TOD DEVELOPMENTS

Hudson Park, Yonkers, NY

The City of Yonkers struggled for years to jump-start its downtown and adjacent industrial waterfront on the Hudson River, an area that is served by four commuter train stations less than a half hour trip from Midtown Manhattan. This effort included a number of amendments to its waterfront urban renewal plan during the past two decades along with other activities. However, with the establishment of a public/private partnership, the private market began to respond in the early part of this decade.

Hudson Park is a dramatic TOD example that resulted from these efforts. Immediately adjacent to the Yonkers Metro-North Railroad/Amtrak station on the Hudson Line, the project’s initial phase was the first multi-family residential development in downtown Yonkers in 30 years. The designated redeveloper Collins Enterprises LLC completed Hudson Park’s first phase in 2003, which included 266 apartments with building amenities and 15,500 square feet of professional offices, retail, and restaurant space. Collins finished the second phase with an additional 294 apartments in 2008. With direct access to Grand Central Terminal in 28 minutes via express train, Hudson Park has achieved a 96 percent occupancy rate by attracting “echo boomers,” those born between 1982 and 1995, who can find few comparable products in Manhattan.

The project’s third phase will commence in 2013 with the construction of another 220 apartments. Upon completion, Hudson Park will top out at 780 rental apartments and command rents averaging $2.50 per square foot.

In addition to immediate access to the Yonkers train station through carefully designed walkways and entrances that provide security to residents, other critical amenities underlie this project. These include public pedestrian access to a renovated Hudson River waterfront, office and retail space, a 9-11 Memorial Park, street furniture, public art, and restaurants such as the world class X2O.

The most recent amenity to the neighborhood is the daylighted Saw Mill River. Cascading through a new urban park immediately to the east of Hudson Park, the river ducks under the train station and re-emerges as it enters the Hudson River. This project, led by the Saw Mill River Coalition, its parent organization Groundwork Hudson Valley, and Scenic Hudson, opened up a portion of the river in downtown Yonkers that had been buried by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1920s for sanitation purposes. The park includes pedestrian walkways, benches, and an interpretive exhibit concerning the American eel, a species that will greatly benefit from this urban river restoration.

The project is the result of a private/public partnership that demonstrates how transit station area planning and creative zoning, environmental review, and site plan approval can work to provide needed housing in an aging but revitalizing downtown. The partners include the redeveloper Collins Enterprises LLC, the City of Yonkers, Metro-North Railroad, Westchester County, private equity and debt investors, the New York Brownfield Tax Credit Program, and environmental organizations such as Scenic Hudson. For its part, the City of Yonkers invested $150 million in downtown capital infrastructure improvements, while Metro-North restored the adjacent Yonkers station and tracks at a cost of $43 million.

In support of the development, the City used numerous zoning and land use techniques. It adopted a highly detailed master plan for the waterfront area that contained certain specifications regarding the types of development the City wanted on available vacant land in the area. The City enacted the Master Plan Zone – an innovative zoning technique – to provide as-of-right status for developments that conform to the design standards contained in the master plan. The Zone waives compliance with New York State’s onerous environmental review requirements for such projects, since the impacts of development contemplated by the master plan had already been studied and mitigation provided. Additionally, the City reduced the parking requirements for the project by 50 percent compared to that required by traditional urban zoning, saving the redeveloper $25,000 in development costs for each parking space not constructed.