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WEST WINDSOR

IT took nearly five years to get all aboard, but this township is to have its own “transit village”: 800 housing units and a retail center beside its Princeton Junction train station.

It was not conceived as a state-designated Transit Village eligible for planning assistance, as the city of Summit, for instance, is now seeking. But a local developer has forced the town to agree to a plan much like a transit village anyway — by taking it to court and winning a legally approved settlement plan.

In 2007, the township’s redevelopment plan aimed to create a bustling town center on a 350-acre site, with abundant public gathering places and retail. The town’s plan, however, was to limit the number of housing units to 500 — which is far below the housing density of the state’s “smart growth” planning model for a Transit Village area around a train station.

In 2008 Steven E. Goldin, a developer who lives here and owns a 24-acre parcel just west of the station, proposed his plan for a transit village development, which originally included almost 1,500 units.

Mr. Goldin argued, as had a consultant hired by the town before it adopted its redevelopment plan, that dense multifamily housing would be an essential element of a lively town center. West Windsor, which has about 27,000 inhabitants, has no shopping or entertainment district; residents must travel to Princeton, the next town over.

There is a built-in demand, Mr. Goldin said, for housing so close to Princeton University. A corner of the campus actually lies within West Windsor, and the Dinky train line takes people to Princeton Junction from the campus.

To push his plan he took legal action, and this past summer, after several years, the town

agreed to the court-approved compromise of 800 units plus retail. “I’m a big fan of Winston Churchill: ‘Never, ever, ever give up,’ ” said Mr. Goldin, who is the chief executive of InterCap Holdings in Warren.

Additionally, after the settlement was hammered out, advocates for lower-income residents jumped in with another lawsuit that, while not challenging the overall number of units, increased the number of “affordable” ones, to 98 from 40. On Sept. 19, the West Windsor Township Council voted to set the amended plan in motion.

“This is fantastic, and we will do something great for the town,” said Mr. Goldin in a telephone interview last month. He said he could promise that the development, which includes 100,000 square feet of retail, would have a high “coolness factor.” Also, he has already contracted with a company to design a rooftop greenhouse. It will supply fresh produce to the local farmers’ market that is to get a year-round home in one of the transit-village buildings.

“But it’s incredible that it took all this struggle and effort just to get to the starting line,” Mr. Goldin said.

Early next year InterCap is set to start working out the details of construction planning with local authorities and will begin seeking the scores of permits required to build in a transit district — “always another long, complicated process in the state of New Jersey,” Mr. Goldin said, adding that construction should begin early in 2013.

As the plan stipulates that most of the units in the complex are to be condominiums rather than rentals, he expressed optimism about a “return to some level of normalcy” in housing sales by then, saying, “Every developer has to be an optimist, and believe that we are not putting together something that won’t sell.” The plan as approved is for 702 market-rate condos and 18 income-restricted condos, for buyers certified by local housing authorities as having low to moderate income. In addition, 80 income-restricted rental units will be built over street-level retail space.

It is too soon to talk about the prices to be attached to the condos, he said. But a consultant’s report submitted to the town pegged the overall project’s potential value at \$345.3 million, estimating assessed value for the 702 condos at \$450,000 each.

At packed public hearings — and on Facebook pages for and against the project — residents have debated whether the complex will change the personality of West Windsor for better or worse. The train station is currently surrounded by parking lots, but there is nonetheless a severe shortage of parking space. The transit district plan includes a new parking deck and also a public “promenade” along the street-level retail strip.

Mr. Goldin says InterCap specializes in designing “public places where there is always something going on, whether it’s interesting mom-and-pop shops, activities and places to gather.

“People going into these projects around the country are looking for a sense of community —

urbanism created in a suburban environment — whether they be young professionals or empty nesters who are still working and commuting.”

How to provide that, he said, is a matter of “gut instinct, not metrics.”

InterCap’s property off Washington Road, north of the Dinky line, is currently occupied by an older, nondescript office building that will be demolished, according to the plan.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: October 23, 2011

The “In the Region” article in some copies on Oct. 9, about efforts to create a town center in West Windsor, misstated the township’s position on applying to the state for Transit Village designation. West Windsor has indeed filed an application, which is pending; it is not the case that officials decided not to seek the designation.