

Commerce Drive Study Area Draft Concept Plan

Promote connectivity and walkability with new sidewalks through existing large blocks.

Redesign the traffic circle into a series of signalized intersections to ease traffic flow while enabling pedestrian and bicycle crossings, and to create a prominent gateway to the neighborhood.

Kings Highway Cutoff

Incorporate traffic calming measures in the New England residential neighborhood to ensure that it does not become a cut-through for traffic headed to the train station.

Kings Highway

Preserve industrial uses toward the eastern end of Commerce Drive, and between the train tracks and Ash Creek.

Commerce Drive

Black Rock Turnpike

*New Metro-North
Train Station*

The core mixed-use area is the area immediately surrounding the train station.

Connect the station area to the Black Rock neighborhood by way of a pedestrian bridge over Ash Creek.

A new trail would turn the riverfront into a recreational amenity and make this natural feature a focal point of the station area neighborhood.

Intensity of redevelopment shall be reduced the farther a parcel is located from the train station. Residential and mixed use projects would be enabled on parcels within walking distance of the station.

The major streets in the area would have ample sidewalks and trees to encourage walking as an alternative to the automobile.

This plan represents recommendations for future development made at the May 2nd Public Design Workshop. Please offer your comments and feedback at www.rpa.org/fairfield by Tuesday, July 21st.

The final concept plan will guide future recommendations for zoning changes within the study area.



Fairfield Commerce Drive Planning Study

Project Goals and Processes

The Town of Fairfield retained Regional Plan Association (RPA) to facilitate the development of a new master plan and zoning regulations for the 300 acre neighborhood surrounding the new train station. The community-based initiative includes a stakeholder committee of representatives of town departments, neighborhood groups, local business people and property owners and residents.

Stakeholders met four times between October 2008 and February 2009 to explore the concept of transit-oriented development and its implications on mobility and traffic, municipal finances and the environment. Highlights from these four meetings can be found on the following page. The result of the stakeholder meetings was the following list of objectives, intended to serve as guidelines for the public workshop:

Mobility

- Encourage non-auto access to the train station through pedestrian connections, bike routes, and bike facilities at the station and throughout the neighborhood
- Adjust parking requirements for new development, to reflect the availability of new transit service

Fiscal Impacts

- Ensure that new development positively impacts the municipal budget by comparing tax revenues with municipal operating costs
- Recognize the potential for increased property values around the station and preserve or create some affordable housing

Environmental Impacts

- Encourage the production and use of renewable energy
- Encourage low-impact development practices such as rainwater collection and green roofs.
- Provide access to riverfront as recreational amenity.

Public Workshop Results

A design workshop was held with the general public in May 2009, in which five groups each developed plans for the study area which addressed the above objectives.

At the workshop, town residents were invited to design the Commerce Drive study area. Aided by facilitators and professional urban designers, participants were divided into groups and asked to come up with a graphic plan for the study area that included specific recommendations on land use, open space, and mobility.

RPA then took the main recommendations from each group, analyzed them for commonalities, and then synthesized into an initial consensus scheme, seen on page 1.

The draft concept plan specifies future land use, guidelines for street design, and public improvements. The results of the workshop and final concept plan will be the basis for recommendations for revised zoning to be reviewed and potentially adopted by the Town Plan and Zoning Commission.

Participants at the Fairfield Community Design Workshop



To make comments on the information presented here please visit the project website at:
www.rpa.org/fairfield by July 21st.

Key Issues and Workshop Results

Members of the Stakeholder Committee met four times before the public workshop to discuss issues related to transit-oriented development. Highlights of each meeting are included below as well as recommendations from the public workshop that relate to each topic. Meeting powerpoints and additional information are available at the project website: www.rpa.org/fairfield.

Traffic and Mobility:

A major goal of the project is to minimize the traffic impacts of new development attracted by the train station. A strategy of transit-oriented development creates communities in which housing, shops, and offices are accessible by transit, walking or biking, and reduces the need for car ownership and car trips. Stakeholders explored several means to reduce the additional vehicle traffic and to minimize impacts of vehicle use:

- Traffic calming strategies decrease the amount of traffic moving along a street or manage that traffic so that it moves at a more appropriate speed, allowing for safer bicycle and pedestrian conditions. Examples include raised and distinctively paved crosswalks that provide visual cues to alert drivers to pedestrian-priority zones and speed bumps and tables that reduce speeding and discourage cut-through traffic on residential streets.
- Streetscape improvements encourage pedestrians and bicyclists to access the train and neighborhood destinations instead of driving. Examples include street trees and street furniture which provide shade in the summer, buffer pedestrians from moving traffic, and produce a more pleasant walking environment, and bicycle lanes and racks which enable bike commuting to the station area.

Fiscal Impacts of Development:

Future development in the area will bring with it costs to the town of Fairfield (infrastructure, education & services) and revenues (property taxes), both upon initial construction and ongoing into the future. It is important to understand the implications of development proposals for the municipal budget.

- RPA developed estimates for the cost of each additional resident, schoolchild, or worker using Fairfield budget information.
- Rutgers University publishes estimates for schoolchildren using census data which relates occupancy, bedroom count, cost, and tenure of housing by state. RPA verified the accuracy of Rutgers' Connecticut numbers using actual Fairfield Center school enrollment data.
- In Fairfield and around the region, homes within walking distance of transit and designed for commuters consistently produce significantly less children than single family houses further away from the train.

Environmental Impacts, Climate Change & Open Space

Transit-oriented development is one strategy for communities to grow while reducing carbon emissions for transportation and building energy use while minimizing impacts to green space.

- Access to transit and pedestrian routes reduce the dependence on private automobiles, which contribute 38% of Fairfield's emissions.
- LEED Certification produces energy-efficient buildings which can incorporate water conservation and recycled materials.
- Parks and impervious surfaces are located and designed for access by residents and wildlife, as well as improved water quality management.

Workshop Results

- Workshop participants detailed the costs of any recommended traffic calming and streetscape improvements in order to balance initial capital costs with expected revenues.
- For the most part, groups agreed that all of the major roads through the area (Commerce Dr, Kings Highway/Cutoff, Black Rock Turnpike) should be pedestrianized with street trees, furniture, and, in some cases, full, planted green medians. One group suggested bicycle lanes along each of these streets as well, while others recommended bike lanes, but on a relatively smaller scale.

Workshop Results

- Workshop plans calculated the number of new housing units by size, cost, and tenure, and the square feet of new commercial space. This allowed estimates for new residents, schoolchildren, and workers for each plan.
- Annual revenue impacts ranged from about \$500,000 to \$3 million in positive income, with initial capital costs ranging from a few hundred thousand for a plan with relatively few infrastructure improvements to nearly \$10 million when the group proposed extreme makeovers of public space.
- The final master plan will be evaluated for its expected fiscal impacts.

Workshop Results

- Workshop groups incorporated pedestrian amenities as noted above and planned a riverwalk for open space and mobility which connects to Black Rock via a new bridge over Ash Creek.
- At least one group recommended that all regulations should require all new development to be LEED certified.

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