

# Transforming Thompsonville Village

By Nelson Tereso

The town of Enfield is continuing its mission to revitalize and transform its historic town center known as Thompsonville Village into a walkable, sustainable, vibrant, and livable community, with the goal of attracting young professionals and entrepreneurs into the village.

Town staff have been diligently working to form partnerships with nonprofit organizations, developers, and governmental agencies to aid in the redevelopment of Thompsonville Village.

The town is in the process of adopting a Midtown Tax Incremental Financing District, which permits the town to freeze present property values within the district and use up to 50% of the newly captured increased tax value for downtown area related projects.

A TIF is a financing method that utilizes future increases in property tax revenues and reinvests them into the TIF district to spur economic development.

By freezing the values and using revenue that is above the current value for downtown-related projects, it creates a fund to offset those

project costs in lieu of raising the funds through increased property taxes. The investments will spur other economic development in the area.

The most crucial task that Enfield faces to revitalize Thompsonville Village is obtaining the state's support on constructing a much-needed train platform along the Hartford Line in

Thompsonville.

The town is working toward the acquisition of five parcels owned by Eversource Energy on the west side of the Hartford Line to eventually form a public and private partnership for a redevelopment project.

If the town obtains ownership of these parcels, it will then be able to market the adjacent town-owned historic former Westfield Casket Hardware Co. building at 33 N. River St.

Redevelopment of the Casket building would provide a unique opportunity to develop mixed-used space, which is compatible with transit-oriented development.

Enfield is the largest municipality north of Hartford without a train stop. Additionally, the town has the Bigelow Commons, which is a renovated apartment complex that was once the location to one of the largest manufacturers of carpeting.

Today, the Commons are home to almost 2,000 Enfield residents, who would find great use out of a train stop right in their own backyard.

The Commons are supportive of this initiative and are evaluating the possibility of providing the necessary parking needed to support transit ridership.

This project is crucial in improving the mobility of all our Enfield residents.

Enfield is also working with the Department of Transportation to enhance Thompsonville Village by providing a multipurpose pedestrian and bike access path, a pedestrian bridge over

Freshwater Brook, and a recreational area overlooking the Connecticut River.

The residents of our town, and tourists, will be able to walk along the river and view the natural beauty that is right here in our town.

To enhance the safety and walkability of Thompsonville Village, the town has invested in walking police patrols in Thompsonville. We hope this will help enhance the safety of the community.

The town has also created a Troubled



Properties Committee to address redevelopment of properties that pose an immediate or serious threat to the health, safety or general welfare of the community.

The town is in the process of hiring an on-call real estate agency that will represent the town's interest in marketing and negotiating sales for these troubled properties so that they can be put back to productive reuse.

To strengthen its public and private partnership, the town's Office of Community Development has obtained status as a certified local government. This is a historic preservation partnership between the town, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the National Park Service that ensures that historic preservation issues are understood and addressed at the local level and allows the town to apply for additional grants.

By becoming listed on the State and/or National Register of Historic Places, it gives the Town or the end users of the property the ability to apply for historic restoration grant funds and tax credits to capture the necessary subsidy needed to support their future redevelopment.

In fact, the Town is currently working on permanently relocating the Opera House Players, a local not-for-profit organization, into 100 High St. This theater group specializes in musi-

cal productions and is currently celebrating its 51st anniversary.

Tying all this all together will be the transformation of Higgins Park, located behind Enfield Town Hall. This project contemplates combining the existing Higgins Park property, which is currently being used as a softball field, with a portion of the adjoining former St. Adalbert parish property.

The newly created Higgins Park Green would consist of an open grassy area for recreation, a new playscape, a new community center (including an outdoor pool), a bandshell, a dog park, and a walkable trail with fitness stations. The parish property would include the existing gymnasium and former convent.

This acquisition would allow for access to Higgins Park from Alden Avenue while creating a new connection into the Thompsonville Village.

The plan is for the gymnasium to be renovated while consolidating town departments into this area, which would create additional redevelopment within Thompsonville Village.

Together, these projects will make Thompsonville a leader in economic development and the center of the town of Enfield.

*The writer is Enfield's deputy director of economic and community development.*

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