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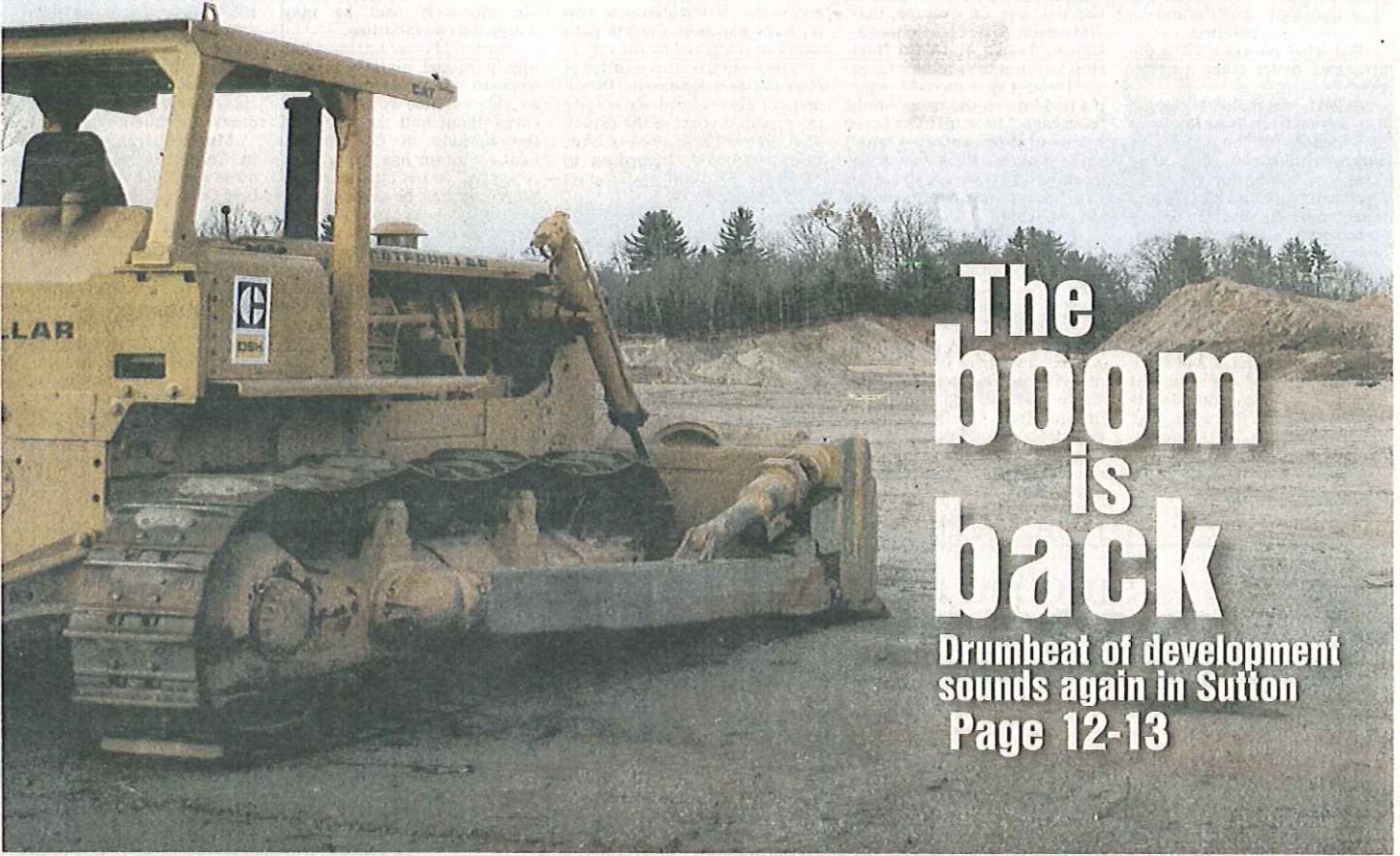
CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

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THE
SOLE



VIA



Cover Story

Sutton development picks up a burst of fresh energy

Pleasant Valley Crossing scheduled in two phases



By Mary MacDonald
CORRESPONDENT

SUTTON — Almost a decade ago, two development companies won town approval to transform the intersection of Route 146 and Boston Road into a shopping destination, with space for a restaurant, retail shops, a home improvement store, and two competing supermarkets.

In a small town with a limited tax base, the intersection promised a big return.

This month, the first hope for that materialized with the groundbreaking for a supermarket that will anchor a \$20 million investment on the northeast side of Route 146. The 54,000-square-foot supermarket will be occupied by a Market 32, a rebranding effort of the Price Chopper chain.

The first phase of the project by Galaxy Development of Auburn will include the supermarket, a restaurant and a 4,000-square-foot retail building and bank, which are expected to be built next spring. Construction of new access roads from Route 146 and Boston Road, along with a new traffic light on Boston Road, will be part of the first phase, according to company principal Michael C. O'Brien.

When the land was owned by a previous development company, LeClaire Builders in Grafton, the town Planning Board had approved plans for a nearly 124,000-square-foot home improvement store. But development of that portion of the site has been rolled into a second phase, according to Jennifer S. Hager, town planning director.

Mr. O'Brien said his company is working with several retail stores that are interested in leasing the retail spaces under the first phase of development. UniBank, based in Whitinsville, has signed on, he said, and will open a new branch in the bank space.

Galaxy Development, a retail real estate development company, has been involved in several projects in Central Massachusetts in recent years, including the East Village Square and Mill Brook Plaza developments in Webster.

The Sutton development will be called Pleasant Valley Crossing, according to the filings at Town Hall. One of the signs along Route 146 still call the development by its old name, Cold Spring Brook Place.

Across Route 146, another large development site awaits. The Sutton Plaza shopping center expansion, on paper, would add two retail buildings of 20,000 square feet and 17,000 square feet each, a 60,500-square-foot supermarket and a 186-seat restaurant. Approved in 2006, the project sought by RK Centers of Dedham initially identified Stop & Shop as the supermarket tenant, but that plan remains inactive.

Ms. Hager, the town planning director, said she has had no contact in recent months with the developer.

A spokesman for RK Center did not return a phone call seeking comment about its development plans in Sutton.

If the company pursues its approved plans, it would wrap the new shopping center around the existing two-story retail building that includes a U.S. post office and several small stores.

'HOTBED OF CONSTRUCTION'

The town is experiencing a wave of commercial development this year.

"Route 146 is the hotbed of construction," Ms. Hager said. In addition to the Pleasant Valley Crossing project, two other businesses are expanding on the town's major artery.

Atlas Box & Crating Co. Inc., a custom crating manufacturer, is expanding its facility by 188,000 square feet. Its site, south of Boston Road, will become the company's new world headquarters, according to Ms. Hager.

Farther north on Route 146, Lorden Propane is preparing a new site for a 7,500-square-foot office building and will build two 60,000-gallon propane storage tanks. The propane distribution business has a good reputation and is expected to be a good addition to the landscape, she said.

1 OR 2 SUPERMARKETS?

One point of contention concerning the supermarket developments is no longer an issue.

RK Centers and Galaxy Development are no longer in litigation. A lawsuit, which had been filed by RK Centers and Stop & Shop against Galaxy Development over its interpretation of traffic impact from the Galaxy parcel, has been settled, Galaxy's partners told the town Planning Board in 2013.

Ms. Hager said the town, which has about 9,600 residents, has never had a home-based supermarket. Residents now travel to surrounding towns, including Millbury, Uxbridge and Northbridge, to shop for groceries. As well as convenience, the new development will bring jobs and strengthen the town's tax base, she said.

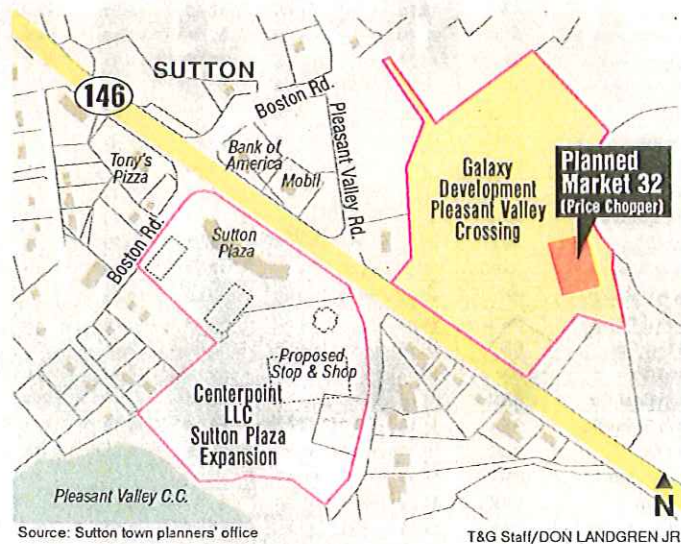
Route 146 cuts through the town, a direct path between Providence and Worcester, but until this year, development in Sutton has been fairly small scale.

"It's a big deal because of the tax base increase," Ms. Hager said, of the twin projects. "It's a bigger deal because it promises local services, grocery stores, restaurants."

Whether a second supermarket materializes to compete with Market 32 is an open question, but the developer of Sutton Plaza's expansion could always return to the Planning Board to request a change of use in the site plan, Ms. Hager said, including to add more retail.

David J. Livingston, a supermarket industry analyst based in Wisconsin, said that, given the small size of the market, a second supermarket operator would have to think carefully. Typically, he said, supermarkets pick locations where they can serve a market of about 10,000 people.

"It's probably a one-store town," he said. "That's it. That's all you need."



T&G STAFF/RICK CINCLAIR

People take pictures with their phones as the ground is ceremonially broken Nov. 12 for a new Market 32 grocery store on Route 146 in Sutton.