
- Encourage revitalization of the existing residential neighborhood and streets in the South End
- Enhance the Stamford Transportation Center as a gateway to the City of Stamford
- Improve connectivity among Downtown, the South End, the Stamford Transportation Center and adjacent neighborhoods
- Promote quality urban design and enhance streetscapes
- Promote and enhance public waterfront access

Key projects to be undertaken by the City over the course of the next 10 years in support of these goals, as discussed in this Master Plan, are as follows:

1. Concentrate regional office, retail and entertainment uses and high-density residential development in the Downtown
2. Explore the feasibility of the development of a convention center in the Downtown
3. Encourage the redevelopment of vacant Downtown office space for housing
4. Promote a regional arts and entertainment Downtown
5. Improve pedestrian connectivity within Downtown and between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, including the South End
6. Encourage quality urban design Downtown and in the South End that relates well to streets and people
7. Implement streetscape improvements Downtown and in the South End to enhance walkability within and between these neighborhoods and to enhance sense of place
8. Complete the Mill River Greenway from Scalzi Park Downtown to Kosciuszko Park in the South End
9. Establish strong guidelines for the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission to protect historic landmarks and districts
10. Revitalize existing residential streets in the South End
11. Maintain and enhance public access to the South End waterfront

#### **E. Community Character**

Maintaining community character and preserving and enhancing quality-of-life in Stamford's neighborhoods is central to the vision for the future of the City. Preserving and enhancing Stamford's low-density residential areas and revitalizing higher-density neighborhoods is key to maintaining community character and encouraging growth in locations that have the necessary infrastructure and

open space, waterfront areas and environmental protection; encouragement of context-sensitive development; and enhancement of resiliency as expressed in the following goals:

- Connect open space and waterfront areas
- Protect and enhance public access to the waterfront
- Protect and promote water-dependent uses
- Protect natural areas, water quality and coastal resources
- Promote sustainable development patterns
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Key projects to be undertaken by the City over the course of the next 10 years in support of these goals, as discussed in this Master Plan, are as follows:

1. Complete the Mill River Greenway from Scalzi Park to Kosciuszko Park
2. Establish an east-west pedestrian and/or open space network connecting Mill River Park, Columbus Park and Veterans Park
3. Identify open space protection priorities and work with public and private partners to protect and acquire priority open spaces
4. Encourage sustainable building design
5. Prepare a watershed management plan
6. Adjust zoning regulations to address flood risk in coastal areas
7. Improve efficiency and resiliency of municipal infrastructure

#### 1.4 ACHIEVING THE VISION

As well-stated in the 2002 Master Plan, "If Stamford is sometimes known as 'the city that works,' then the Stamford Master Plan is a set of proposals for helping it work better." The goals, policy recommendations and implementation strategies described in this Master Plan are the updated set of tools necessary to help Stamford work better in order to achieve the vision for the future described above. Once adopted by the Planning Board, this Master Plan will be used to evaluate development applications and subdivisions. It will also be used by the Zoning Board as a basis for any proposed changes to the City's Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map. Any zoning changes must be consistent with Master Plan policies and the Generalized Future Land Use Plan described in Chapter 8. In addition, the Plan will be used by the Mayor and the Board of Representatives as a tool for assessing the Planning Board's capital budget recommendations.

As discussed in the chapters of this Master Plan and summarized in Chapter 9, achieving Stamford's vision for its future will require diligent advocacy, action and funding for a variety of programs and projects.



Government and 2,100 in Stamford Public Schools. Among the City Departments, Public Safety, Health and Welfare is the largest employer, responding to more than 100,000 calls for police, fire and emergency services in 2012. State government accounts for nearly 500 workers, and federal government some 700 workers in activities as diverse as higher education and postal service.

#### D. Property Markets

##### Office Market

Leasing activity and net absorption of available office space have been depressed in the Fairfield County office market since the 2007 peak. However, asking prices for sale of office properties may be slowly recovering in the County, at \$180 per square foot in 2012. The Countywide rental price of Class A office space is also recovering, at \$51.04 per square foot, as reported in the fourth quarter of 2013, up from \$47.67 in 2012. With a current inventory of 15.2 million square feet in Stamford, of which 11.7 million square feet are in Class A structures, the City's supply exceeds the current demand for office space. As shown in Table 17, as of the third quarter of 2014, the vacancy rate for the central business district (CBD) was 27.4%. Despite this high vacancy rate, there is a strong demand for office space in close proximity to the Stamford Transportation Center; there is a low office vacancy rate in this area, with MetroCenter almost fully occupied.

Table 17: Stamford Central Business District Office Vacancy Rate, 2010-2014

Year	Stamford CBD Vacancy Rate
2010	23.1%
2011	26.9%
2012	26.8%
2013	26.5%
3Q 2014	27.4%

Source: Cushman & Wakefield Marketbeat Office Snapshot

According to global real estate service company CBRE, nearly a million square feet were leased in Stamford in 2012, up from roughly 700,000 in 2011, though availability remains relatively unchanged, if not marginally increased. Weak signs of recovery are evident in a modest rise in asking rents to \$47.67 per square foot in the Downtown, compared with \$34.29 per square foot elsewhere in the City, as reported in 2012 by Cushman & Wakefield. Future trends indicate that office vacancy rates will remain close to present levels with stronger demand for office space Downtown, particularly in the vicinity of the Stamford Transportation Center, and weaker demand in suburban office parks. As businesses seek more efficient, technologically capable work spaces, the quality and location of office space will play a central role in the office market, indicating a need to repurpose outdated offices in less desirable locations.

economic development strategies. The plan will provide a comprehensive overview of the local and state economies; set policy direction for economic growth within the City; and identify strategies, programs and projects to improve the local economy.

**3A.2: Market existing and create new Incentives to attract business.** Market existing incentives and business loans to corporations and small businesses and create new incentives where feasible to support business development. Currently, the City partners with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to offer incentives to new and expanding businesses in Stamford through several programs, including the Enterprise Zone Program, the Brownfield Remediation Program, the C-Pace program and the Urban Jobs program.

**3A.3: Encourage modernization of office space and allow for adaptive reuse.** Encourage modernization of outdated office space to enhance efficiency and provide technological capability and allow for adaptive reuse of vacant office space for residential and mixed-use development. Capital improvements to enhance technological capability should be pursued and zoning should be amended, as appropriate, to allow for reuse. See Policy 3B.5.

**3A.4: Promote upgraded telecommunications infrastructure.** Analyze the impact of cellular phone coverage throughout the City as it affects technology.

**3A.5: Explore the feasibility of the development of a convention center in the Downtown.** A convention center could support hotels, restaurants, shopping and entertainment venues Downtown; provide an attractive reuse option for vacant large floor-plate office space; and enhance the vitality of the Downtown. Stamford is strategically located as a convention destination on I-95 and the Northeast Corridor rail line and could provide an attractive and more affordable convention alternative to New York City.

**3A.6: Increase and promote financial, technical assistance and development programs for industry.** Tax credit and financing programs should be employed to encourage manufacturers to remain in Stamford, attract new manufacturers and help companies upgrade buildings and equipment.

**3A.7: Promote live/work arrangements.** Zoning should be amended to clarify the difference between home occupations and home businesses as accessory uses in residential districts. Home occupations should be as-of-right and typically consist of a single person working from home. Such use should prohibit employees, signs, off-premise noise and smells, increases in parking and traffic and changes to the appearance of the residence. Home businesses should be permitted by Special Exception and generally include businesses operating out of a home that have employees and generate visitors.



**3A.8: Promote affordable artist live/work space.** The City should encourage strategic alliances between arts groups and affordable housing builders to create artist live/work housing and artist housing with shared work and gallery space.

### **Policy 3B: Growth Management**

Encouraging development in areas with strong transit access and the infrastructure to handle additional density is central to the economic vitality of Stamford. **Regional office and retail and higher-density housing should be concentrated in the Downtown** and around the Stamford Transportation Center; neighborhood-scale transit-oriented development should be encouraged in the vicinity of the Glenbrook and Springdale train stations and potentially at a new proposed transit node at the intersection of East Main Street and Myrtle Avenue. Quality transit connections and an inviting environment for bicyclists and pedestrians support higher-density activities in concentrated nodes where fewer users are dependent on personal automobiles and can travel to and within neighborhoods without increasing vehicle congestion or requiring parking facilities. The City should support the concentration of economic growth in these areas by pursuing the following strategies:

#### ***Implementation Strategies***

**3B.1: Concentrate regional office, retail and entertainment uses and high-density residential development Downtown.** Regional office, retail development and entertainment uses should be concentrated Downtown and near the STC in order to support Downtown's position as a regional center. Higher-density housing should also be encouraged in order to support an active live/work Downtown, promote transit use and enhance the vitality of Downtown as an attractive, walkable city center for living, working and entertainment.

**3B.2: Discourage expansion of office development outside of Downtown in areas that do not have direct access to transit.** Regional office development should be concentrated in the Downtown. Smaller-scale office should be encouraged in areas close to transit including Glenbrook, Springdale and potentially near a proposed transit node at East Main Street and Myrtle Avenue. Redevelopment of underutilized office space in suburban-style office parks for mixed-use development should be encouraged. Significant new office development outside of the Downtown is currently permitted under existing zoning; zoning for these areas should be amended to encourage mixed-use development.

**3B.2-a: Employ a 50 percent floor area ratio (FAR) cap for office development in industrial districts.** Limited amounts of additional office development could be considered for uses that meet performance/environmental and design standards.

**3B.2-b: Discourage retail and office development in industrial districts.** Superstores and large-scale office buildings should not be allowed in industrial districts with the following exceptions:



The City has set forth the following goals for Downtown, the South End and the Stamford Transportation Center area. Policies and implementation strategies for achieving these goals are outlined below.

- Take advantage of the synergies between the Downtown and South End to maximize the potential of both neighborhoods
- Maintain and augment Downtown's standing as a regional center
- Encourage revitalization of existing residential neighborhoods in the South End
- Enhance the Stamford Transportation Center as a gateway to the City of Stamford
- Improve connectivity between Downtown, the South End, the Stamford Transportation Center and adjacent neighborhoods
- Promote quality urban design and enhance streetscapes
- Promote and enhance public waterfront access

### Policy Recommendations

#### **Policy 5A: Support Downtown as a Regional Center**

Downtown should remain the focal point for large-scale office and residential development as well as regional retail and cultural attractions. Office development outside of Downtown should be discouraged.

### Implementation Strategies

**5A.1: Concentrate regional office, retail and entertainment uses and high-density residential development in the Downtown. See Strategy 3B.1.**

**5A.2: Identify opportunities to relocate office uses that are currently situated in other neighborhoods to the Downtown.**

**5A.3: Encourage redevelopment of vacant Downtown office space for housing. See Strategy 3B.3.**

**5A.4: Explore the feasibility of the development of a convention center in Downtown Stamford near the Stamford Transportation Center. See Strategy 3A.3.**

**5A.5: Promote a regional arts and entertainment district Downtown.** The City should continue to work with the Downtown Special Services District and the Stamford Cultural Development Corporation to promote arts and entertainment Downtown. This collaborative effort should focus on 1) integrating arts into the physical landscape (murals, window displays, public art, etc.); 2) promoting more efficient use of existing arts and entertainment space; and 3) creating more affordable space for arts and entertainment.

Westover has the third-highest median household income of all neighborhoods in the City, increasing by 29.3 percent from \$116,829 to \$151,099 from 2000 to 2011. The share of persons in poverty expanded from 3.4 percent in 2000 to 6.4 percent in 2011. Most households own at least one car; however, over the period from 2000 to 2011, the car ownership per household dropped slightly from 95.5 percent to 92.1 percent.

Westover's housing supply increased by 7.3 percent from 3,320 to 3,564 units over the past decade, all while its share of units built within the last 20 years remained largely unchanged, an indication that new housing construction has remained consistent with previous decades. The share of owner-occupied units dropped slightly as renter-occupied units increased in number, from 19 percent to 20.7 percent of the neighborhood's housing stock. Nevertheless, the median value of owner-occupied housing units grew from \$508,368 to \$690,201 over the period from 2000 to 2011, a difference of \$181,833 or 35.8 percent. In 2010, Westover's owner-occupied home values ranked third-highest in the City, after North Stamford and Shippan. Despite rising home values, the vacancy rate increased from 3.1 percent to 4.2 percent from 2000 to 2010.

#### **Newfield, Turn-of-River and Westover (NTW) Neighborhood Policies and Implementation Strategies**

##### **Policy NTW1: Preserve, protect and enhance neighborhood character and quality-of-life**

**NTW1.1:** Maintain existing residential character of neighborhoods by maintaining existing residential zoning districts.

**NTW1.2:** Direct and enhance commercial/office development in existing commercial zones.

**NTW1.3:** Retain current floor area ratio (FAR) caps for commercial and office development in industrial districts outside of Downtown.

**NTW1.4:** Explore the feasibility of rezoning certain vacant or underutilized commercial/office properties along Long Ridge Road for multifamily residential and mixed-use development.

**NTW1.5:** Designate significant roads in Newfield, Turn-of-River and Westover as Scenic Corridors to assure that the character of the existing streetscape is retained and enhanced. Efforts should focus on retaining natural street trees and historic elements, such as stone walls, located within the right-of-way and minimizing the impacts of engineered roads on these important features.



## CHAPTER 8.0: FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

### 8.1 OVERVIEW OF UPDATES TO THE GENERAL LAND USE PLAN

The 2002 Master Plan established a General Land Use Plan consisting of 17 land use categories. This updated Master Plan establishes a General Land Use Plan consisting of 15 land use categories and includes several key revisions, as follows:

The "Downtown Corridor" and "Downtown Collar" categories from the 2002 Plan have been eliminated. The "Downtown Core" category remains (renamed, "Downtown") and the boundaries revised (see Revised Proposed Master Plan Land Use Category Map). The new "Downtown" category is meant to provide for regional commercial facilities and protect an intensive mixed-use district. Intended is a full array of retail, office, cultural, recreation and residential uses.

A new "Urban Mixed-Use" category surrounds the Downtown. The Urban Mixed-Use category will provide for development of a mixture of uses including housing, offices, retail and restaurant and other approved uses, which – by nature of the type of activity, design and layout – are compatible with each other and their surroundings. This district largely surrounds the Downtown and is intended to be lower-density than the Downtown and not contain uses of a regional nature such as major shopping centers or major office uses.

The "Commercial – Campus Office" category from the 2002 Master Plan has been renamed "Mixed-Use-Campus." This new category is intended to provide for and protect low-density mixed-use areas, potentially including office uses as well as carefully limited industrial, research and development uses. Such development should be "suburban" in nature.

Figure 22 shows the Proposed General Land Use Plan. The major changes between the existing and proposed plan are in the Downtown and South End. Figure 23 shows the proposed land uses for the southern portion of the City, while Figure 24 shows the proposed land uses for the Downtown area.

### 8.2 2025 MASTER PLAN LAND USE CATEGORIES

The following land use categories have been structured and defined so as to provide for and protect a suitable environment for residential, commercial, industrial and recreational development and to promote the general welfare, health and safety of the community. These land use categories implement the policies laid out in the prior chapters and are employed in the official Master Plan Map to establish the general land use plan for the City of Stamford, pursuant to Section C6-30-3 of the Stamford Charter. The proposed revised categories are displayed in Figure 22, Figure 23 and Figure 24.

1. RESIDENTIAL—Very Low Density Single-Family
2. RESIDENTIAL—Low Density Single-Family
3. RESIDENTIAL—Low Density Multifamily

#### **#7. COMMERCIAL—Arterial**

This category is intended to provide for and protect business-oriented development (1) extending from the Downtown or (2) along major arterial routes. The category is intended to: (1) encourage retail and by Special Exception compatible uses (limited office and residential) distinct from the Commercial-Neighborhood (Category #6) and Downtown (Categories #9, #10, #11) development; (2) be mindful of traffic, safety and community design considerations with regard to the residential neighborhoods abutting; and (3) be serviceable by the capacity of existing arterial systems. Automotive uses and shopping centers shall be permitted subject to Planning Board review and recommendation and approval by the Zoning Board on the basis of (1) compatibility with adjacent development, (2) superior design, and (3) improvement of traffic safety or congestion conditions. Development within this category shall be at densities below those allowed in Commercial-Neighborhood (Category #6), with bonus subject to approval by the Zoning Board on the basis of (1) compatibility with adjacent uses, (2) superior design, (3) superior traffic management, (4) compliance with the goal of directing most commercial development to Downtown, and (5) compliance with design guidelines. Residential development within this category shall not exceed the permitted density of Residential-Low Density Multifamily (Category #3).

#### **#8. MIXED-USE – CAMPUS**

This category is intended to provide for and protect low-density office parks and commercial (non-retail) centers in locations outside of the Downtown, by allowing limited expansion and adaptive reuse of compatible office, research and development, residential, government, educational and medical uses. Principal large-format retail uses, shopping centers, sports and entertainment complexes and similar uses shall be prohibited. New buildings and structures shall be compatible with the scale, height and character of existing buildings and maintain a landscaped "campus" setting of relatively low development intensity compatible with surrounding residential properties. Mixed-use development including adaptive reuse of existing buildings shall be carefully planned and designed and shall result in no net increase in traffic impact compared with office development. Development within this category shall be at densities, height and bulk far below those allowed in Downtown (Category 11). Such development may be permitted to locate on sites "suburban" in nature, subject to approval of the Zoning Board, based on (1) compatibility with adjacent uses and residential areas, (2) superior design including landscape design to buffer this use from adjacent residential uses, (3) superior traffic management, (4) compliance with the goal of directing most commercial development to Downtown, and (5) compliance with design guidelines. Total floor area shall not exceed 0.4 FAR for property located adjacent to State highways.

#### **# 9. URBAN MIXED-USE**

The purpose of this category is to encourage redevelopment and to provide an orderly transition from the more-intensive Downtown area (Category # 11) to adjoining neighborhoods; and to provide a mix of uses complementary to and supportive of the Downtown. Intended is a full array of uses including high-density residential uses as the primary use in this category, supported by a dynamic mix of neighborhood retail and service uses, office, and recreational uses serviced by mass transportation and quality streetscapes that enhance connections between the Downtown and outlying neighborhoods of



## The New York Times

# As Office Parks Empty, Towns Turn Vacancies Into Opportunities

By Nick Corasaniti

May 29, 2018

WAYNE, N.J. — Perched off a busy road in northern New Jersey with sweeping vistas of a vast reservoir sits a new relic of the suburban panorama: the international headquarters of Toys “R” Us slogging through its final days after the company announced that it would be shutting down for good.

The decline of the toy giant prompted wistful recollections across the country of the increasingly bygone era of brick-and-mortar retail, but concern in this town quickly turned to the exoskeleton that the company leaves behind — a roughly 200-acre plot with multiple office buildings scattered across the land that once housed as many as 1,600 workers.

While the worry locally is focused in part on what an extended vacancy might mean for the town’s tax base, the fate of the once thriving headquarters illustrates a much broader reality confronting many towns across America: the era of the suburban office parks is coming to an end.

Outside Silicon Valley and other areas that have benefited from the technology boom, what were once the lifeblood of many suburbs have now become eyesores, forests of empty glass and concrete boxes that communities must figure out what to do with.



Christopher P. Vergano, the mayor of Wayne, said he does not know what will become of the Toys “R” Us campus, but it is unlikely that it would become another corporate office park. The era of the suburban office park is fading in New Jersey. Stephen Speranza for The New York Times

Nowhere is the demise more keenly felt than in New Jersey, where the country’s first corporate campus was built in Murray Hill by AT&T Bell Labs in 1942. The state experienced perhaps the biggest building boom of office parks during the 1980s.

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“The model as it played out in New Jersey is now seemingly obsolete,” said Louise A. Mazingo, the chairwoman of the department of landscape architecture and environmental planning at University of California, Berkeley.

Suburban office parks have lost their luster for a variety of reasons, including a growing preference among younger workers for life in more dynamic urban centers



than in sometimes staid and sleepy suburbs. And the rapid pace of technological advancement has made the need for many clerical and processing jobs and the real estate to house those workers increasingly obsolete.

But it was the recession and its aftermath that sounded the death knell for many suburban parks; New Jersey lost about 100,000 office-related jobs since 2008, according to James W. Hughes, a professor at Rutgers University. By 2010, the majority of the state's suburban office inventory was between 20 and 30 years old, built during a much more primitive information technology era.

The parking lot at Toys “R” Us headquarters. “The model as it played out in New Jersey is now seemingly obsolete,” Louise A. Mozingo, the chairwoman of the department of landscape architecture and environmental planning at University of California, Berkeley, said, referring to office parks. Stephen Speranza for The New York Times

“So, not only do we have a lot of obsolete space, but we also have workplace densification occurring at the same time,” said Mr. Hughes, referring to the move by many companies toward smaller, shared work spaces. “That’s the dilemma that really burst onto the scene maybe three years ago or four years ago.”

In the 1980s, about 90 to 100 million square feet of suburban office space was built in New Jersey, accounting for 80 percent of the state’s inventory, Mr. Hughes said. By contrast, only 50 percent of the national suburban office inventory was built in the same period.

New Jersey currently has over 6.5 million square feet of vacant office park space, according to CoStar, a commercial real estate company. In northern New Jersey, 23 percent of office space is listed as available, which includes vacant spaces and buildings that are emptying out as leases end, according to Newmark Knight Frank, a commercial real estate firm.

But vacant office parks are important to municipal coffers because they remain on property tax rolls. Yet the longer they sit vacant, the faster their assessments plummet, forcing municipalities to find other sources of revenue and in some cases raise real estate taxes in a state that already has the country’s highest property taxes.



A view inside the Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, N.J., in 1942, the first office park in the United States. Universal History Archive, via Getty Images

In Roseland, about 11 percent of the town's overall property tax base is vacant office space, according to data provided by Newmark Knight Frank. In Bridgewater, two office parks are responsible for more than \$1.7 million in taxes. In Parsippany, four vacant buildings account for \$1.8 million in taxes. In Warren, the former headquarters of Chubb Insurance pays over \$1 million in taxes, but that is far less than when the property had a higher value.

However, some municipalities are seeing opportunities in the vacant spaces. In some places the properties are being considered as a low-cost option to expand affordable housing, though that has proved somewhat controversial. Other municipalities are looking to reimagine the buildings with amenities to attract younger workers, including restaurants, banks, fitness centers and open-design offices all housed within a walkable or bikeable campus.

“None of these millennials want to work in a corporate campus in western Morris County and have to commute long distances to meet their friends at a bar,” said Carl Goldberg, a developer who has been vocal about the redevelopment of office parks. “It’s just not the lifestyle that they’re interested in.”

One model in the state has been particularly successful: the former Bell Labs building in Holmdel. Now called Bell Works, it is a two-million-square-foot, glass-encased behemoth with coffee shops, pop-up restaurants and a soon-to-be-completed wine bar and food hall on the first floor that is open to the public. Businesses occupy the rest of the space, with footprints as small as 350 square feet to as large as 350,000 square feet, and interest from companies has been high since the complex opened in 2013.



As Office Parks Empty, Towns Turn Vacancies Into Opportunities - The New York Times  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/27/nyregion/new-jersey-office-pa...>

A former Bell Labs complex in Holmdel has been turned into a more modern space designed to attract smaller technology firms by offering amenities, including a food hall. Stephen Speranza for The New York Times

While Bell Works does not have residences, condominiums are being built nearby by a different developer, and the office space has drawn workers from the surrounding area, including Asbury Park and Red Bank, who like the amenities and don't want to commute to New York. And the building has become a bit of a downtown hub — the Holmdel Library is on the first floor, as are doctors offices, hair salons and a gym.

“We coined a term for this: Metroburbs,” said Ralph Zucker, the developer behind Bell Works. “They said it’s an insane idea, we wish it could work, its great, it’s what we need, but you’ll never pull it off. Once we started pulling it off, everybody jumped on board.”

It has proved particularly appealing to tech companies that face the challenge of attracting a mostly younger work force to the suburbs.

“You go out to the burbs and then, you may have a cafeteria, and you may have two or three options, but that’s it,” said Ken Wincko, the chief marketing officer at WorkWave, a software company and one of the original tenants of BellWorks, who commutes 45 minutes from Morristown. “Here, to be able to have a wide array of options, plus support from the community, you have everything that you need.”

The Holmdel campus developer hopes to lure workers who live in New Jersey and do not want to commute to New York City. Stephen Speranza for The New York Times

Other municipalities have tried to turn vacant office parks into residences in response to a longstanding court order to expand affordable housing in many New Jersey towns. But while the costs might be lower than building from scratch, the efforts in some cases has provoked a backlash.

In Park Ridge, the former mayor, Terry Maguire, resigned amid a recall attempt after his attempts to turn the former roughly 37-acre Sony office park into affordable housing.

In Montvale, Mayor Michael Ghassali described the battle he faced in trying to convert a vacant office park into affordable housing.

“There were protests at every meeting, at the office, the council meetings, the phone calls, emails, there was not one person that was for it,” he said. “We voted on them three times. Twice was no, and then the third time is when the court said if you don’t



do it, then we will make the decision for you.”

As a result of the legal pressure, Mr. Ghassali has managed to carve out affordable housing, along with luxury condos, from some of the vacant office parks that are helping to plant the seeds for a new downtown.

In Wayne, where the Toys “R” Us logo still welcomes passers-by to the campus, Mayor Christopher P. Vergano said he believed the site would prove desirable, though possibly as something far different.

“I think there will be change,” he said, “only because we don’t see big corporate tenants buying 200-acre properties anymore.”

A version of this article appears in print on May 30, 2018, on Page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: As Office Parks Empty, Towns Turn Vacancies Into Opportunities

## The New York Times

# *The Old Suburban Office Park Is Getting a Big Reboot*

By Miranda S. Spivack

Dec. 5, 2017

The aging office park is getting a face-lift.

Once a proud symbol of suburban working life now suffering from high vacancy rates in many parts of the country, corporate office parks are being reimagined as sports domes, upscale townhouses, retail shops and green gathering spaces, among other possibilities.

“It’s an obsolete model for an office,” said Robert Youngtob of the Maryland-based developer EYA, which has begun constructing upscale townhouses in sections of an office park in suburban Bethesda, Md., including some that are selling for about \$1 million.

That office park, called Rock Spring Park, is at the junction of the Capital Beltway and Interstate 270 and is home to Lockheed Martin and Marriott International. Marriott is planning to move in the next few years to a downtown Bethesda location, citing the desires of its 3,500 employees for a more urban setting with easy access to restaurants, retail and public transit.

“In today’s world, most office tenants want access to public transportation in more walkable areas with retail amenities,” Mr. Youngtob said. “It’s about recruiting employees and creating an attractive work environment. Many of these older buildings do not meet the needs of today’s office workers.”

That has opened the way for EYA and several other developers around the country to consider new uses for the car-centric office and industrial parks, which are often

lifeless spaces far from restaurants and retail but frequently near major highway interchanges.

The Urban Land Institute, which has been studying new uses for office parks and other commercial and industrial areas, found that in the Washington metropolitan area, about 16 percent of suburban office space had been deemed obsolete because of outdated buildings and limited access to amenities. In suburban Montgomery County, Md., site of Rock Spring Park, a recent Urban Land Institute study found that the office vacancy rate in two office parks near major highways was higher than 21 percent, compared with an overall office vacancy rate in the county — which includes urban centers such as Bethesda and Silver Spring — of about 14 percent. In the Rock Spring area, the study found, the office park's proximity to highly rated public schools, and a prime location even without easy access to the Metro system, made it desirable for other kinds of uses.

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Office parks, said Rich Forslund, executive vice president for Colliers International in Indianapolis, are finding success when they are either modernized or repurposed. Most important, he said, is that they offer “a sense of place, creating areas where people can create somewhat of a community.” He said that some office parks in and around Indianapolis were remaining all office, but trying new looks, including installing central green spaces for outdoor dining and retooling buildings to provide internal spaces that encourage workplace collaboration.

The potential to convert office and industrial space into something else is also driving redevelopment in East Fishkill, N.Y., where IBM for decades employed thousands but began to consolidate operations in the last several years. In one of the two 700-acre former IBM campuses, Dan Fraioli, president and owner of Air Structures American Technologies, is planning to build what he said would be one of the largest indoor sports domes in North America. Mr. Fraioli said he was expecting it to open next year



to provide a place for young athletes to hone their craft.

“Youth sports has exploded,” Mr. Fraioli, the father of three boys who spent many years on the baseball diamond. In the northeastern United States, he said, those trying to excel can be disadvantaged by “weather conditions that are not conducive to the demand of youth sports.” As a result, he said, “we can’t bring these kids to their full potential as they do down south.”

The sports dome, being built on about 30 acres at the former IBM site, will have climate-controlled indoor turf fields for baseball, field hockey, lacrosse and soccer.



Joseph M. Forgione of JMF Properties is working to redevelop the former Colgate office park.  
Christopher Occhicone for The New York Times

“Our hope is that we become a Southern state — without the heat,” Mr. Fraioli said.

Ronald Hicks, assistant county executive in Dutchess County, said the indoor sports facility should be a boon for high school teams, adult leagues and others who compete

for limited public fields and are hampered by cold weather.

“We don’t have a lot of land available, or a lot of open parks,” he said.

Not every approach is successful. In Hopkinton, Mass., Steven Zieff, a developer, struck out after several years of trying to persuade town officials to approve his proposal for a “new town” in an underused office park near Interstate 495, southwest of Framingham in the outer ring surrounding Boston.

Mr. Zieff and a partner had proposed that the town allow them to build a hotel and apartments and create retail spaces.

“It was a full-on mixed use development,” Mr. Zieff said. But in retrospect, he thinks his big-picture approach may have scared off local officials. “We should have taken it in bite-sized pieces.”

Hopkinton, a town of about 15,000, claims several buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. At public meetings to discuss the project, residents offered a litany of worries, including concerns about building heights and traffic.

“People were agitated that we were going to gentrify the downtown,” Mr. Zieff said.

But other projects have gained local approval. In October, officials in the Township of Morris in New Jersey, near Morristown and Hanover, approved the outlines of a proposal from JMF Properties and RD Management to redevelop an industrial and office site where Colgate once made liquid hand soap, body wash, antiperspirant and deodorant. The plans include retail space and market-rate and affordable housing.

“The idea is to create a destination and downtown,” said Joseph M. Forgione, founder of JMF Properties.

In Tempe, Ariz., the Wentworth Property Company acquired an aging office park and modernized it by adding high-tech infrastructure for internet access and incorporating some urban amenities, such as restaurants, walking paths, workout stations and bike rentals, as well as a shuttle bus system to connect with nearby

retail. Another developer has added two hotels.

“It was a very rundown, industrial office campus that used to be occupied by Motorola,” said Steve Butterfield, a Wentworth spokesman. “We came in with a new vision and transformed it from a single tenant to multiple tenants.”

Deborah K. Bilek, who has studied office parks for the Urban Land Institute, said there was no one solution for adapting corporate parks to new uses. She points to some highly successful models, such as some of the Silicon Valley tech campuses, which have brought amenities — gyms, restaurants and other perks — directly to employees, and provide transportation to and from work.

She also sees reuse of office and industrial parks as a way to resolve one of the most vexing problems that urban areas face: the high cost of housing. “Different types of housing products could be offered,” Ms. Bilek said.

Mr. Youngentob of EYA agreed. “The greatest challenge for millennials is the affordability issue,” he said. “They would like much the same location as the empty nester, close in, convenient to retail amenities, access to transit and good schools.” Large tracts of land occupied by office parks and former industrial sites could provide some of those opportunities, he said.

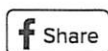
A version of this article appears in print on December 6, 2017, on Page B5 of the New York edition with the headline: As Businesses Exit, Old Office Parks Get a Reboot



## Suburban Office Parks Gain New Life As Millennials Grow Up

With some tweaks and upgrades, suburban office parks are reinventing themselves to attract new tenants and the millennials ready to start families in the 'burbs.

October 20, 2017, 6am PDT | [jwilliams](#) | [@jwillia22](#)



Jeffrey B. Banke / [Shutterstock](#)

Aging millennials starting families and moving out of the city into the suburbs may be giving out-of-fashion suburban office parks a new lease on life. Patrick Clark and Rebecca Greenfield of *Bloomberg* report that companies looking to attract workers have sought out office parks that incorporate some of the amenities most city dwellers have come to expect—including proximity to mass transit—but with the benefits of better schools and a cheaper cost of living.

Many employers, hoping to attract millennials as they age, are trying to marry the best of urban and suburban life, choosing sites near public transit and walkable suburban main streets. "What's desired downtown is being transferred to suburban environments to attract a suburban workforce," says Scott Marshall, an executive managing director for investor leasing at CBRE Group.

The trend to the suburbs has been increasing, with the *Bloomberg* article noting that "Americans are more likely to live in the suburbs today than they were in 2000."

## FULL STORY: [Suburban Offices Are Cool Again](#)

Published on Wednesday, October 11, 2017 in *Bloomberg*

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[Aristophanes](#) • 7 months ago

The whole idea that Millennials are very different in their urban trendiness and are uniformly anti-suburb is the most over-washed piece of nonsense in planning dialogue and urban discussion.

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Business

# Suburban Offices Are Cool Again

Companies don't have to head downtown to woo millennials anymore.

By [Patrick Clark](#) and [Rebecca Greenfield](#)

October 11, 2017, 12:45 PM EDT

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## In this article

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First you leave the city for a kid, a garage, and a backyard.

Then you get a job in an office park—only maybe it's an office park with yoga and food trucks.

For millennials, the suburbs are the new city  
<<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-08-25/millennials-are-driving-the-suburban-resurgence>>, and employers chasing young talent are starting to look at them anew.



GE  
GENERAL ELECTRIC  
13.69 USD  
▼ -0.21 -1.51%

MAR  
MARRIOTT INTL-A  
130.45 USD  
▼ -0.34 -0.26%

TWTR  
TWITTER INC  
44.71 USD  
▲ +0.45 +1.02%

MSI  
MOTOROLA SOLUTIO  
122.45 USD  
▲ +1.10 +0.91%

CAT  
CATERPILLAR INC  
138.95 USD  
▲ +0.87 +0.63%

For years companies like Twitter, Salesforce, and GE have headed downtown, framing their urban offices as recruiting tools for young talent. After opening <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/02/business/economy/why-corporate-america-is-leaving-the-suburbs-for-the-city.html?mcubz=0> a new headquarters in downtown Chicago last year, Motorola Solutions bragged that it got five times the job applicants it had in the suburbs. Suburban landlords like Charles Lamphere kept hearing a common refrain from tenants: “We need to go to the city to get millennials.”

Fresh college graduates might be attracted to downtown bars and carless commutes, but these days, for older millennials starting families and taking out mortgages <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-08-22/millennials-pair-big-suvs-with-new-homes-in-u-s-suburbs>, a job in the suburbs has its own appeal. “What people find is that the city offers a high quality of life at the income extremes,” says Lamphere, who is chief executive of Van Vliissingen & Co., a real-estate developer based in the Chicago suburb of Lincolnshire, Ill. “The city is a difficult place for the average working family.”

Many employers, hoping to attract millennials as they age, are trying to marry the best of urban and suburban life, choosing sites near public transit and walkable suburban main streets. “What’s desired downtown is being transferred to suburban environments to attract a suburban workforce,” says Scott Marshall, an executive managing director for investor leasing at CBRE Group.

Marriott International’s recent search for a site to replace its

old office park in the Washington suburb of Bethesda, Md., led it not into Washington but just across town, into Bethesda's more transit-accessible downtown. (Jim Young, Marriott's vice president of corporate facilities, cites access to "some of the nation's top public schools"—something more millennials will care more about as their kids get older.) When Caterpillar Inc. announced its move from Peoria, Ill., to the Chicago suburbs earlier this year, CEO Jim Umpleby bragged <<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/caterpillar-names-deerfield-illinois-as-new-global-headquarters-300442201.html>> that the new site "gives employees many options to live in either an urban or suburban environment."

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Suburban landlords are upgrading office parks with amenities to mimic urban life, too. At Van Vliissingen's properties, that's meant fitness centers, food-truck Fridays, beach volleyball courts, and a fire pit and amphitheater where monthly concerts are staged. Origin Investments, a real-estate investment firm, recently spruced up a dated office building outside Denver with a 4,000-square-foot fitness center and a "barista-driven" coffee lounge and stationed a rotating cast of food trucks outside a building it owns near Charlotte.

Suburban office parks appeal because they're cheap compared to downtown buildings, says Dave Welk, a managing director at Origin, which is based in Chicago. But his firm's suburban thesis builds on the belief that city-loving millennials will eventually opt for suburban accoutrements.

“The thinking has been, ‘We’re in a 20- to 30-year supercycle of urbanization,’” Welk says. “I believed that five years ago. I don’t believe it anymore.”

None of this means the suburbs are going to supplant central cities as job hubs. After all, jobs traditionally based in cities—jobs in professional industries as well as the service jobs that support them—are growing faster than those typically based outside of them, according <http://jedkolko.com/2015/12/09/where-the-fast-growing-jobs-are/> to Jed Kolko, chief economist at Indeed.

At the same time, Americans are more likely <http://jedkolko.com/2016/03/30/urban-revival-not-for-most-americans/> to live in the suburbs today than they were in 2000, and even the young, affluent ones drawn to cities tend to move once their kids reach school age, Kolko’s research shows <http://jedkolko.com/2016/03>



/30/urban-revival-not-for-most-americans/>\_ . Many of those workers will suffer long commutes into the city center. Others will opt for jobs closer to their suburban homes.

Jack Danilkowicz, 29, moved to Chicago in 2012 for a job at a financial job downtown, but within a few years, he got married and started plotting his move to the suburbs. He landed a job at Horizon Pharma, a drugmaker with offices in the northern suburb of Lake Forest, and moved with his wife to nearby Libertyville, trading city nightlife for the good public schools their newborn son will one day attend. “I grew up in the suburbs,” he says. “Probably in the back of mind, I always thought the suburbs would be the place to raise a family.”

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# STREETSBLOG

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## Real Estate Giant: Suburban Office Parks Increasingly Obsolete

By Angie Schmitt | Dec 10, 2015 | 23

What tenants want in an office building is changing, and the old model of the isolated suburban office park is going the way of the fax machine. That's according to a new report from Newmark, Grubb, Knight and Frank [PDF], one of the largest commercial real estate firms in the world.

The old-school office park does “not offer the experience most of today’s tenants are seeking,” according to NGKF. As a result, the suburban office market is confronting “obsolescence” on a “massive scale.” More than 1,150 U.S. office properties — or 95 million square feet — may no longer pencil out, the authors estimate, though a number of those can be salvaged with some changes.



Suburban office parks are losing their luster, industry analysts say. Photo: [Wikipedia](#)

“Walkability and activated environments are at the top of many tenants’ list of must haves,” the report states. Office parks in isolated pockets without a mix of uses around them must have “in-building amenities” — including a conference center, a fitness center, and food service — to remain competitive, according to NGKF: “If tenants are not going to be able to walk to nearby retail or a nearby office property to get lunch, they had better be able to get it at their own building.”

The study took a close look at suburban office submarkets in and around Denver, Washington, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. In the “southeast suburban” Denver office district, for example, office buildings within a quarter-mile of the new light rail line had a 1.7 percent vacancy rate. For those outside a quarter-mile, vacancy rates were nine percentage points higher.

NGKF’s findings don’t mean that office tenant preferences are in perfect alignment with



walkability, however.

Parking was also important to the marketability of buildings in suburban Denver. The report notes that a lot of older management personnel prefer to drive, while younger workers want transit access. So buildings that offered both were in the highest demand.

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Filed Under: Development, Sprawl, Studies & Reports, Suburbia

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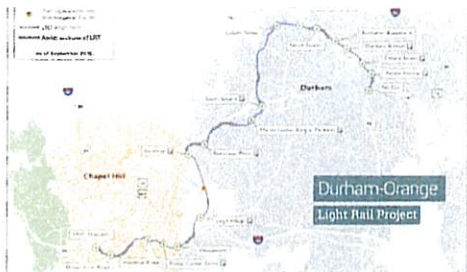
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nullbull • 2 years ago

The housing market in areas where significant amounts of time (growing all the time) are spent in the car to get where you need to go will follow this.

In housing it will take longer, however, because of people and their stuff. Businesses have to pencil out, so putting the same # of people in a smaller space makes a compelling case sooner than a family re-locating so as to avoid spending their lives in their cars.

^ v • Reply • Share ›



ja\_1410 • 2 years ago

Office parks are located where employees live and want to go. In most US cities it is in the suburbs. The decline of office space has more to do with decline of US industry and businesses cutting their workforce by improving efficiency.

1 ^ v • Reply • Share ›



neroden → ja\_1410 • 2 years ago

Employees certainly do not want to go to the suburbs for work. That's a dreary horror trapped in your office all day.

You want to be able to get out of your office at lunchtime and get a decent lunch, and to get dinner afterwards, and maybe go to a show...

Even employees who want to live in the suburbs prefer to work downtown. If they can be teleported there. :-) Fast train service is second-best to teleportation, which is why houses in suburbs near the commuter rail stations are super-expensive.

6 ^ v • Reply • Share ›



ja\_1410 → neroden • 2 years ago

Vast majority of US cities has poor, uneducated people living in the city and middle class, educated workforce located in the suburbs. Cities like Philadelphia, Washington DC, Detroit, Saint Louis Baltimore etc. Bullshit that employees from suburbs want to work in the city. Companies are attracted to cities by special low taxes deals so they force employees to travel from suburbs, often 20 and more miles one way. Employees also end up picking up the tab by paying high city taxes for the "privilege" of working in the city. Besides in many of those cities the best restaurants are also in the suburbs. So going outside in the city to eat is not only poor quality of food but also risky of being mugged or carjacked. Why would I want to spend hours commuting in traffic jams to get to the work place that I rather not leave for lunch for safety and food quality reasons and in addition end up paying taxes for the fact that I'm working in this





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