Transit-oriented development is the wave of the future and the CTA FastTrak stations in West Hartford, along with a potential rail stop on the horizon, have opened the door to opportunities for such development in town.

"We want to try to promote a mixed-use environment and our opportunities to promote transit-oriented development would include residential development, perhaps even office development, in the future," Director of Community Services Mark McGovern said. "We're looking for more development that would put feet on the street so we understand that we need to try and facilitate a better pedestrian environment."

A change to zoning code was made in 2014 to permit residential uses in the general business zone and the general industrial zone, a change that will make mixed-use development possible along New Park Avenue, McGovern said.

West Hartford then applied for a Transit-Oriented Development Planning Grant through the Office of Policy Management in December 2014. OPM, in consultation with the Interagency TOD Workgroup, ranked and scored 23 applications, according to information from the state. The West Hartford project was one of 11 prospective planning projects chosen.

According to the resolution, smart growth are TOD and mixed-use development, Town Planner Todd Dumais said, calling them "the wave of the future."

The Capitol Region Council of Governments supported the town for the planning grant application because the council continually encourages plans and policies taking advantage of major infrastructure investment in the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Rail and CTA FastTrak project areas.

The town requested a total of $250,000 to research potential improvements and implement recommendations, and received the $75,000 requested for a complete streets study for the area.

There is an opportunity for New Park Avenue to become a more well-rounded environment through a mix of uses."

- Director of Community Services Mark McGovern

The current TOD zone -- the Flatbush and Elmwood fastrack station area -- is defined in the application as a "unique commercial district."

"Traditionally this area was dominated by industrial uses, with nearly all of the town's 700+ acres of industrially zoned land located within it," the application reads. "In general, the industrially zoned areas do not reflect the heavy industry of the past, but rather commercial services, auto-related repair garages, small machine shops and storage yards. More recently, a trend towards retail development has occurred."

It notes the "significant industrial employment centers" of the area, including major commercial employers, the Home Design District and the single- and multi-family residential neighborhoods that line the TOD zone.

A long with the fastrack stops, state improvements to New Britain Avenue, construction of the Trout Brook Trail and the new Charter Oak International Academy are all
listed as recent positive changes, while traffic, pedestrian and bicycle
accessibility and safety are listed as needed improvements to "capitalize
on the opportunities presented by the two new CTfastrak stations and
the proposed NHHS rail station."

Funding for initial steps toward bringing a railroad station to West
Hartford was approved by the State Bond Commission at the beginning
of the year.

Gov. Dannel Malloy's office announced at the time that the
$8.75 million approved would be used to advance design plans and
address environmental issues for new railroad stations on the New
Haven-Hartford-Springfield line and the New Haven Line. The fund-
ing was combined with $4 million in previously approved funding.

Called the "Hartford Line," the new NHHS line stations will be in
Enfield, West Hartford, Newington and North Haven. Enhancements
will be made to existing stations in Windsor Locks and Windsor, and a
location study for a future Hamden station will be done.

The West Hartford rail station will be accessed from the Flatbush
Avenue CTfastrak station.

The town's vision for the future outlined in the TOD planning grant
application is for a more walkable and mixed-use redevelopment of
the New Park Avenue area, including dedicated walking and bicycle
networks from neighborhoods to commercial and municipal destina-
tions, programs that support and encourage alternate transportation
modes, and land use decisions that support smart growth.

The study funded by the grant will focus on a review of the
Flatbush and Elmwood Station areas, a feasibility assessment for
development and implementation, conceptual planning and zoning
amendments, evaluation of alternatives, public outreach and partici-
pation, and final reporting and public presentations.

"There is an opportunity for New Park Avenue to become a more
well-rounded environment through a mix of uses," McGovern said.

He noted smaller parcels have already begun to convert from
industrial to other uses, such as 635 New Park Avenue which used to
be industrial and now includes gyms, personal services and other
neighborhood elements.

"That's sort of a new type of investment that leads us to believe
we'll see more and more of this type of activity," McGovern said. "What's
critical is residential opportunities and places of work."

Plans evolve
The first major mixed-use, transit-oriented development in the
works is a $19 million project on the former Pontiac dealership site at
616 New Park Avenue, north of the Elmwood fastrack station, planned
by Trout Brook Realty Advisors, the developer of the West Hartford
Housing Authority.

The plan includes 54 units that mix market-rate and workforce
housing on the building's three top floors with the first floor reserved
for retail use.

The units will be both one and two bedroom, though predomin-
antly one bedroom units are expected as the development is aimed at young,
working professionals, West Hartford Housing Authority President George
Howell explained during a public information meeting last month.

Howell said the options are open for the retail offering, though a
restaurant is not possible; he cited a casual coffee shop, bike shop or
dry cleaners as likely examples.

"Although the location near CTfastrak should be beneficial,
Howell said the idea for the project emerged prior to the fastrack project.

"We're looking at young professionals. With CTfastrak you could
have or not have a car and get into the downtown of both cities," he
said. "To me, it feels like Brooklyn, with its sense of urban sustainabil-
ity. It's a place to walk." He added, "Fastrack is here and it isn't going anywhere. This invest-
ment tells other investors, 'Maybe I should be here.'"

"616 New Park could serve as an economic catalyst for the area
by providing new customers for local restaurants, stores and busi-
nesses, and encouraging new investments in Elmwood and West
Hartford," a release on the development says.

To continue building on TOD opportunities, the town most
recently added its name to a

CTfastrak's first 100 days
The first 100 days of CTfastrak have had ridership numbers
that exceed expectations, and in late June, the 300,000th rider
boarded one of the buses running on the dedicated route.

Michael Sanders, transit administrator, said the CT
Department of Transportation projected 11,200 daily rides in
the corridor on an average weekday for the first year of service.

"We're already seeing an average of 14,000 weekday
boardings a day in June," he said.

The previous transit system had about 8,000 bus rides a day
along that line. About 1,000 of them, plus about 7,000 additional
riders are using the new rapid transit system now; with the
addition of the green buses running on the bus-only road
Ridership numbers drop to about 5,000 on Saturday and 2,500
on Sunday, Sanders said.

Routes and stops continue to be adjusted. For instance,
a new route to Westfarms Mall was added from West Hartford,
and another runs from the Flatbush station through West
Hartford Center and Bishops Corner to the Copaco Shopping
Center in Bloomfield. A few tweaks will possibly occur in August
with other changes coming, if necessary, in November.

CTfastrak also has a new rewards partnership, offering
riders discounts and incentives at local businesses. In West
Hartford, participants include The Corner Pub, Blast Fitness,
Bombay Olive, Custom Framing Depot LLC, Elmwood Grill & Bar,
Indigo Hair Innovations, Joe Czernoff's Bands and Wavecock,
New Asia Chinese Restaurant, Purrish Barber Shop, Max Muscle
Sports Nutrition and a Norik Photographers.

A survey conducted in June noted that 90 percent of people
who completed it were new riders on Connecticut Transit.
Information from the survey is being processed.

"Very efficiently and quickly, we want to get feedback from
our new customer base and see what each community and
in general, central Connecticut commuters are seeking in their
weekday and weekend transit needs," CTfastrak Spokesperson
Ron Driscoll said.
A potential road diet would modify New Park Avenue's existing four-lane roadway into a single travel lane in each direction, a two-way left turn lane in the center and bike lanes in each direction.

Connecticut Department of Transportation application for a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery discretionary grant for a project titled CTfastrak Ladders of Opportunity: Complete Streets to Improve Access Between BRT Stations and Employment.

The Capital Region Council of Governments, the facilitating entity for the application, brought on the Central Connecticut Metropolitan Planning Organization, West Hartford, Hartford, New Britain, and Newington and wrote the application for a total of $16,000,000 in TIGER funding. According to CTfastrak information, 86,000 jobs are located within walking distance to the busway while another 30,000 are accessible by federa to major employers. The project is aimed at strengthening connections "between low-income, transit-dependent neighborhoods that surround most stations, and the corridor's large employment base of 155,900 jobs," according to the application.

"Access to employment will be improved by constructing complete streets, enhancing transit operations and improving infrastructure that supports transit-oriented development."

According to the application, average daily traffic volumes on New Park Avenue range between 18,100 and 17,500. The defined New Park Avenue corridor is between New Britain Avenue and the intersection with Flatbush Avenue. The preliminary cost along with a road diet that would modify New Park Avenue's existing four lanes into a single travel lane in each direction, a two-way left turn lane in the center and bike lanes in each direction.

It will also create an improved link between the Elmwood Station and the existing Trout Brook multi-use trail terminus on New Park Avenue.

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The long-term goal is for the New Park Avenue corridor to evolve into a more mixed-use pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly neighborhood with the characteristics that support transit ridership growth. The New Park Avenue improvement project proposal

“The long-term goal is for the New Park Avenue corridor to evolve into a more mixed-use pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly neighborhood with the characteristics that support transit ridership growth.”

Still, he said, there is "no magic bullet." "What we need to do is try and provide the right environment. We have very unique areas that are doing well. We have a great school system, great park system, good environment that is very stable. There are a lot of things that attract development.”