

# TOLLAND VILLAGE PROJECT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (“FAQs”)

Last updated April 23, 2016

## OVERVIEW

### **What is the name of the proposed development and what is its purpose?**

The proposed name of the development is “The Tolland Village Project.”

Its purpose is:

- to provide a place for residents from many walks of life to enjoy Tolland and to contribute to our community
- to be an attractive, efficient part of Tolland, with New England-style architecture and green, energy-efficient buildings
- to provide amenities such as a hotel, a premier restaurant, and a variety of small retail establishments
- to allow residents to live with fewer vehicles to maintain and clog our roads
- to answer a need for higher-density housing in a location which does not impact the rural nature of Tolland.

### **Why have we heard different names (i.e. University Gateway Village, etc.)?**

The zoning area in Tolland’s regulations is “Tolland Village Area” or “TVA.” This doesn’t change unless PZC votes to change it.

The developer has shown visuals and used the phrase “University Gateway Village” or “UGV.” At this point, he has not submitted an application for development so the name is not decided. He is very open to and wants to hear feedback from Tolland residents.

### **What is the timeline for the proposed development?**

If the various approvals, studies, engineering, and environmental processes go smoothly, the project could break ground in mid- to late-2017 and would be complete in about three years.

### **What is the mix of residential and commercial space proposed for the development?**

The proposed development consists of:

Apartments (67 studio, 112 1-bedroom, 155 2-bedroom, 35 3-bedroom)

20,000 square feet of small retail

50,000 square feet for a hotel

4,000 square feet for a restaurant

### **What are the proposed apartments going to cost to rent per month?**

Rent ranges from about \$1,100 to \$2,000 for studio, 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom apartments.

**How will the proposed development be integrated with UConn?**

Other than providing shuttle service to and from the UConn campus, there is no relationship with UConn.

**Why was Tolland chosen for it?**

In a word, location.

Tolland sits at the crossroads of I-84 and Route 195, so it's convenient for people living in the TVA to commute to both Hartford, Storrs and other towns. It's also in a place where people can simply walk or cycle to future businesses in the Technology Campus Zone.

**Did Tolland solicit this proposed development or is it driven by outside parties?**

The Town did not solicit this proposal, though the Town has encouraged development proposals for this area for at least ten years.

**Why is the Tolland Village Area a good site for this proposed development?**

For several reasons.

Because it's commercially-zoned and is served by both sewer and water. This helps support more housing.

Because Tolland needs a greater variety of homes—by law—which means apartments or small townhomes. There are very few properties which can support commercial development, and this is one of them. By putting more available homes here, we're reducing the need to do so in the rest of town.

Because it isn't historically significant or particularly rural. Placing development in other parts of town would ruin the rural nature of the other parts of town which are historical or rural.

**What brand of hotel is proposed?**

The developer has indicated that Hilton has proposed the ultra-modern *Trü*-brand hotel. However, he's also said that other hotel brands, including Marriott, are still interested, and that he's heard the feedback that such a modern hotel would not be acceptable to Tolland residents.

**What retail stores and restaurants are proposed?**

The developer has not engaged with a restaurateur or retailers because the hotel and housing are much more important to ensuring the long-term success of the development. The developer thinks that small stores (coffee shop, deli, specialty sports items, etc.) and offices (medical or professional) operated by Tolland residents will make up the retail stores. Restaurants being considered are Burton's, Gino's, and others.

**Does this development include anything on the other side of Merrow Road, behind the Dunkin' Donuts and Gulf station?**

No.

**How does a development of this nature in the TVA impact other development sites in Tolland, or other existing retail for that matter?**

As proposed, the TVA development brings in two anchors: housing and a hotel. These serve to support the restaurant and retail components of the site. Further, they act as a catalyst for additional development in the TVA on the other side of Merrow Road and add a much-needed boost to other retail goods and services already operating in the area.

**What is a Zip Car?**

“Zip Car” is a brand name, short-term hourly car rental service. They are standard vehicles which accept car seats for kids and have the usual features we expect in modern cars. They accommodate the needs of people who don’t need to own a car but have the occasional need to travel farther than a bicycle or walking can carry them.

**What are the development’s phases?**

The proposed development would occur in three phases.

Phase 1 is the creation of the infrastructure, such as securing environmental controls, moving dirt and rocks, and building drainage, roadways, utilities, and the intersection with Merrow and Cider Mill Roads.

Phase 2 is the first phase where buildings would start to appear, including the building on Merrow Road, the hotel, the transportation center, restaurant and as much of the housing element as early market demand drives.

Phase 3 is that last phase of building and would be when the last residential buildings, nearest Cider Mill Road, would be built.

## BENEFITS TO TOLLAND RESIDENTS

### **How does this development fit into the town's long term strategic plan and vision?**

The Town's zoning regulations state that the TVA is to implement the Town's *Plan of Conservation and Development*, enhance the gateway to the historic Tolland Green and preserve the nature of nearby areas, expand opportunities for economic development and housing in a mixed-use manner for the benefit of stakeholders and the Town, transition use and density between the Green and I-84, and allow for progressively more intensive development in the TVA as it approaches Interstate 84.

Whether it meets most or all of these purposes is subject to a wide variety of opinions, but the Economic Development Commission feels that it meets enough of them to say that the development fulfils the Town's long-term strategic vision and plan.

### **What is the total of tax revenues to be received if both sides of Route 195 in the TVA are as densely developed as proposed?**

The probable tax revenue impact of the proposed development is approximately \$2.5 million when fully developed. If something of similar taxable value were to be built across the street, then the impact could be closer to \$5 million. Tax revenues could go higher still as this project serves as a catalyst for other development activities in town.

### **Will the new amenities, food service and retail in the proposed development be open to everybody?**

Yes, the village community is open to everybody, whether it is the added specialty retail, the boardwalk or trails in and around the marsh, or the community amenities offered by the hotel. It is a Tolland resource and asset that we may all make use of.

### **I've heard the phrase "live, work, play" several times. What does that mean?**

A place where residents are encouraged to not only live, but also work and play. Why commute to Hartford or elsewhere when you can get what you need and want much closer to home? With the right mix of retail, housing and commercial development, residents will be in the enviable position of working locally, accessing desired amenities locally and being able to enjoy Tolland's natural resources, all within Tolland's borders.

### **How will this proposed development create economic growth in Tolland?**

Three words—Live, Work, Play—describe the path for economic growth in Tolland, and this development plays an essential role in that path.

**Live:** Making housing available to people of all walks of life is key to growing Tolland's economy. Adult children of Tolland residents can afford to make their homes in Tolland, as can seniors who are looking to downsize. People who wouldn't ordinarily want to buy a house, such as new faculty who haven't achieved tenure status, can make their homes here. This development answers their needs by providing a place for them to live—and keep their money in Tolland.

**Work:** People who live in Tolland need places to work, and a higher concentration of people near the Technology Campus Zone means that there are going to be businesses interested in Tolland. The Travelers, for example, has expressed interest in opening offices in Tolland's Technology Campus Zone because the TVA is attractive for this very reason.

**Play:** Residents of Tolland who spend less on transportation and housing have more money to spend on other things, including at restaurants and in shops, spurring growth in retail, restaurants, and professional services, such as doctors and dentists.

None of this will happen overnight, of course, but we must start somewhere, and this development is a great way to begin.

### **How will this proposed development affect existing Tolland businesses?**

There are some obvious positive effects caused by a having a population close to retail and restaurants. Nearby businesses will be able to market to more people who are within walking distance of their establishments, and hotel residents will require restaurants and occasional retail therapy.

Businesses which provide maintenance, construction, landscaping, etc., will also benefit from the presence of a new, large customer.

Current home-based businesses may even find that the retail spaces offered in this development are small enough to provide an affordable stepping stone to a larger space.

### **What about telecommuters?**

For those people who telecommute, the developer plans co-working space in a business incubator style where desks and conference rooms are available as needed.

### **Why is this proposed development good for Tolland? What are its benefits?**

This development benefits Tolland in many ways. For example, it answers the legal requirement to provide more variety in housing stock in a sensible and responsible way without affecting other parts of town. It also will provide anywhere from \$1,500,000 to \$2,500,000 per year in tax revenue. It may provide more students for our school system, which can make the system more efficient. It may also provide a more-varied population of residents and students, which is important for a well-rounded population.

As explained in another answer, it's also a stepping stone to economic growth in Tolland.

### **Will the developer pay any permit fees?**

Yes. For a project of this size (assuming it is approved as conceptualized) permit fees will be substantial—at least \$1,000,000.

**Assuming the Town Council approves the fullest abatement possible, how much in tax revenue will be collected?**

If the full abatement is approved, taxes will be collected during construction. When the certificate of occupancy is issued for a phase, the abatement begins. Three years later, the developer begins paying taxes gradually each year. Seven years after the certificate of occupancy is issued, the full taxes are due.

Assuming the full abatement is approved to the greatest benefit of the developer, and assuming construction takes three years, taxes collected will be approximately:

Construction Phase:

Years 1-3: estimated at an average of \$750,000 per year

Occupancy and Abatement Phase:

(The abatement does not affect the residents who pay full taxes on personal property and motor vehicles during this period.)

Years 1-3: \$0 per year

Year 4: \$500,000

Year 5: \$1,000,000

Year 6: \$1,500,000

Year 7: \$2,000,000

Full Tax Phase:

\$2,500,000 per year

**How does this project both take advantage of and help reduce current UCONN traffic on Route 195?**

The developer proposes to provide shuttle service to UConn. Also, its close proximity to the the State's commuter bus service allows residents to commute without increasing traffic on I-84.

**Why should Tolland residents concern themselves with economic growth in town?**

Economic growth in Tolland is extremely important given the stagnant nature of Connecticut's economy and the state of the State's budget. It is highly unlikely that Tolland will emerge unscathed from the next few years of Connecticut's state-level budget cuts. If we want to keep our services (think education, trash collection, etc.) the same, we will be required to raise taxes. If we want to keep our property taxes the same, then we'll have to cut services.

The only way to maintain services and keep property taxes in check is going to be to allow developers and companies to build more taxable properties. This development is one such example which makes highly-effective use of available space, eventually returning around \$2,000,000 in taxes per year to the town.

**How does economic growth work in general?**

Unfortunately, that's an answer that stretches several pages long on Wikipedia. Have a look at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\\_growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_growth).

**How will the proposed development be similar to Storrs Center near UConn or Blue Back Square in West Hartford?**

It will resemble both in that both are a mix of residential and retail in a small-ish area. However, Storrs Center has a distinct "university feel" to it given the nature of its occupants, and Blue Back Square has a distinctly modern feel to it, with tall, brick buildings. This development will be styled more like a tall New England village, reflecting the traditional nature of the area.

**What can a Tolland resident do to show support for this project?**

Whether you're for or against the project, you should attend all of the public hearings regarding it and should not be afraid to voice your opinions.

## CONCERNS OF TOLLAND RESIDENTS

### **Can Tolland support a hotel?**

Yes. Extensive studies by the developer support a hotel at this location, even without UConn's close proximity.

### **How can Tolland support a hotel if the one at UConn already failed?**

That hotel, the Nathan Hale, did not fail and was serving UConn's on-campus hospitality needs before UConn bought it to convert it to undergraduate student housing.

The developers have done a \$20,000 feasibility study showing viability for a limited-service hotel of 100 rooms is economically sound, one which draws on and benefits from both I-84 traffic and increased activity in the area, including UConn. The Nathan Hale hotel on the UConn campus had little visibility and did not draw on I-84 traffic. And over time, due to the demand for undergraduate housing on the UConn campus, the top two floors of the hotel were rented by UConn to supplement student housing needs in South Campus.

### **We have empty retail space in town now. Why do we need more?**

If you look at the retail space we have in town, you'll notice that none of it is within reasonable walking distance of a large part of the town's population. You'll also notice that the spaces that we have available are quite large—if you wanted to open a small shop with a storefront, you'd have very few choices available to you. As a result, this type of retail is completely missing from Tolland's amenities, a shortcoming which is addressed by this development.

### **Is UConn proposing this development?**

No. UConn is not a part of the development. However, people who work and learn at UConn will definitely be served by the development and will provide some highly-qualified tenants and neighbors for Tolland.

### **What tax incentives will Tolland be expected to provide to the project? When will the town start collecting tax revenue from the proposed development?**

The Town Council has to approve the tax abatement program (also called a tax incentive program) after an application is received by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and if the project gets that far, it's quite likely that it would do so. So let's assume that the full amount of abatement is approved.

If so, then the property taxes are waived for the first three years after the certificate of occupancy is issued. In year 4, the developer pays 20% of the taxes due. In year 5, the developer pays 40%. Year 6, 60%. Year 7, 80%. And in years 8+, 100%

### **Does the developer own all the land required to make this project a reality?**

No. A 7 acre parcel owned by the Town is necessary to implement the full development. The Town has a vested interest in ensuring this parcel is part of the development

because it will (a) allow the development to connect to Cider Mill Road which enhances the flow of traffic between Cider Mill and Merrow Roads and (b) substantially increase the tax revenues from the added buildings on that parcel.

### **What if I do not like the development as currently proposed?**

Landowners in the TVA have a right to develop their property to the fullest extent of the TVA regulations.

This development, however, has a lot that has to go right in order to make it happen. First, the developer needs zoning changes to achieve the density of housing required to make the development financially feasible. Second, the developer needs a parcel of Town-owned land (addressed in another answer). Third, the developer needs approval of the area and site plans. Finally, the developer needs approval of the tax abatement.

None of these steps is a “sure thing.”

### **Why *this* developer? Why *this* plan?**

Basically because this developer is the first one to conceive of a plan which is financially viable. Properties in the TVA have been available for decades, the TVA regulations have been around for years, and yet developers haven’t flocked to Tolland. This developer, on the other hand, is the first one to show serious interest and commitment to both the project and the community. So while somebody else might be clever enough to propose something better—or even much worse—for these properties, we couldn’t know unless that proposal came forward instead.

### **What about impact on town infrastructure and services such as schools, roads, water, sewer, police and fire?**

Let’s take these categories one at a time. (All of the impacts outlined below are estimated, if an estimate is even possible.)

Schools: The developer estimates about 75 students will be added to Tolland’s school district. If we look to the literature, a study by Mark Obrinsky and Debra Stein of the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University states that students add about 29 students per 100 apartments. Interestingly, in single-family, owner-occupied housing, that number is 51 students per 100 houses, so this development may be less fiscally impactful than a similar number of houses or townhomes.<sup>1</sup> Statistically, the effect on Tolland’s schools would be to add eight students into each of the 13 grades served (Pre-K to 12). At current enrollments and current class sizes, this averages out to be less than one student per classroom. (*Note: These are estimates which have not been endorsed by the Tolland Public Schools or the Board of Education.*)

Traffic: While Obrinsky and Stein also give figures for traffic volumes, estimating that the apartments would cause anywhere from 198 to 241 cars entering or exiting the development during peak hours, this is a development whose focus is on sharing cars

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<sup>1</sup> Obrinsky, Mark and Stein, Debra, “Overcoming Opposition to Multifamily Rental Housing,” Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2007.

and mass transit. These numbers may be insignificant compared to the 10,000 cars which go through the Green each day. Only a traffic study will reveal the likely impact.

Roads: The intersection where this development will connect to Merrow Road will require a traffic signal to be installed at the expense of the developer and in cooperation with the state's Department of Transportation. The area it is in is already badly in need of additional traffic controls (left turns out of Papa T's/Village Spirits/NAPA plaza, Dunkin' Donut, etc., are very difficult at times), so this light may help alleviate some of the turning motions of vehicles from these other businesses. Again, only a traffic study will tell the impact, especially to Cider Mill Road.

Beyond the traffic, the town will have to plow an additional road. As proposed, this road adds less a quarter mile to the 134 miles the town already cares for. The impact will be minimal.

Water: The water supply to this property is provided by Connecticut Water Company and is well-capable of handling the anticipated load.

Sewer: One advantage of this location is that it is one of the very few locations in town with sewer service. Sewer analysis would be done by an engineer and the town. It is likely that the developer will need to install a pump station on the property, but otherwise the sewer capacity is expected to be adequate.

Police: Obrinsky and Stein state that there are few studies addressing the relationship of apartment complex crime rates to overall crime rates, but cite two studies that find no differences between the two. Public Safety has already been involved in the discussion and believes that no additional personnel will be required, though the developer has offered a State Trooper sub-station in the development for convenience.

Fire: These buildings will be required to be protected by sprinklers and Tolland's 105' aerial truck in the station on Merrow Road is capable of protecting the taller buildings in this development. These buildings will also benefit from the latest fire code-compliant construction techniques and materials to provide the highest levels of occupant safety.

### **Will our schools become overcrowded again?**

Highly unlikely. See the question relating to impact to town services.

### **Will crime in Tolland increase as a result of this proposed development?**

Trooper sub-station (a satellite office) has been proposed, but no additional personnel will be required.

### **How will this proposed development affect the rural character of Tolland?**

The buildings will be situated on less than 20 acres of land which is less than 0.07% of the total area of Tolland. If Tolland were the size of a football field, the development would be about the size of a full-sized bedsheet.

If you're driving north on Merrow Road from the Interstate, you'll be able to see the buildings. The tops of some will be two to three stories higher than Merrow Road. They

will, however, look like New England-style buildings with siding, dormered windows, etc. Next to the façade of The Electric Blue and the canopies of the twin gas stations, these will provide a nice transition to the Tolland Green as envisioned by the Town.

**Will Tolland become overdeveloped like some residents feel Manchester or Vernon is? Why or why not?**

No, it won't. Tolland is unique compared to Manchester and Vernon in that it has very little land (less than a square mile) which allows commercial and residential development of this sort. If Tolland were the size of a football field, the total area for this sort of development would be a stripe across the field about two yards wide at the 50-yard line. If you look at a map of Tolland, the only areas where this scale of development are allowed are quite small compared to the other 39.5 square miles that give Tolland its rural feel.

**Will this proposed development affect the Tolland Green and its historical buildings?**

It depends on your definition of "affect." If you mean, "Will you see these buildings before you drive up the hill to the Tolland Green?" then, Yes, it will. If you mean, "Will this development cause the Tolland Green harm?" then it's highly unlikely that it will harm the Green and its buildings.

**Will affordable housing be required as part of the project?**

Yes. By regulation, any development in the TVA requires an affordable housing component. The developer is asking for the 12% minimum to reduce the number of apartments required to make the project fiscally viable.

**What's the deal with the zoning changes? Is that the same thing as an application?**

The developer has applied to make changes to the TVA zoning so that taller buildings (five stories) can be built closer to Merrow Road, and some other changes, including allowing a drive-through establishment. So, yes, this is an application, but it isn't an application for a development.

**If the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) approves the zoning changes, does that mean that the development is a "done deal?"**

No.

In fact, it's quite far from a done deal because the next step is even more intense than the first: the developer must apply to actually build the development, and the PZC can reject the application based on quite a list of reasons. The list includes architecture, conformity with town goals, traffic, pedestrians, interconnection, parking, environmental factors, etc. And the town will investigate, at developer's expense, all of the negative and positive impacts the development will have on the town.

If the PZC is satisfied that the application meets the requirements of the regulations and will not negatively impact the town will it allow the developer to build.

**How do we find out if the development will have negative impacts on the town, like traffic, environment, etc.?**

As part of the application process, the developer must pay for the Town to hire experts to evaluate these factors—and the Town gets to select the experts, even though the developer is paying the bills.

However, the Town will never know what the impacts might be unless the PZC approves the zoning changes because neither the Town nor the developer will pay for these experts without an active application.

**If the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) approves the zone changes this developer has requested, does that mean that these changes affect the other side of Merrow Road, behind the Dunkin' Donuts and Gulf station?**

Yes, but the PZC can reject the application for the same reasons as for any other development, including architecture, conformity with town goals, traffic, pedestrians, interconnection, parking, environmental factors, etc.

**Why can't Tolland build out the retail elements of the project to add amenities to town without doing the hotel and apartments?**

Well, Tolland itself can't do anything—we're a town and not a developer. Otherwise, the Town's zoning regulations encourage mixed uses, so the retail would have to be mixed with residential.

## OTHER

### **Who can a Tolland resident contact with additional questions on the project?**

Heidi Samokar is Tolland's Director of Planning and Community Development/Zoning Officer. She can be reached by phone at (860) 871-3601.

Mark De Pecol, the developer who is interested in developing the site, is available by E-mail [mdrealtycap@gmail.com](mailto:mdrealtycap@gmail.com) and phone 203-770-2159.

Both welcome your comments, both of support and opposition, and your questions.

### **Who wrote these FAQs?**

The questions were compiled by Andrew Levesque (interested town resident) and answered by Bill Eccles (Vice-Chairman, Town Council), Kevin Bouley (Vice-Chairman, Economic Development Commission), and Greg Williams (Chairman, Economic Development Commission). While three of us participate in town government, this work is independent and is not an official document of the Town of Tolland or NE Real Estate. Answers were verified by NE Real Estate (Mark De Pecol) and the Town of Tolland (Heidi Samokar) to the greatest extent possible and are accurate to the best of our knowledge based on information available at the time.