

Appendix D: TOD Questionnaire Responses

In August 2010, a questionnaire regarding TOD was sent to the mayor/first selectman, planning department, and/or economic development department for each of the eight municipalities within the Danbury Branch study corridor. The following is a log of the responses received.

Norwalk

Respondent:

Munro Johnson, AICP
Senior Project Manager for Development
Norwalk Redevelopment Agency

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail stations in your community?

We have a large TOD planning study that is in full swing for the area encompassing the South Norwalk Rail Station in Norwalk's "SoNo" district. That study is intended to segue into formal plans and then projects. Information on the study is available at <http://www.norwalkredevelopmentagency.com/?q=transit>, and Susan Sweitzer (ssweitzer@norwalkct.org) of our office is project managing the initiative. None of the other rail stations in Norwalk fall within the redevelopment agency's area of jurisdiction.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

Norwalk's POCD pegs its average population density citywide at 3,700 residents per square mile, which (based on demographic data for average household size, etc.) approximates 2.5 d.u./acre. Norwalk's downtown – which the redevelopment agency defines as the 2-mile long, 4,000 foot wide swath between its two major transit hubs (bus pulse point, and South Norwalk rail station) – is built out today at an average of 9 d.u./acre. Each of the agency's major development projects – which have varying levels of approvals in place – are being developed at an average density of 46 d.u./acre,

and, in the aggregate, would double downtown's residential units, bringing the average density to roughly 18 d.u./acre.

While there was some nominal pushback from the community on density – especially in cases where some of that proposed density consisted of affordable units – by and large, there was little objection and much support for restoring residential land uses to Norwalk's downtown and directing density to the center, away from Norwalk's more bucolic, outlying sections.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail stations? If no, why not?

As alluded in 1, above, we are already working aggressively on a TOD plan for the South Norwalk Rail Station (SNRS). In my opinion (and, anecdotally, that of many others – from residents, to developers, to planners), another "suitable site to promote this type of development" is the site at and around the discontinued Wall Street stop on the Danbury branch line. Once the site of a stop on the Danbury Branch, Norwalk's other main, historic downtown area – the Wall Street area – is the site of one of the city's biggest redevelopment plans, and also the site of the convergence of every transportation mode – except rail. An already dense, mixed-use, multimodal, historic downtown district, Wall Street is slated to quintuple its residential density within a ¼-mile radius of the city's central bus terminal and the former Wall Street rail stop. Over 1,100 public parking spaces exist within the area, along with direct highway access. Inasmuch as the development is already planned, reviving the former rail stop would probably be an example of "development-oriented transit" rather than "transit-oriented development," but it would accomplish the same policy objective, i.e., co-locating dense, mixed-use, multi-modal development with transit.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail stations?

In Norwalk's experience, finding relief for parking requirements in

consideration of proximity to transit has been less of a local zoning issue and more of a State of Connecticut (STC) and lending/underwriting issue. In one recent case for a development that was ¼- to ½-mile from the SNRS, our zoning offered a sizeable reduction in parking requirements, only to have the move thwarted by STC and rejected by the project's lenders based on expectations that the project's tenants would insist on a copious supply of on-site parking. Overlooking the STC issue, Connecticut's TOD effort should take cognizance of this significant 'outside' role in the TOD planning process, i.e., that of the banking/lending/underwriting sector, who can effectively veto any TOD plan, even when it has the (rare) benefit of a community and developer jointly ready to curtail parking.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

I recommend that the study, the state, and Metro-North seriously consider reviving the former Wall Street stop on the Danbury Branch in Norwalk's TOD-optimized Wall Street neighborhood. I challenge anyone to find a more suitable location for TOD anywhere on the Danbury Branch.

Wilton

Respondent:

Robert Nerney, AICP
Director of Planning and Land Use Management
Wilton Planning and Zoning Department

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail stations in your community?

The Town of Wilton has an option to lease several acres of land to a non-profit organization (Wilton Commons, Inc.) whose mission is to build 51 units of affordable-restricted senior housing. Wilton Commons Inc. is in the final stages of securing construction funding and is hopeful of proceeding with the project in 2011. It should be noted that this project is within several hundred feet of the Wilton Train Station.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

No.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail stations? If no, why not?

Much of the property within a quarter-mile radius of the Wilton Train Station is currently developed. The second rail station in Wilton is located in Cannondale (Cannondale Train Station). Cannondale is a historic village which is not well-suited for high density development. Moreover, much of the area surrounding and including the Cannondale Train Station is serviced by private drinking water wells and private septic systems; again, limiting the carrying capacity for accommodating density of this magnitude.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail stations?

Wilton's Planning and Zoning Commission has not considered changes to its parking requirements. The Commission, however, is presently considering zoning amendments that would allow higher densities for residential apartments located above retail stores when located within 1,000 feet of a train station.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

The Town of Wilton requests that the study support funding for key projects, such as the bridge/walkway plan. This is a critical component to improving urban connectivity and ultimately making rail use a more attractive transportation alternative.

Redding

Respondent:
Natalie Ketcham
First Selectman

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail station in your community?

TOD at the West Redding Train Station was addressed in the 2008 Town Plan of Conservation and Development: "this concept may be a means of bringing creative housing solutions and greater commercial viability to the hamlet of West Redding if the significant environmental issues in that district can be resolved". Also: "Higher density housing units should be located in the limited areas where they can meet the program's goals of Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Design".

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

Yes, in the Georgetown section of Redding which is served by public water and sewer. Comments were overwhelmingly supportive.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail station? If no, why not?

We have a nationally recognized TOD plan surrounding a new station in Georgetown.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail station?

Yes.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

The community recognizes the value of TOD in general. Because 90% of our land is watershed, we also recognize our role as environmental stewards and the locations for TOD are therefore limited. Where appropriate, we would support TOD.

Ridgefield

Respondent:
Betty Brosius, MPA, AICP
Director of Planning
Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Department

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail station in your community?

The Town is currently involved with the Route 7 Corridor Study (funded by CTDOT and implemented through HVCEO and SWRPA), and Branchville is one of the "focus areas" for study of TOD. In addition, the Economic Development Commission has formed a Route 7 committee to look at development in the entire Route 7 corridor, with focus on Branchville. The recently adopted Plan of Conservation and Development (effective August 16, 2010) includes support in the Business chapter for study of the Branchville area for possible re-zoning or improvements to current zoning, to allow "small-scale transit-oriented development within the development limitations." The area is limited by lack of sewer service, which is an issue that must be resolved in order to consider higher-density residential development. The areas in proximity to the Norwalk River present concerns for the environment, and for development that would be limited by the 100-year flood zone.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

No.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail station? If no, why not?

In Branchville, there are no large sites. Zoning would have to promote the combination of smaller parcels, which is a possibility. We would consider initiating TOD where site conditions would allow.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail station?

Possibly.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

Parking and access to the train station is on the opposite of Route 7 from the business area. Safe pedestrian access between the east and west sides of the highway needs to be provided. The parking lot and amenities for train service need to be expanded and improved to be more attractive to commuters.

Bethel

Respondent:
Steven Palmer
Town Planner

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail station in your community?

Bethel has placed a strong planning emphasis on Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities in the downtown center. The 2007 Plan of Conservation and Development identified areas to the east and west of the Bethel Train station as highly desirable for TOD. Subsequently, the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO) commissioned a study which performed a more in depth analysis of the subject area, outlined a TOD's potential economic impact, and provided draft regulations for TOD. Furthermore, a public outreach meeting was recently held to present the studies finding to educate and engage the public about the benefits of TOD.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade

with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

No.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail station? If no, why not?

Yes. The HVCEO study identified underutilized industrial zoned properties adjacent to the train station on both the east and west side of the tracks. This area encompasses 121 acres of land distributed over 36 parcels. The parcels' uses are a mix of vacant, industrial, and multi-family residential. The goal is to provide high density, mixed use development, within walking distance to the train station and contiguous to Bethel's downtown center core.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail station?

Yes, draft regulations have been proposed which include modifications to the parking requirements that are typical in TODs which will further encourage transformation and redevelopment of properties within the targeted area.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

Continue public outreach to further educate the community on the financial, cultural, and environmental benefits of transforming historically underutilized industrial land proximate to trains station and the downtown center into transit oriented developments. With regards to infrastructure, the Study recommended that a west side, tandem platform be constructed to promote access on either side of the tracks or that an overhead pedestrian bridge be constructed to allow west side access to the existing train station and platform.

Danbury

Respondent:
Sharon Calitro, AICP
Deputy Planning Director

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail station in your community?

The City of Danbury has made a concerted effort to promote high density development in the downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods for which there are various transit options. The CCBD Zoning District, encompassing most of downtown Danbury, allows a variety of commercial and residential land uses. There is no density limit for residential development in this zoning district. Additionally, the Mayor of Danbury appointed a Main Street Renaissance Task Force, which has focused its efforts on ways to promote and revitalize downtown Danbury as a place to live, work, and recreate. Task Force recommendations will be forthcoming. The Plan will, however, support continued efforts to promote high density development downtown. Existing Zoning Regulations promote high density development nearby transit opportunities. In fact, the CCBD zone has no density limit.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

Several residential developments have been approved and constructed within the last decade in the CCBD and surrounding RMF-4 and R-3 Zoning Districts which abut the railroad and the HART pulse point. Most comments focused on anticipated traffic impacts.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail station? If no, why not?

Sites are available or could be amassed to allow for high density development nearby transit opportunities. Market forces have driven development downtown and in surrounding areas. Existing

Zoning Regulations allow for higher density in districts closer to transit nodes. There is no need for a TOD overlay zone.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail station?

The City of Danbury Zoning Regulations already allow for shared and off-site parking to meet parking space requirements. In conjunction with the Main Street Task Force recommendations, the City will be considering additional strategies that are consistent with general TOD principles.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

The City should continue to promote high density residential development and mixed use development in the downtown where transit and other services are readily available to support such development. Recommendations of the Main Street Task Force will include parking reduction strategies and continued support of high density development in the downtown area which is within 1/2 to 1/4 mile from transit opportunities.

Brookfield

Respondent:

Katherine Daniel

Wetlands Enforcement Officer / Land Use Manager

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail station in your community?

The Brookfield Zoning Commission and others are considering what changes to our zoning regulations would be appropriate in light of the town's interest in promoting the appropriate mix of uses and increased residential density in what is currently titled the Town Center District. Transit oriented development is certainly among the factors under discussion.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so,

what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

There are currently several affordable housing developments in Brookfield; one is in the vicinity of the proposed train station near the Four Corners of Route 202 and Route 25 with an address of 871 Federal Road. It is located within the Town Center District.

There is a proposal currently before the Zoning Commission to adopt an overlay Incentive Housing District in the Four Corners area to include the Town Center District. The proposed densities are as follows:

- Mixed use development from 6 units/acre to 24 units/acre
- Multi-family development from 20 units/acre to 24 units/acre
- Town Houses from 10 units/acre to 20 units/acre
- Single Family Houses from 6 units/acre to 12 units/acre

Residential units would be restricted to 2 bedrooms.

During the review process for approved affordable housing applications, comments were received that ranged from concerns regarding their proximity to housing zoned for 60,000 square foot lots to concerns of impacts on wetlands and watercourses. The nature of the concerns related to the specific location of the proposed development. The Zoning Commission is hopeful that an incentive housing zone would give the town more control over the impact of higher density residential developments while still working to improve the affordability of housing in the area. The public hearing on the incentive housing district will begin September 16, 2010.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail station? If no, why not?

The Four Corners area, most of which is currently mixed use zone (Town Center District), is the area where the town is interested in promoting aspects of transit oriented development, particularly increased residential density.

In this area, there is a confluence of multi-modal transit options now and in the future. There are currently bus routes; a multi-use path along the Still River Greenway is going through commission approvals and final engineering; sidewalks are required for site

plan modifications or special permits to facilitate these modes of transportation, and the interest of the DOT in extending the train line from Danbury to New Milford is in concert with town objectives and has been for at least 10 years, as evidenced by the 2002 Plan of Conservation and Development.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail station?

Yes.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

Move forward with the plan to extend the train line and develop a station stop at the Four Corners.

New Milford

Respondent:

Vincent P. Nolan, Jr., CEcD

Economic Development Supervisor

1. What efforts are ongoing to promote Transit Oriented Development (TOD) at the rail station in your community?

We have made few meaningful changes in the past year with regard to TOD in and around the downtown. The one significant change is the adoption of the Housatonic Riverfront Zone last August (2009). It covers an area south to The Bleachery and north to the southern section of Housatonic Avenue, on the east side of the Housatonic River. It was meant to encourage adaptive reuse of larger parcels on the village side of the river, that are currently industrial or other less desirable riverfront usage. It specifically encourages mixed-use development and was somewhat contemplative of the future arrival of passenger rail service to the downtown. It is expected to allow for the addition of 70 or 80 residential units at the Bleachery property specifically.

There is one new apartment complex under construction on Fort Hill Road, that will have approximately 36 rental units of 1 & 2 bedroom varieties. That project is on the other side of the river, but

close enough to be of consideration.

2. Do you have any existing compact residential or residential mixed use developments approved within the last decade with housing densities greater than 10 units per acre? If so, what types of comments did you receive during the review process?

No.

3. Do you have appropriate or suitable sites to promote this type of development? If so, would you consider initiating TOD within a quarter- to half-mile of the rail station? If no, why not?

The Housatonic Riverfront Zone identifies larger parcels on the village side of the river that currently house industrial or other less desirable riverfront usage. These parcels could be suitable for TOD. Our Economic Development Commission, Zoning Commission, and much of the Town Council are supportive of rail service restoration and the subsequent promotion of Transit Oriented Development in the Village Center. We are looking for a positive signal from the State DOT before further encouraging density in the Village Center.

4. Would you consider revising your municipal parking regulations to promote higher density TOD within a half-mile of the rail station?

Yes, pending the extension of rail service to New Milford.

5. Do you have any specific recommendations to help promote TOD within your community?

Extend rail service to New Milford.