

'Transit-oriented' keeps tenants coming and going

BY MATT KELLY
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

It's a corny mantra for the economic development world, but it just might work: Build it, and they will come.

From Medford to Woburn to Newton, state officials and private developers are testing that thesis under the moniker of "transit-oriented development." Such projects adjoin subway stations or other transportation hubs and include both commercial and residential elements so that people will come — and go — all day long.

"It's a huge trend," says Ted Tye, managing partner at Newton-based National Development, "and it's that way for all good reasons."

National Development broke ground in November on its first transit-oriented project. Called Station Landing, the site is a 16-acre parcel next to the Wellington Circle MBTA station on the Orange Line. The first phase, to be delivered in early 2006, consists of 292 luxury apartments and 67,000 square feet of retail space. Ultimately, the project will include two towers of luxury condominiums, a hotel, more retail space and a tram to shuttle people to the subway.

Nestled against routes 28 and 16 on the outer fringes of Medford, Station Landing "is a bit apart from the rest of the world," Tye admits. "That makes the

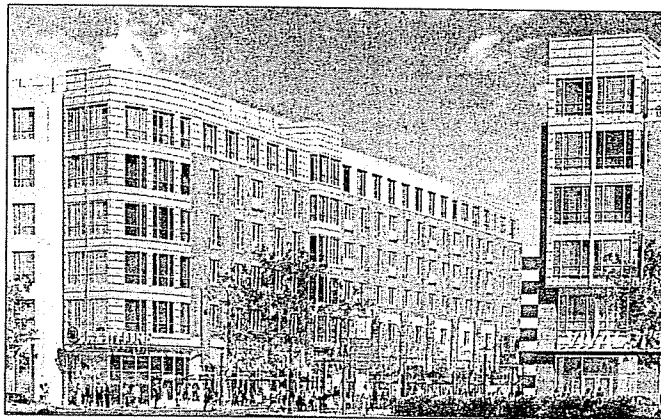
transit link all the more important."

State economic-development officials see transit links as not merely important, but indispensable. Eager to increase the housing supply — yet avoid new burdens of traffic or pollution — the Romney administration is pushing several pilot projects to convince cities and towns that dense, multiuse developments near mass transit can help solve everyone's problems.

"The advantage ... is that proximity allows you to reduce dependency on car travel," says Tad Read, planning coordinator in the state's Office of Commonwealth Development. "People like it. People like to live this way."

Coincidentally, the T owns a large number of surplus properties and needs new sources of revenue. That has led it to launch pilot projects at the Wonderland Blue Line station in Revere, the Malden Center station in Malden, and the Mishawum commuter rail stop in Woburn, where it is trying to coax local officials to allow dense, multiuse zoning for transit-oriented development.

Of the three, Read says, Woburn is furthest along; the city council is holding public hearings this month to rezone a parcel near Mishawum from office-only to allow multifamily residential buildings. (Zoning amendments for Revere and Malden are still being worked on.)



The first phase of National Development's Station Landing, near the Wellington Circle MBTA station, consists of 292 luxury apartments and 67,000 square feet of retail space.

"It is one obstacle," Read says. "If developers have to push for zoning themselves, they're not interested."

Station Landing — which fits the description of a transit-oriented project, but is not one of the state's pilot sites — is a rare exception. National Development purchased the property in 2002 without multiuse zoning, but city officials were so eager for development there that they amended its zoning in five months.

At the outer reaches of the MBTA's domain, other cities are pursuing their own transit-oriented projects. Lowell is eyeing development of the Hamilton Canal District, an 18-acre stretch of land connecting downtown to its Gallagher terminal on the commuter rail. City officials are still drawing up a master plan, but envision 1,000 units of housing, plus office and retail space, essentially to extend downtown Lowell all

Please see TRANSIT Page 11

TRANSIT: Projects near transit points show promise, execs say

From page 7

the way to the train station.

David Hancock, partner with Boston-based architectural firm CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares Inc., says the key to any successful transit-oriented project is to mix residents and office workers in the same location. "You mix employment, which has people going one way, and residents, which has people going the other way, and then you have people coming and going all the time," he says.

Hancock bemoans such areas as Boston's Financial District or Kendall Square, perfectly sound projects that

are empty by the end of the workday. Hancock heartily endorses the idea of mixing uses and keeping people "behind the facade" with apartments, stores or entertainment. The Loews Theater at the Ritz Carlton (which CBT helped design) is one example.

Tye is practical about transit-oriented development projects as well: building an attractive multiuse development will make it easier to fill the office space at a time when office space abounds throughout metropolitan Boston.

"It clearly does build the appeal around the office building," he says — because, Tye readily notes, "We are also doing this to make money."