Franklin Center Commons

Site Details: 77 housing units; office and retail space.
Zoning: Overlay district for mixed use in the downtown created by the Town in 2001.

Date(s): 2005-2010
Funding: Developer funded.
Goals: Downtown Revitalization; reduce and control rapid residential sprawl; promote transit-oriented growth.

Background

As Franklin's population grew rapidly along with the technology boom in the 1990s, the town became a quintessential Interstate 495 suburb. Office buildings and shopping centers were built along the highway and new subdivisions popped up in the forestland and open space on the outskirts of town. This sprawl strained services and many residents felt the community's character had changed as well. As development slowed, the Franklin community established the Franklin Downtown Partnership, which pushed for revitalization and rejuvenation of the lackluster downtown.

Franklin Center, 2005 and 2010
Source: Re/Max Executive Realty

Site Development

In 2001, Franklin rezoned roughly 40 acres in the town center to allow for mixed-use development in zones that previously forbade it. Soon after, the town planner approached John Marini of Marini Management Company in Canton to help give young professionals and empty-nesters an option for smaller-scale housing, providing pedestrian and bike friendly areas, and lure people to shop and dine downtown. Marini bought the 115 year old abandoned warehouse across from the commuter rail station downtown and proposed Franklin Center Commons, three mixed use buildings, to replace it. Franklin Center Commons I and II contain retail, office space, and 77 condominiums.

Development Process

Most aspects of the Franklin Center Commons design required a special permit. Zoning bylaws in Franklin made high density development difficult. Since the smallest ready-made zoned lot was 5,000 sq ft, Marini needed a special permit to build on only 2,000 sq ft. In the 14 months that it took to get the project approved, Marini went to 14 hearings to explain what he wanted to do and gained community approval.

The project was also delayed due to a previous tenant lease in an existing commercial strip that was set to be demolished. The developer eventually had to settle with the pizza shop owner. During this delay, Marini sought permission to change the order the buildings were built in order to continue construction. The town officials, however, were against this change, thereby delaying the project even more and causing a bank to temporarily pull part of Marini's funding. Despite some internal conflict on the planning board, the project was ultimately a success for both the town and the developer.

Franklin Center Commons I, Building One
Source: Re/Max Executive Realty

Franklin Center Commons and MetroFuture Goals

Housing Choices

Franklin Center Commons brought new housing opportunities to the downtown. It draws students, young professionals, first-time homebuyers, and people who want to downsize.

Franklin Center Commons apartments and retail.
Source: Re/Max Executive Realty

Community Vitality

Franklin Center Commons brought office space, condominiums, and stores to Main Street and the T's Franklin/Dean College stop. The dual draw of the commuter rail station and the high amount of traffic through the downtown quickly attracted businesses to the newly available commercial spaces in Franklin Center Commons. Additionally, a unique arrangement was made with Dean College to lease twenty of the new condos to students, bringing young people and energy to the downtown.

Franklin Center Commons apartments and retail.
Source: Re/Max Executive Realty

Regional Prosperity

Once completed, Franklin hopes its downtown will be an upscale version of what it used to be. The Town Administrator estimated that Marini's development would generate about $100,000 worth of tax revenue.

Transportation Choices

Franklin Center Commons is located next to the commuter rail. The desire to be near the commuter rail station and the traffic that it brings downtown allowed for the retail and professional space to fill quickly. The highway department simultaneously planned to make $5 million worth in improvements along Route 140, adding new streetlights and sidewalks.

Source: Re/Max Executive Realty

Contact information

For more information about the development of Franklin Center Commons, contact John Marini, Developer, Marini Management Company, at *johnmarini@marinimgmt.com.*

Source: Re/Max Executive Realty

"The town planner and a few local business ow ers approached us to work on a downtown revitalization project. It was a long process, but we all worked together and came out with a great building." - John Marini, Developer, Marini Management Company