

Firm says Town Center could benefit from shift away from cities

By Samantha Sciarrotta - October 31, 2020

Robbinsville's Town Center has undergone a makeover or two over the last couple of decades, and people are taking notice.

The Princeton-based Boyd Company named the site one of the top mixed-use developments in the country for Expansion Solutions Magazine last month.

"Town Center and Robbinsville as a whole are both in a sweet spot for attracting new residents and corporate investment," said John Boyd, Jr., principal at the Boyd Company. "Timing is everything in economic development, and timing is now a good friend to Town Center and Robbinsville."



The Lofts at Town Center, Robbinsville, NJ

Boyd cited Town Center's combination of retail and residential space as its positives. He also commended the Dave Fried administration on its efforts to improve JCP&L and Optimum

services, ensuring a sound power, light and Internet infrastructure for residents, especially those who are working from home.

All of that, coupled with Robbinsville's recreational space, make the development and the township as a whole "uniquely attractive," he said.

"A major driver of the resurgence of suburbia is the growing popularity of mixed-use developments like Town Center providing an urban feel along with attractive housing, retail, restaurants and eateries and modern office space," he said. "While the millennial workforce—highly coveted by today's employers—is not necessarily interested in golf courses and gated communities, they do like jogging trails, parks and open spaces. Robbinsville, in particular, has done a fine job of balancing open space, as seen in the recent purchase of the 158-acre Miry Run property for passive recreation, with the kind of development occurring in and around Town Center and along the Route 130 Corridor."

Town Center's growth aligns with national trends, Boyd added, and that could mean economic and residential growth in Robbinsville.

And COVID-19 has only made that more plausible, Boyd said, as city dwellers and corporate offices look to the suburbs. They're banking on a relief from the unease the pandemic has caused, especially in densely populated cities.

"One of the major national site selection trends that our firm is currently dealing with is the massive relocation of wealth, people and businesses from cities especially hard hit by the pandemic and whose fiscal conditions are sinking fast due to tax shortfalls and difficult business climates," he said.

Boyd cited the migration of California based-companies like Tesla, Charles Schwab, McKesson and Toyota to Texas. On the east coast, some are heading to Florida, but more are heading to New Jersey.

"Town Center and Robbinsville are well-positioned to be top landing spots for the mass exodus of New Yorkers and New York companies leaving the city due to the pandemic, social unrest and the impending tax avalanche," he said. "Historically, Northern New Jersey communities in Bergen, Passaic and Essex counties have been the beneficiary of this trend but due to inflationary cost pressures and congestion, Central New Jersey communities like Robbinsville housing attractive mixed-use developments like Town Center are poised to attract some of the already half a million people that have fled New York City during the pandemic."

Boyd said he sees the potential for the Route 130 area to develop in a similar fashion to the Route 1 Corridor, dating back to the 1980s—research and development center, financial operations and shared coworking centers could sprout up locally.

“Our corporate clients are telling us that remote working is working for them and they are planning for downsized office footprints in tune with the growing trend of remote working,” he said. “We see the new corporate office being almost like a spaceship, visited periodically (maybe twice or three times a week versus 9-5 every day of the week) by employees for consultations and training, with much of the weekly work carried out at home.”

And Robbinsville is likely to be the preferred landing spot for individuals and families looking to move to the suburbs.

“I would point to the right combination of development and open space which has been a smart, guiding principal of Robbinsville and its elected officials in recent years,” Boyd said. “When Town Center was first proposed, it was ahead of the curve and faced its share of opposition from those opposing this type of large-scale development. Town Center is now a valuable drawing card for Robbinsville, distinguishing it from other New Jersey communities.”

Other pluses include its proximity to the Newark and Philadelphia airports, New Jersey colleges and universities, the turnpike, highways and the New Jersey Transit and Amtrak Northeast Corridor Line. Other positives, Boyd said, include shore towns, cultural offerings and cities all within an hour or so.

All of that could lead to a very different Robbinsville—and Town Center—within the next five years. “We see opportunities for new retail and smart office development in and around the underutilized Foxmoor shopping plaza and opportunities for new restaurants appealing to the many new and diverse residents moving to Robbinsville. The BAPS temple—attracting thousands of visitors per month from around the globe—is another catalyst for exciting development activity in Robbinsville. Economic development today is very much about putting people first—that is to say, attracting talent first and the employers will follow. Having the many and varied lifestyle amenities found in Town Center and in the close-in Robbinsville region makes this all come together.”

It’s a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity that Boyd hopes succeeds.

“On a personal note, the future is bright for Town Center and that makes me happy,” Boyd said. “I now live and work much of the year in South Florida, but I am looking forward to getting back to DeLorenzo’s and having drinks at the new Kuo Social. Funny thing, wherever my travels take me, someone always comes up to me when they learn I’m from Jersey, and says, ‘Yeah, I know DeLorenzo’s, the best pizza in America!’ I couldn’t agree more.”