

Concord Township ready to accept proposals for development of new mixed-use project center

By Chad Felton, The News-Herald

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After 11 years, Concord Township is ready to step up to accept proposals for the development of a new Concord Town Center Mixed Use Project.

Located within the Auburn-Crile Corridor, the Concord Township Town Center Master Plan details the framework and vision for a mixed use destination offering high-end retail, restaurants and entertainment venues, in addition to offices and some residential

housing options.

Safe and integrated pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and plazas will allow opportunities for outdoor dining, fitness classes, art installations and gathering while maximizing natural amenities of the site, according to a Concord Township news release.

With limited [retail and service amenities](#) currently available, many residents and workers within Concord Township often leave the community to shop and dine, the release stated. Groceries, goods and services, in addition to associated office spaces, are envisioned in the Mixed Use Town Center.

The township also would consider moving its community center to attract daily fitness, recreation and related programs. Supporting such recreational uses creates a destination component necessary for mixed use developments to sustain themselves long term, the release stated.

According to Concord Township Administrator Kathy Mitchell, the township has been working on the project since 2005. The original Auburn-Crile Business Corridor Study was the initial step.

The study identified potential future economic development opportunities in the corridor and ensured that service, zoning and infrastructure were properly matched to maintain efficient, maximized development for the corridor, acting jointly with the overall development agenda of Concord Township.

Following the completion of the 2006 Business Corridor Study, some zoning changes within the corridor were approved and about \$13 million in roadway and utility improvements also were planned to ensure immediate and convenient access to the Concord Town Center site, according to the release. The township actively and successfully pursued authorization and financing for the new roadway connection from the existing Capital Parkway/Auburn Road intersection eastward to a new intersection at Crile and Route 44. The road improvements were approved not only for safer, efficient traffic circulation, but to help ignite economic development within the corridor.

Additional analysis was conducted by the [Concord Township-City of Painesville Joint Economic Development District](#) when the group hired Buxton, a consumer analytics firm, in 2012.

Buxton surveyed Concord Township and the surrounding trade area to determine and understand the needs and demands of consumers, residents and potential retailers. Those views were tracked over the course of four years to understand and gauge consumer and spending trends within the township's trade area.

According to Buxton's 2015 estimates, 94,503 people were within a 15-minute drive of the proposed Town Center area, with a total of 57,237 people contained within the existing workplace population. The analysis concluded that a large segment of the population was being underserved, and retail and service demands were not being met.

While this data was being collected, an update to the comprehensive plan was completed in 2015. As part of the update, specific topics were identified as essential items to address, including a new Town Center model (updated from previous 2006 study), and key zoning recommendations needed to support a Town Center concept. Public meetings were held to update the comprehensive plan for Concord Township, completed and adopted by the trustees in May 2015.

In early 2016, the township acquired the southwest corner of Auburn and Capital Parkway to establish a starting point for the project. The 7-acre investment set the stage for the mixed-use concept and was a key component in the pitch to potential developers, the release stated.

Concord Township Trustee Chris Galloway said the property is a returnable asset in terms of investment.

"The land acquisition is a value recoupable holding rather than a stranded cost and a critical component to development strategy. This project is a complement to Concord's existing fabric. It doesn't detract from, but rather enhances, our community's most attractive attributes."

JEDD and township officials, in combination with the planners and architects of Chicago-based Risinger and Associates, developed the updated Town Center Master Plan that was approved and adopted by township trustees in December 2016. Following the adoption, the most recent RFP was sent out in May seeking a developer for the Town Center concept. Concord Township and JEDD officials have been preparing for prospective developers to take interest.

Mitchell was adamant that the development is not about "Big Box Retail" or creating another strip mall plaza.

"We want to allow our residents and workforce to stay in our community and within Lake County, which is why we are hoping to develop a town center that is about creative place making," she said. "Through the various studies and explorations over time, we have come to realize that our proposed project within the Auburn-Crile corridor requires a mix of uses for long-term sustainability and success, which means some limited housing, too."

According to the Demand Institute, a nonprofit think tank headquartered in New York City, "Communities that can offer the best of urban living (convenience and walkability) with the best of suburban living (good schools and more space) will thrive in the coming decade."

For more information on the project, visit www.concordtwp.com.

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