

## Officials welcome long-awaited gains

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Despite national and local economic forecasts that seem to get grayer by the day, a plan to revitalize the abandoned Digital Equipment Corp. office park on Parker Street in Maynard is poised to move forward, one of two business-district redevelopment projects being considered for the town this winter.

Developer Chartwell Properties of Hudson is expected to submit its formal proposal for the Parker Street site to the town within a few weeks, commencing a permitting process that has been years in making, according to local officials. The sprawling retail and office complex planned for the dormant 58-acre parcel would prove a significant revenue source for the town, said William Cranshaw, chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

"This would make a big difference on the real estate taxes and how much goes to the schools," said Cranshaw in a recent telephone interview.

Meanwhile, Walgreens Co. has filed plans for a 10,510-square-foot building that would occupy a central gateway into town, where routes 62 and 27 intersect. The first public hearing on the project was held Tuesday. The building would sit at the heart of Maynard's downtown area, replacing five residential buildings that are scheduled for demolition, said Town Administrator John Curran.

The Parker Street project is large in scale - especially for this town of 10,592.

A first stage of the project entails a 45,000-square-foot supermarket, which will serve as the anchor, as well as 110,000 square feet of retail space. For the second phase, developers plan to convert an abandoned 400,000-square-foot structure on the site into office space, as well as build approximately 100 residential condos.

Chartwell Properties did not return phone calls last week, but Marie Morando, an administrative assistant in the town planning office, said she has been talking to company officials and that they plan to submit a formal proposal within weeks.

Cranshaw said the Parker Street project has been in the pipeline so long - almost five years - that the developer probably isn't going to change course all of a sudden.

"We're all concerned about the economic situation," said Cranshaw. "But the project was here long before the meltdown of subprime lending or anything like that."

Curran said the property on Parker Street has been empty for more than a decade, after Digital moved out of the buildings in the early 1990s. The town has not realized any tax revenue from the office park since then, he said.

The proposal to revamp the property has gone before Town Meeting three times for various approvals.

About five years ago, voters signed off on a business-incentive agreement that provides a tax break for the developer, said Curran.

In 2006, approval was given for a rezoning to allow for retail and residential uses on the site in addition to office park space. Last February, voters approved the concept plan for the campus of retail and office space.

As part of its arrangement with the town, Chartwell Properties has agreed to make \$1.2 million in road improvements to help the town accommodate the influx of traffic from the site.

The improvements include installing a traffic light near the development and major upgrades to Route 117 and Route 27, said Brendon Chetwynd, chairman of the Planning Board.

As for the Walgreens store, Cranshaw said it is expected to provide as much as \$50,000 annually in tax revenue to the town.

"It's an attractive area," he said. "There's a lot of cross routes going through the center of town there."

Cathy O'Dea, assistant town administrator, said some residents and members of a nearby church had raised concerns at the public hearing, citing access issues and the design of the building.

Despite the grim economic forecasts, Walgreens remains committed to building at the site, said Myron Fox, an attorney for the company. He said the company has not expressed concerns to him about the economy.■

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