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MARLBOROUGH COUNTRY

Collaboration Can Bring Innovation, Life Back To Cities

City Forges Path To Recovery

BY ARTHUR VIGEANT AND ROBERT BUCKLEY
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The city of Marlborough, like many municipalities, has experienced good times and bad since the economic downturn began in 2008.

In the years following, both Fidelity Investments and Hewlett-Packard, two of the larger employers in the area, closed their Marlborough facilities, leaving more than 1.5 million square feet of office space largely vacant and causing widespread layoffs. These departures were a significant setback for a community that historically has always had a vibrant commercial sector. In the aftermath, the hundreds of thousands of square feet of office space that served as the economic anchor in the city's southwest quadrant now sat vacant, as developers lacked confidence in a state and national economy that continually appeared unstable.

This uncertainty can cause cities and towns to react in one of two ways. Municipalities can be passive and watch jobs and industries leave for greener pastures, or they can be proactive and innovative in the fight to attract and retain top companies. While the national political climate of 2012 leaves much to be desired, with Congress unable to reach agreements on taxes and the deficit, the city of Marlborough refuses to sit on the sidelines and is forging its own path to economic recovery and prosperity.



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Forest Park Development

One prime example is the city council's recent approval of Forest Park, an exciting mixed-use development unique to the region. The city's leaders looked at an office vacancy rate of 29 percent in the I-495 corridor and fought to change the region's fate. In less than two years, Marlborough has welcomed such distinguished companies as TJX and Quest Diagnostics, with this new amenity-laden development poised to bring additional companies. In addition, Boston Scientific recently announced their existing Marlborough campus will serve as their new global headquarters.

In a way, Forest Park returns Marlborough to its original roots. Decades ago, residents of Marlborough and similar municipalities lived, worked and played in vibrant downtowns, where individuals and their employers reinvested revenue in the community. Starting in the 1970s, city zoning shifted and began to separate distinct residential, commercial and retail sectors. Now, however, top employees often demand residential, shopping, and work options in close proximity, and developers and municipalities must work together to respond to this shift.

Atlantic Management purchased and began marketing the 109-acre former Hewlett-Packard campus, soon to be Forest Park, in 2010, but the lack of high-end residential options and surrounding amenities made companies hesitate when considering Marlborough. The new Forest Park overlay district changes that.

Atlantic Management and the city of Marlborough share the vision of bringing a 360-degree living experience back to Marlborough, where top employers can attract highly educated and talented employees with nearby services and high-end living that is virtually commute free. The overlay district at Forest

Park will bring high-paying jobs that reflect the values of the community and revitalize the local economy for the long run, while offering professional development opportunities and attracting more industry and business.

One of the companies committed to this "live, work and play" vision is Quest Diagnostics, the world's leading provider of diagnostic testing, information, and services. The city of Marlborough is working to match the convenience and proximity of Cambridge's mixed commercial-residential layout, which has resulted in Quest Diagnostics moving about 1,000 jobs from Cambridge to Forest Park.

More importantly to the taxpayers of Marlborough, this development and the companies that come with it will also bring approximately \$3.4 million in annual net tax revenue to the city and revitalize existing Marlborough businesses, whose total revenue will increase by \$4.4 million annually.

The overlay district is a win-win for the city and Atlantic Management. The efforts and partnership of local government working collaboratively with their corporate neighbors should serve as a model throughout the Commonwealth. This success is also owed to the Marlborough Economic Development Corp., a quasi-public agency solely dedicated to attracting good businesses and growing the city's commercial tax base. Through this unique and exciting vision, Marlborough continues to lead the charge towards vibrant, profitable city centers, with greener pastures on the horizon for the I-495 corridor in 2013 and beyond. ■

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