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Robbinsville's Edge: Speed to Market

by John Boyd Jr.

In a recent presentation to the Chicago-based Warehousing Education and Research Council (WERC), our corporate site selection firm named a series of “Hot Spots” in the U.S. for new distribution and fulfillment center operations. Robbinsville made this national list buoyed by an emerging site selection trend termed “The Last Mile.”

The rise in E-commerce and omni-channel retailing, coupled with Amazon’s quest for the holy grail of internet shopping — same-day delivery — are all underscoring the importance of speed-to-market in today’s instant gratification economy. Robbinsville, located within minutes of Exit 7-A on the New Jersey Turnpike and about an hour from the mega markets of both New York City and Philadelphia, is perfectly situated to deliver “last mile” benefits to Boyd Co. clients in the logistics sector.

Last July Amazon opened its first New Jersey distribution center in Robbinsville. It is a 1.2-million-square-foot facility employing more than 1,000 workers. The company plans to use this fulfillment center to debut its much-anticipated same-day grocery delivery service, called AmazonFresh.

In San Francisco Amazon is now testing its own delivery network for the final leg of a package’s journey to consumers’ doorsteps. The new service will give Amazon more control over shipping time and expenses. We expect the E-commerce giant and logistics innovator to roll out similar “last mile” services in major markets like Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago in the months ahead.

In addition to Robbinsville, other logistics “hot spots” named by our firm include: Savannah, GA; Miramar, FL; Dublin, OH; Jeffersonville, IN; Pryor Creek, OK; St. George, UT; Santa Teresa NM; Sparks, NV; Tracy, CA; Apple Valley, CA; and Ritzville, WA.

Another corporate location and recruiting trend that Robbinsville is well-positioned to capitalize on is corporate America’s growing affinity for niche “new urbanism” enclaves, not unlike Robbinsville’s Town Center mixed-use planned community.

Trending today is the decline of the sprawling suburban office campus in favor of a more urban

setting, one showing special appeal to millennials and young, upwardly mobile professionals. This is especially evident among tech companies like Google, Amazon, and Facebook that are carving out tech enclaves in niche office sub-markets in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Seattle.

Demographics also point to millennials clustering in a select number of U.S. cities. As young, dual-career professionals marry and start families later than previous generations, they are delaying or rejecting altogether moves to the suburbs. Many of these educated millennials are already living in Robbinsville, drawn to Town Center's mixed-use urbanism, relative affordability compared to the northern New Jersey/New York environs, and commuter-friendly location.

Our firm has seen first-hand the potential for industry to be attracted to a planned, multi-use community like Town Center. In the 1990s our firm was hired by the Howard Hughes Corp. in Las Vegas to develop a strategy to attract new corporate office investment to its Summerlin master planned community — the nation's largest. Today Summerlin houses major office operations of Williams-Sonoma, Expedia, Bank of America, HSBC, Citibank, Allegiant Airlines, and others.

Also, many of our clients' current headquarters and administrative offices were designed for workplace standards dating back 20 or more years. Today's collaborative work spaces and technology that allows mobile employees to work from anywhere have translated into much smaller office footprints. For some Boyd projects, the average square foot per office worker requirement has dropped from as high as 250 square feet to as little as 125. Worker requirements are also trending downward due to automation and the cloud. This trend fits nicely with smaller, tech-driven office projects expected to come on stream along Route 130 and in the Town Center periphery over the next few years.

It's been my experience that companies often make their first entree into a community in the form of a distribution center and then later expand their presence by relocating office, IT, research, and other support functions. With the huge concentration of distribution centers in the immediate Robbinsville/Exit 8A area, opportunities are great for Robbinsville to capitalize on this trend, not to mention the continued migration of back office projects out of New York City, especially now with its current mayor and his anti-business tax and regulatory agenda.

I would also point to amateur sports as a driver for economic development in Robbinsville. The township's high profile soccer academy, led by ex-New York Cosmos Bobby Smith, has put the Robbinsville name and brand out there nationally among the sport's elite. Nearby Mercer County Park this spring is hosting the Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Collegiate Championship Regatta that will attract thousands to the area. On a larger scale, we have seen Indianapolis — home of the NCAA — and Kansas City — home of the U.S. National Soccer Training Center — successfully leverage amateur sports as a promotional tool and strong driver of their local economies.

It is our firm's experience that, if there is one common denominator in successful economic

development, it is strong political leadership. Mayors like Jonathan Rothschild in Tucson, Stephen Goldsmith in Indianapolis, Oscar Goodman in Las Vegas, Tomas Regaldo in Miami are just a few examples of strong leadership paying dividends on the industry attraction front. In Robbinsville Mayor David Fried's leadership, business acumen, and steady hand during the Amazon courtship are well established and serve the community well.

John Boyd is principal of the Boyd Co. Inc. (www.theboydcompany.com), founded in 1975 in Princeton and one of the nation's leading corporate site selection firms. Boyd clients include PepsiCo, Time Inc., Royal Caribbean Cruises, Dell, HP, JP Morgan Chase, TD Bank, and other Fortune 500 and up-and-coming companies worldwide.

Boyd says that "30 years ago our firm coined the phrase 'Route 1 Corridor' in its much-heralded economic development blueprint prepared for Mercer County under the Arthur Sypek administration. Today we are seeing the same kind of development potential emerging along Mercer County's other major north/south corridor, namely Robbinsville's Route 130. We are excited to see this play out."

