



sustainable sites and buildings. Cities can provide FAR bonuses or other incentives for sustainable design, as in Bloomington. Green roofs may be counted toward open space requirements, as does Grand Rapids, Michigan. Seattle, Washington allows flexibility in set-back requirements for green buildings and provides waivers of height limitations, so that small wind turbines, skylights, greenhouses, and solar panels can be placed atop buildings.

Sustainability could also be fostered by implementing and enforcing an energy conservation code as developers seek approval for new and renovated buildings. The code would work with a variety of financing sources to provide incentives for energy retrofits in existing buildings, including combined heat and power technologies and the designation of energy conservation districts. These policies should be complemented by a city's commitment to greening its own buildings, operations, and vehicle fleets.

**FILLING THE TOOL BOX**

Each issue of the TOD Line™ will present useful tools that are being employed by innovative localities to respond to Dr. Nelson's challenge to meet the burgeoning market for TOD living.

Note that Bloomington, Minnesota used a novel zoning district, custom-built for TOD, along with bonus density, or incentive zoning, to encourage developers to provide affordable housing, infrastructure, and amenities, including neighborhood art. Austin, Texas combined transit and land use planning, designated appropriately-sized transit station areas, adopted station area plans, and then rezoned to calibrate densities and land uses to needed ridership for each category of station.

Seattle, Grand Rapids, and scores of other cities are adopting additional techniques that include streamlining the development process for TOD projects, assisting developers to achieve LEED-ND certification, property tax abatements, private-public partnerships that vest development rights, remediating distressed properties, retaining affordable housing options for the workforce, and many more. Stay tuned.

**END NOTES**

- 1 Enhanced TOD: Connecting Transportation and Land Use Planning, Jennie C. Nolon & John R. Nolon, *NEW YORK TRANSPORTATION JOURNAL* (Winter 2009).

# Connecting the Region – the New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium

David Kooris, AICP

**W**ith more than 22 million people and nearly 1.3 trillion dollars in economic output, the New York metropolitan region includes a diverse set of living choices that spans the densest urban core in the nation and a network of smaller cities and suburban communities. Linking much of this region is its transit system. Government officials, business professionals, and civic leaders have gone from viewing the region's transit station areas as simply locations for park and ride lots to opportunity sites for economic development. Success will be achieved when the region looks holistically at its transit corridors and plans



Mamaroneck, NY

multiple station areas together with complementary land uses to create a functioning ecosystem of neighborhoods and commercial centers stitched together by commuter rail. The New York-Connecticut

Sustainable Communities Consortium, a bi-state partnership of municipalities, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, counties, and regional planning entities, seeks to achieve this vision through a grant provided by the federal Sustainable Communities Partnership.

**BACKGROUND**

In order to work, a transit line must serve a combination of origins (places where people begin their trip) and destinations (places where people are headed) and must aggregate enough people along its route to supply the ridership necessary to support an attractive level of service. The New York metropolitan region is anchored by the

greatest destination of all, Manhattan's Central Business District. With more than one million jobs on the island, workers from across the tri-state region are drawn continually to Midtown and Lower Manhattan to access the high paying employment options that concentrate there. Suburban communities, large and small, were able to grow because of this link to Manhattan and its economic strength. At the region's rail stations, parking for commuters became the highest and best use of adjacent land. For example, along Metro-North Railroad's New Haven Line there are presently multi-year waiting lists for parking permits at nearly every station.

Over the last decade, however, sporadic redevelopment proposals near several transit stations make it increasingly clear that significant land value to the local community derives from the greater access to Manhattan that these station-adjacent parcels provide. Transit-oriented development (TOD) offers an alternative that provides greater short- and

long-term value to each station community while generating even greater ridership for the region's commuter railroads.

Looking to other regions around the country where TOD serves as a significant redevelopment tool, communities in New York and Connecticut began experimenting with allowing limited residential development near their stations. Projects in Pelham and Mamaroneck, New York, along with developments in Old Greenwich and Norwalk, Connecticut, demonstrate the proof of concept: that luxury apartments and condos with amenities

attract residents looking to live in the suburbs with easy access to frequent transit and New York City.

Despite the growing recognition that high-end rental apartments, condos, and modern office space have proven successful redevelopment ventures around certain of the region's rail stops, not every station area can support these uses. Nor are those three uses alone sufficient to create vibrant, livable communities in the vicinity of a station. If each community is left to plan its own station area in a vacuum, the



*New Rochelle, NY*

region's transit-oriented zoning may result in an oversupply at the top end of the market, and the communities' plans and policies may not encourage other aspects of thriving neighborhoods and downtowns: affordable housing, open spaces, community facilities, etc. To be successful, station areas along the corridor must strive to achieve complementary land use mixes that offer housing, retail, service, and employment options to a broad range of society. This requires planning the corridor as a whole.

## **NY-CT SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES CONSORTIUM**

A federal grant funds this effort in the region. The Sustainable Communities Partnership (Partnership) is a groundbreaking initiative led by the U.S. Departments of Transportation (DOT), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Breaking down the federal silos between the bureaucracies that impact physical development across the country, the Partnership represents a new, comprehensive, and coordinated approach to assist communities in achieving their goals for the future. In 2010, the Partnership announced its first significant funding program for proactive planning, offering Challenge Grants across the country to individual communities and Regional Planning Grants to partnerships across the country.

The New York–Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium (Consortium) coalesced in anticipation of this funding opportunity. The Consortium is a unique, bi-state collaboration; the Regional Plan Association is serving as project coordinator. Leading this effort are nine mayors from Connecticut, Westchester County, and New York City and the County Executives from Long Island. Together, these chief elected officials demonstrate that working together is a better path to regional prosperity than competition between jurisdictions. The four relevant Metropolitan Planning Organizations and the Long Island Regional Planning Council also participate in the collaborative.

The group aims to better capitalize on the region's commuter rail network to foster livable and sustainable communities. With over 225 commuter rail stations served by the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, and Shoreline East in the 12-county geography covered by the Consortium, significant opportunities exist for transit-oriented, mixed-use, and mixed-income development. Currently, surface parking lots and low-density commercial buildings dominate the built landscape around many station areas.

The New York metropolitan region has the transit connections necessary to link a diverse set of communities to one another; by working together in this Consortium, members will ensure land use along the transit routes is designed to best harness opportunities for growth in neighborhoods that offer housing, employment, and mobility choices for all. To achieve its vision, the Consortium implements a program under the federal grant that involves sixteen major activities in three broad categories as outlined below:

**Metropolitan planning and policy integration:** Consortium members are assessing the region's existing policy plans to identify missing elements and opportunities for better alignment across political boundaries and between levels of government.

Anticipated outcomes of this process include enhancement of existing plans, a regional housing analysis and incentive fund for affordable housing implementation, and a regional public dialogue to share knowledge about building sustainable communities.

**Northern Sector sustainability planning:** Station area regeneration and infrastructure investment planning for TOD development projects connected by the Metro-North Railroad will occur around New Haven's Union Station, on Bridgeport's

Rail Road from central Brooklyn to Eastern Suffolk County will emphasize different elements of sustainability planning that can be replicated in various parts of the region. The Consortium will develop an interdisciplinary sustainability plan for the East New York neighborhood in Brooklyn. In Nassau County, the Consortium will conduct a feasibility study for sustainable infill development at several LIRR stations. A transfer-of-development-rights study in Suffolk County will explore this potential mechanism for jointly preserving land and spurring transit-oriented communities. Finally, a Long Island housing strategy will identify the greatest needs and opportunities to provide affordable options for the area's young professionals and families while adding revenue to local budgets.

If the Consortium is successful, the region will accommodate roughly 300,000 new jobs and 200,000 new residents in the transit-oriented cities of New York metro region's northern and eastern suburbs. These devel-

opments could house the next generation of the region's population and entrepreneurship, while meeting the needs of the new economy and the nation's changing demographics. For more information on the Consortium, please visit <http://www.sustainablenyct.org/>.



White Plains, NY

East Side, in South Norwalk, on Stamford's East Side, in central New Rochelle, and at several locations in the Bronx. Consortium members also will develop action strategies for the I-287 and Cross County Parkway corridors.

**Eastern Sector sustainability planning:** Four projects linked by the Long Island

