

Plan On It

A Dutchess County Planning Federation eNewsletter

January 2011

Transit-Oriented Development in Eastern Dutchess

By John Clarke, Development and Design Coordinator

Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) are pedestrian-friendly centers containing a mixture of uses, incomes, building types, and public places, all within a ½-mile walk of a rail station or express bus stop. They typically involve infill or extensions of existing centers and redevelopment of park-and-ride lots into walk-and-ride neighborhoods. TODs have multiple benefits, including:



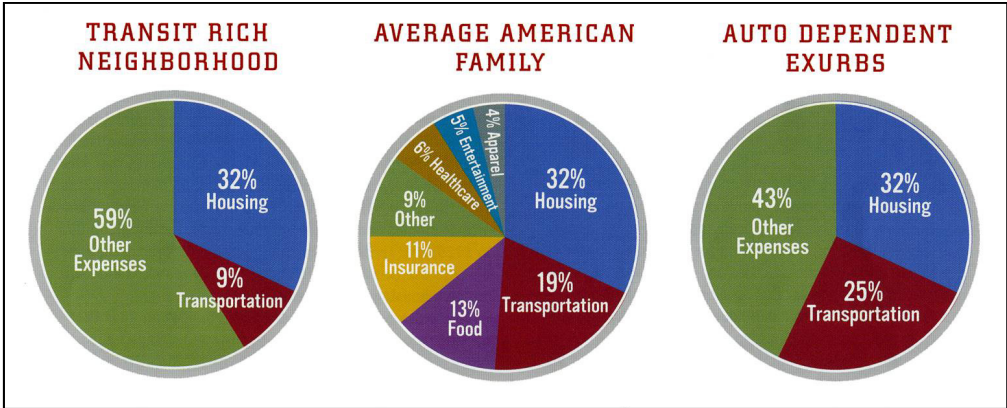
The historic 1884 Dutcher House in the Village of Pawling provides an excellent TOD prototype with housing levels above storefronts, rear parking, and a centerpiece location overlooking the village green and rail station.

- Reinforce traditional centers, support main streets, and build on existing infrastructure;
- Reduce traffic and pollution, making many trips possible by walking, biking, and transit;
- Provide broader housing choices for smaller households, singles, retirees, and commuters;
- Replace lifeless, tax-exempt station parking lots with active, attractive, tax-positive districts;
- Avoid wasteful energy, land consumption, and local costs of servicing spread-out sprawl;

The New York State Smart Growth Cabinet called TODs “probably the most pure and sustainable manifestation of Smart Growth.”

Spend Less on Housing and Transportation

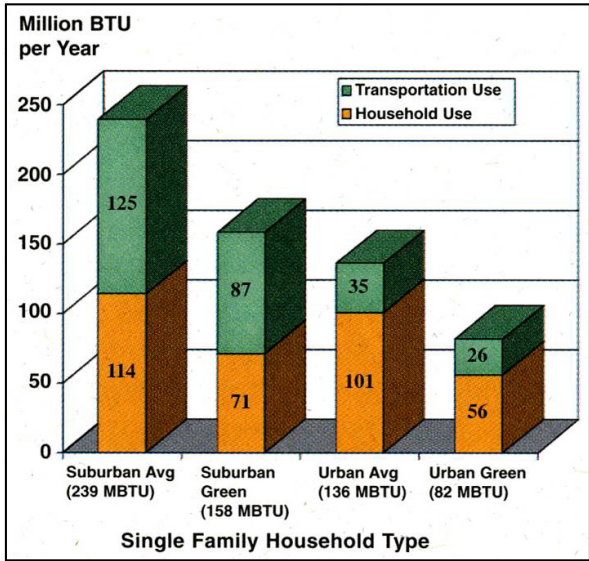
TODs also promote overall housing and transportation affordability because of smaller, more efficient unit or lot sizes and fewer required automobiles. Transportation is the second largest expenditure in the average American household budget, well above food, clothing, or health care. Moving from an isolated auto-dependent suburb to a TOD reduces transportation costs from 25% of a household budget to only 9%, like getting free food for life. And TODs are a healthy fit for our fastest growing demographic groups, from young singles to retiring seniors. An AARP study found that 71% of older households want to live within walking distance of transit to maintain an active life without relying on others for transportation.



While the average family spends 19% of the household budget on transportation, and households in auto-dependent neighborhoods spend 25%, households with good access to transit spend just 9%. [Source: Reconnecting America (Center for TOD + Transportation Affordability Index, 2004 Bureau of Labor Statistics)]

Reduce Pollution

High percentages of pollution and greenhouse gases come from the inefficient separated buildings and near total auto-dependency of our suburban land use patterns. Even the most energy efficient houses are not truly green when they average over 10 vehicle trips a day. Compared to scattered suburban houses, TOD units can produce fewer than half the vehicle trips per day and 43% less greenhouse gases. Compact walk-and-ride neighborhoods are perhaps our best long-term solution to unsustainable sprawl, widespread traffic congestion, and air pollution.



Outlying suburban houses average higher levels of energy use, even with efficiency upgrades and high-mileage vehicles, compared to the same size house in a walkable neighborhood with good transit access. [Source: Jonathan Rose Companies newsletter, Winter 2004]

TODs in Dutchess County

Dutchess County has been working with communities to prepare illustrative site plans for [rail stations](#) with the best TOD potential, including waterfront sites in the cities of Poughkeepsie and Beacon. But proposed conversions of surplus state properties near rail stations in eastern Dutchess County have also provided creative small and large-scale TOD models.

Tenmile Station in Amenia

New York State has been downsizing its population at the Taconic Developmental Disabilities Services Office for more than 25 years. It has abandoned many of the buildings and sold off almost half of the 770-acre campus to a private party. Remaining landmarks at the northern end include the Tenmile Station park-and-ride lot and the Listening Rock Farm environmental education center in the beautifully converted former dairy barn.

The Amenia 2007 Comprehensive Plan and zoning endorsed a TOD concept for the Tenmile Station. An Illustrative Plan for a model Greenway TOD hamlet was presented to state and town officials, Metro-North, and the architect-owner of the Listening Rock Farm at a series of meetings in 2008, with substantial agreement that a TOD was desirable and that more detailed planning should proceed. However, state and private interest was put on hold with subsequent state administrative changes, budget difficulties, and the collapse of the housing market.



The Tenmile Station Illustrative Plan would transform state surplus land into a transit-friendly, mixed-use center with the best green technologies as a living example of Greenway economic and ecological principles.

Wingdale Station in Dover

The 850-acre Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center was closed in the 1990s and sold to a private development company in 2003 for redevelopment as a mixed-use pedestrian village, consistent with the 1993 Town Plan. Despite a cooperative start and favorable zoning, the Town Board criticized the original 2004 Knolls of Dover proposal because it focused too much of the early phase development on suburban-type housing around the golf course and not enough on the conversion of buildings around the Station into a walkable commercial center.

Several key steps helped turn the project toward a successful conclusion. The Town and developer agreed on a single environmental consultant to analyze the impacts on the Great Swamp and other sensitive habitats, rather than having drawn-out debates between competing consultants. In addition, the Town asked the County to provide an alternative sketch plan that stressed compact neighborhoods within easy walking distance of the Station and a main street center that took advantage of more historic campus buildings.



The Knolls of Dover plan calls for the conversion and re-use of at least nine of the major buildings from the 1930s era campus, including the large power plant at the existing Harlem Valley-Wingdale Station.

The Town then took an unprecedented approach, requiring the developer to hire a new design firm with new urbanist TOD experience to prepare a critical alternative as part of the necessary Environmental Impact Statement. This alternative plan made great progress towards pleasing all parties and became the developer's preferred proposal, and in 2010 the Town approved the overall plan. The initial demolition process has begun while the applicant works on more detailed site plan approvals.



The 2009 development plan has a mix of 1,376 residential units, including designated senior units and 10% workforce housing, and 245,800 square feet of commercial space with an anchor grocery store. About 70% of the new units are within a 1/2-mile walk of the Station. [Source: Dover Knolls Development Co. LLC, Torti Gallas and Partners]

This village-scale TOD will be the largest development in recent Dutchess County history and a future model for the region, but it will also mark the return to our historic traditions, when from the 1850s on, whole new walkable villages like Millbrook and Pawling grew up around rail stations. Well-designed TODs demonstrate a fundamental planning principle — no single development decision has a greater influence on protecting the environment and rebuilding our communities than the initial placement of a project in a close-in, centered and connected location.

MORE INFORMATION

Reconnecting America's [Center for Transit-Oriented Development](#)
[Returning to Rail-Centered Development](#) article in DCPF June 2004 Newsletter
[Knolls of Dover](#)

Jonathan Rose Companies [Winter 2004 Newsletter](#)

[CLICK HERE](#) to view past issues of the DCPF's newsletter, *Plan On It*.

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

To unsubscribe from our eNewsletter mailing list, please send an email with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject line to DCPlanningFederation@co.dutchess.ny.us.