

SQUARE FEET

Hyde Park Considers a Makeover



The proposed St. Andrews at Historic Hyde Park would have a commercial area close to a cluster of housing.
LRK Architects

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HYDE PARK, N.Y. — Stately historic sites and large expanses of meadow still pervade much of this old river town, but Hyde Park also has its less elegant corners, like a main business district along Route 9, which is, at best, an architectural jumble.

Tourists have long flocked here, mostly to visit the homes that belonged to the Roosevelt and Vanderbilt families and the 170-acre Culinary Institute of America. Still, Hyde Park has no large destination stores or even a large hotel. Instead, the main commercial district is filled mostly with sleepy strip centers, modest roadside motels, a few antiques stores and local landmarks like the old Hyde Park Drive-In, which is still in use.

Local officials like Pompey Delafield, the town supervisor, say they want to preserve Hyde Park's small-town feel and cultivate more homegrown businesses. But they also want to strengthen the appeal to tourists and create a strong community center in a town where unfocused development has reigned for years.

As a result, they are paying particular attention to two large development proposals awaiting town approval that might reshape Hyde Park to make it more commercially vibrant, offer places for residents to meet and work together and further tourism.

Town officials say that while the two plans need more review, their overall goals appear to be consistent with the master plan for development that the town adopted in 1997 and amended last year, when the zoning law that was needed to make the plan work was also passed.

The developer behind one of the projects is Lauter Development, based in Albany. Sanford Zimmerman, the founder and president, said his company wanted to build a mixed-use community, the Club at Hyde Park, on a vacant 156-acre parcel. The project would combine retirement housing with attractions that Hyde Park now lacks, like a large inn and spa and an outdoor theater for plays and musical performances, Mr. Zimmerman said.

The developers of the second project, which would be close to the first, are Gagne Development of Stamford, Conn., and the Baker Companies of Pleasantville, N.Y. They want to take about a third of the 340 acres of wooded land directly across Route 9 from the Culinary Institute and build St. Andrews at Historic Hyde Park. They say it would combine a commercial area, a pedestrian-friendly, urban-flavored "village," with a nearby cluster of housing and leave the rest of the land as open space.

Baker, a longstanding residential and commercial developer, would build the housing. Norman C. Greenberg, a company vice president, said there would be 50 single-family homes, 82 duplexes and 96 town houses; collectively, they would cater to a range of household incomes.

The commercial area would have a different look from the residential cluster. Pierre Gagne, the head of Gagne Development, said the centerpiece would be a 200-room hotel and conference center. Next to it would be a 10-acre site that would house space for continuing education classes offered by the Culinary Institute.

It would also have 300,000 square feet for retailers and restaurants, some office space and 330 units of housing, like condominiums and second-floor apartments, Mr. Gagne said. He said he expected it to cater mostly to young professionals, empty-nesters, college professors and students (in addition to the Culinary Institute, three colleges — Vassar, Marist and Bard — are in the region).

Mr. Gagne said his company's research had shown that the area from north of Rhinebeck to south of Poughkeepsie could support an additional 1.2 million to 1.8 million square feet of retail space. Still, he is not interested in bringing big-box stores to Hyde Park, he said. Instead, he wants to attract food- and wine-oriented businesses, like Dean & DeLuca and Sur La Table, as well as bookstores and home furnishing and accessory stores.

"We see this as a chance to bring to the area a bit of a Napa Valley lifestyle, and like Napa, also make it more appealing to destination travelers," he said.

Statistics are hard to come by, but tourism in Hyde Park seems to be growing. The National Park Service hopes to build the first visitor information center for Dutchess County directly across the street from the birthplace of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

And the town is drawing more tourists for its culinary attractions, said Charlie O'Mara, the senior vice president for finance and administration at the Culinary Institute, which has five on-site restaurants.

Mr. O'Mara said the institute drew an average of 100 restaurant professionals and "foodies" a week for its continuing education classes. Some of them, he said, are leaders within the food industry who are used to staying in top-tier full-service hotels.

The St. Andrews development has generally won good reviews so far. One stumbling block has been the lack of a municipal sewer system in Hyde Park. While both Gagne and Baker have promised to build a sewer plant, the town would need to come up with the accompanying infrastructure, like piping, which could be costly.

Some local officials, as well as groups like Scenic Hudson, a local nonprofit group involved in land preservation and environmental education, hope the St. Andrews project will not overshadow the town's business district, which sits farther north. Because of that concern, the town recently objected to the use of the term "village" in the original proposed name of the project, St. Andrews Village, Mr. Delafield said.

Jeffrey Anzevino, a senior regional planner for Scenic Hudson, said, "There is a lot to like" about the project. He said that the most successful communities in the Hudson Valley are those that have found distinctive niches, like Cold Spring and Hudson, which cater to the antiques business, and Kingston, which is developing the Rondout Creek area to spotlight the city's long maritime history.

"Hyde Park has nationally significant historical sites, and we think that a mixed-use orientation that caters to people with an interest in the culinary arts is a good mix," Mr. Anzevino said.