

Meriden's New Information Technology Zone To Lure Businesses

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Technology, Technology, Technology. It may not be as catchy as Meriden's "Location, Location, Location" campaign, but the city's inclusion of nearly three square miles of properties in its new Information Technology Zone (ITZone) marks the beginning of the next phase of Meriden's renaissance.

The new ITZone, approved by the Meriden City Council on July 15, overlays hundreds of buildings and developable parcels, includes both the center city area, the former Veteran's Memorial Medical Center and Insilco sites near Cooper Street and stretches south to Wallingford along Broad and Colony Streets.

Meriden's ITZone offers real property tax incentives to property owners who construct or newly improve their buildings to house IT businesses.

With most of Meriden already "wired" for high speed Internet access, the city is now poised to attract new investment and help property owners improve space for new info technology companies.

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The incentive, based on the cost of improvements, will be in the form of a

break on the increased assessment resulting from the same improvements. The minimum new investment required is \$25,000. The break will be from 50 percent to 100 percent on the tax increase for terms of two to six years.

Qualified IT business tenants can also receive tax abatements for three years on IT personal property new to Meriden's tax rolls. This abatement will be 100 percent for the first two years and 50 percent in the third year.

According to **Peggy Brennan**, Meriden's Economic Development Director, "The ITZone program seems complicated but it really isn't. People who have any questions about the location of the Zone, the incentives and requirements for qualifications should call us. We'll walk them through the specifics. Our goal is to make this program very user-friendly."

"Meriden has been highly successful in attracting top-notch corporate headquarters along Research Parkway, which is nearly at capacity with companies such as Canberra Industries, RFS Cablewave, Cuno Corporation and Bob's Stores Corporate Offices" says **Stephen T. Zerio**, chairman of the city's Economic Development, Housing & Zoning committee.

"The ITZone is designed to attract investors and IT users; companies that will benefit from our central location and excellent IT infrastructure while investing in center city office reconstruction and other redevelopment opportunities."

Meriden's ability to create an information technology zone has been made possible because of long-standing partnerships with SBC-SNET and Cox Communications, who provide high-speed information transmission capabilities

(both voice and data) throughout the Zone.

"The utility companies have built an infrastructure that allows us to offer state-of-the-art technology to businesses locating in the ITZone," says Zerio.

"The City has invested \$24 million into the physical infrastructure of our city center and our partners have done their part to ready the area for high-tech tenants."

Many of the properties in the Meriden ITZone are also in the State-designated Enterprise Zone (EZ), says Brennan, noting that her department will help business owners secure these benefits if they qualify.

She adds that building owners and prospective tenants must submit both state and local applications prior to securing a building permit or signing a lease. Information Technology Zone benefits may only be applied retroactively except with the approval of the Meriden City Council.

"The great news about this new program is that local, established businesses and property owners may benefit from this program equally with new businesses," says **Sean Moore**, President of the Greater Meriden Chamber of Commerce.

"Meriden has made a strong commitment to its marketing campaigns and to being business-friendly," adds Meriden's Mayor, **Mark Benigni**. "We're hopeful that the ITZone will help us parlay those investments into returns on investment, with a unique offering for information technology dependent companies."

For more information about the Meriden ITZone, including a map of the affected properties and application forms, please contact **Peggy Brennan** at the City's Economic Development office at 203-630-4151. ■

Meriden's City Center Initiative

A VISION FOR THE LARGEST REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN THE CITY'S HISTORY

Meriden's past met its future as the Meriden Economic Resources Group (MERG) recently unveiled its vision for the largest redevelopment project in the city's history. The plan, which includes major transportation, flood control and economic development initiatives, represents the first draft of a comprehensive redevelopment proposal to greatly enhance the gateway to Meriden's City Center.

"For the first time that I can remember, all constituencies have been consulted and concur," says **Wayne D'Amico**, project coordinator for MERG. "From the Mayor's office, the city counsel chambers and administration to the business and arts communities, Meriden is speaking with one voice."

According to **Bob Landino**, president of BL companies, the Meriden project has tremendous potential once certain critical elements are addressed. It was Landino's firm that poured over 20 years worth of planning documents and studies that focused on downtown Meriden and the surrounding neighborhoods, to develop a plan that would address the myriad issues facing the urban center.

"The resources that lay in planning department proposals and flood control agency studies helped us move from a high-level goal of addressing critical issues to a plan with spe-

cific, measurable steps that will ameliorate obstacles and position Meriden for significant economic growth," he said.

The centerpiece of the project area for the City Center Initiative is a conceptual commercial development and new Town Green consisting of approximately 46 acres. Within that area currently exist various obsolete, under performing commercial properties and The Mills Apartments, a low-income, high rise housing project along with another high density garden style apartment complex presently under a mix of private and public ownership.

WAYNE D'AMICO, CCIM



MERIDEN

The newly configured and designed roads and a reconstructed waterway will alleviate chronic flooding problems that have plagued the City Center for decades.

The redevelopment of this area aims to improve regional access via I-691's connection into the City Center and reconfigure a historically confusing and ineffective road system. The newly configured and designed roads and a reconstructed waterway will alleviate chronic flooding problems that have plagued the City Center for decades. The development of a regional retail, Class "A" office and multi-modal transportation center will stimulate economic activity at the hub of the City Center,

sparkling real opportunity and market driven revitalization of the surrounding environs.

"MERG and BL closely studied and analyzed the City Center and its surrounding neighborhoods and have developed a plan that not only fixes problems but positions this gateway area for great prosperity in the future," said **Stephen T. Zerio**, majority leader of the Meriden City Council and chairman of its Economic Development Housing and Zoning Committee.

Highlights of the Meriden City Center Initiative:

A new Meriden Green will serve as a physical and social center for the City Center, create a space for public gatherings and provide a new image for Meriden.

The Commercial Center will redevelop the Hub, create a Transportation Center in the historic Colony Street Post Office building, and provide multiple venues for offices, retail and commercial uses, all in a scale and style conducive to pedestrian traffic, and promoting activity in the area beyond weekday business hours.

The Downtown Arts District builds on the work already done to create a pleasant pedestrian environment along West Main Street and moves toward realizing the full potential of the planned community Playhouse anchoring the urban neighbor-

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hood with small shops and offices on the street and housing above.

- ◆ The Colony Street Small Business Corridor extending from the Downtown Arts District will utilize existing buildings for small business and retail serving the nearby courthouse, arts district and local interests.

- ◆ The Government Center, anchored by City Hall, will be made more accessible and inviting by the related transportation improvements resulting in a campus-like environment around City Hall.

- ◆ The Cook Avenue Campus uses the former medical office and VMMC properties to support a proposed campus environ-

ment for a higher education facility or technical school.

- ◆ The Commercial Business Link will link the Westfield Shoppingtown and surrounding commercial uses with the Commercial Center and provide direct regional access to the City Center from I-691.

- ◆ Redesigned Gateways to Meriden will improve physical access and the impression conveyed to visitors.

D'Amico stresses that MERG's conceptual plan is a first, large step toward the realization of a new City Center, one that will require additional planning work, public and private funding and significant

physical land development.

"MERG is not a public agency, but we welcome public input. The ideas and creativity of citizens and city employees who've been working to affect change in Meriden for decades have created groundwork for this plan."

Mayor Benigni, adds, "If we can get the majority of this project moving forward, we will be able to position Meriden's City Center as a regional magnet." ■

