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Westminster, Massachusetts – Developing Route 2 Corridor Priority for Local Town Leaders

By Evan Calbi

Beyond the Greater Boston area, Route 2 is a lifeline that cuts through Massachusetts. The state highway runs the entire length of the Commonwealth, from the New York border to Boston. The route is still referred to as the Cambridge and Concord Turnpike, a reference to its original name when it was established in 1803.

The town of Westminster, in the heart of Worcester County, benefits from its location along Route 2 and its proximity to the many business centers in the region. Over the last few years, the community has raised its profile in a bid to attract new business to a section of town called the Route 2 Corridor by offering attractively priced commercial and industrial real estate.

“In the last six months we've had inquiries about Westminster on both the state level and out of the region,” says Robert Pontbriand, director of economic development for the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation. “It is your sort of quintessential, small New England town, but it’s close to cities as well. You have Gardner to the west and Fitchburg and Leominster to the east. Boston is 50 miles east, and Worcester is 20 miles north. It’s a central location.”

Developing the Route 2 Corridor is a priority for local town leaders. The Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP), a statewide tax incentive program designed to stimulate business growth and encourage development, designated the area as an Economic Target Area (ETA). Certified projects with ETA designation receive state tax incentives that range from a 5% investment tax credit to a 10% abandoned building tax deduction.

“Being designated as an Economic Target Area really puts sites on the map on both the state and national level as far as availability,” says Pontbriand. “It also sends the message that these particular sites meet all of the criteria to begin development as soon as possible.”

In addition to tax incentives for new businesses, the area features readymade infrastructure including municipal services and state-of-the-art telecommunications. “The infrastructure is in place,” says Marie Auger, Westminster's interim town planner. “These sites have everything — water, sewer, natural gas, ample parking, loading docks, and a location right off Route 2.”

The municipal services already in place are some of the best in the state. According to a 2007 study by Mullin Associates, Inc., “These infrastructural systems are essential for any future uses that are to be placed along the corridor. Indeed, there are but a handful of communities in the entire Commonwealth

that can boast of having all of the basic requirements for first class industrial/office park use that one can find in Westminster.”

Sweetening the deal, Westminster recently added to the economic incentives available to new businesses. Town leaders adopted Chapter 43D, a law allowing communities to expedite the permitting process for new businesses. “In the last year, three sites were designated as 43D sites, including the property along the Route 2 Corridor,” says Auger. “A solar farm that generates energy for the national grid is in permitting process now.”

The solar farm is part of a trend of new technology startups currently sweeping the area. In 2007, Governor Deval Patrick unveiled the Massachusetts Life Sciences Initiative, a plan to invest \$1 billion in biotechnology over the next 10 years. Worcester County has thrived as a result, led by the Biotech Park Neighborhood in Worcester, the second largest city in the state after Boston.

“Westminster offers both an affordable community and the infrastructure for new business,” says Michael Hackman, founder and chief executive officer of Hackman Capital Partners, LLC, an investor in a joint venture which acquired Route 2 Commerce Park, a 396,000-square-foot subdividable high technology/manufacturing/warehouse complex visible from Route 2. “It’s rare to find an area that is as move-in ready.”

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Route 2 Commerce Park is a joint venture among entities formed by Hackman Capital Partners (www.hackmancapital.com), Calare Properties (www.calare.com), and KBS Real Estate Investment Trust (www.kbsreit.com). Route 2 Commerce Park is currently leasing space at 100 Simplex Drive in Westminster, MA. For leasing information, visit www.Route2CommercePark.com or call CB Richard Ellis at (617) 912-6947.