

Southwick Offers Winning Mix of Business, Fun

By Joseph Bednar

Many communities, Doug Moglin notes, tout themselves as a great place to live, or an ideal spot to do business, or a haven for recreation.

“But we have all three,” said the chair of Southwick’s Board of Selectmen. “I’m one of those people who do all three in town, and we still have room for more of all those things.”

On the residential front, for example, work continues on 26 homes at the new Noble Steed subdivision off Vining Hill Road. Meanwhile, the Southwick Country Club site is being sold to Fiore Realty, which intends to develop more homes and perhaps some mixed-use properties along College Highway.

Golf enthusiasts in town shouldn’t fret, though, said Karl Stinehart, the town’s chief administrative officer, noting that Southwick boasts three other golf courses, including the PGA-level track at the Ranch. The community’s recreational offerings run far deeper than that, actually, from the Congamond Lakes and the boating opportunities there to a fully developed rail trail; from motocross events at the Wick 338 to the 66-acre Whalley Park.

On the business front, meanwhile, the town’s industrial park continues to thrive with its mix of high-tech, light-industrial, and other types of firms, while a series of major infrastructure projects ease the path for motorists seeking out those aforementioned opportunities to live, work, and play in this community of just under 10,000 residents.

“It’s just a great place,” said Stinehart, Southwick’s chief administrative officer. “People who live in our community have all the right pieces — access to recreational opportunities, good schools, business, and commerce. We also have the ability to have more capacity — more business and commerce here.”

And plenty more fun.

Great Outdoors

Indeed, Southwick has long prided itself on its recreational opportunities, and they have only grown in prominence over the past several years.

Take the lakes on the south side of town — featuring two boat ramps, a fishing pier, and a town beach — which provide an array



Karl Stinehart (left) and Doug Moglin say Southwick is an ideal spot to live, work, and play, with plenty of opportunities for all three.

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of activity for residents. A planned \$275,000 project will renovate the south boat ramp on Berkshire Avenue, and the beachfront was recently renovated as well.

Ongoing efforts to preserve open space nearby are also gaining ground, as the town hopes to acquire a 144-acre parcel for sale on North Pond at Congamond Lakes. The Mass.

Department of Fisheries and Wildlife awarded Southwick money to help purchase it, and the Franklin Land Trust has embarked on a fund-raising effort to make up the difference in price. The parcel is abutted by two areas owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the state of Connecticut.

Outdoors enthusiasts can also enjoy access to the natural scenery of the Metacomet/Monadnock Trail, as well as a 6.5-mile-long linear park, or rail trail, that runs through town, from the Westfield border to the Suffield border. “It gets a ton of use on weekends during spring, summer, and fall — even the winter, before the snow flies,” Moglin noted.

Bikers can park in a number of spots along the trail to start their ride, and, in fact, expanding parking is one of the challenges the town is studying, he added. But the fact that the trail skirts close to several commercial areas of town is a benefit to stores and restaurants when bikers take a break to enjoy a meal or shopping.

“People can take advantage of these busi-

nesses,” Stinehart said. “I often see people riding off the trail to make use of these commercial areas.”

The Wick 338, the motocross track behind the American Legion, is another major draw. “They’ve put a lot of investment into the track, which abuts the Southwick Recreation Center and Whalley Park, so the spinoff benefits are significant,” Stinehart said.

The complex hosts the annual Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championship — which is broadcast live on NBC and draws close to 20,000 people to town — as well as a host of other events, including Rugged Maniac New England, a challenging, mud-splattered 5K obstacle course.

“People of varying levels of capability can do that, from people who can do it in 20 minutes to those who take four hours — we’re somewhere in the middle,” Stinehart said with a laugh and a nod to Moglin.

The selectman agreed, again noting that more than 10,000 people may show up. “That’s an economic driver as well as a great recreational opportunity.”

As for Whalley Park — which was donated to the town by the prominent Whalley family and developed using municipal and Community Preservation Act funds — it includes a full-size soccer field, baseball field, and softball field, lighting for the fields, a huge kids’ play area, and a pavilion.

On the Right Road

Speaking of kids, a recent \$69 million project was completed two years ago at the complex on Feeding Hills Road that houses Woodland Elementary School, Powder Mill Middle School, and Southwick Regional School, all of which enjoyed additions and renovations.

Meanwhile, the town just finished the total reconstruction of a half-mile stretch of Route 57 that runs by the school complex, including new turn lanes, synchronized signals, drainage, and road widening. That’s important, Moglin said, because businesses

Southwick at a glance



YEAR INCORPORATED: 1770

POPULATION: 9,502

AREA: 31.7 square miles

COUNTY: Hampden

RESIDENTIAL TAX RATE: \$17.50

COMMERCIAL TAX RATE: \$17.50

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$52,296

FAMILY HOUSEHOLD INCOME: \$64,456

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT: Open Town Meeting; Board of Selectmen

LARGEST EMPLOYERS: Big Y; Whalley Computer Associates; Southwick Regional School District

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access the road from the industrial park, and parents and bus drivers appreciate the safety upgrades where the school lots dump out onto 57. “It makes for improved public safety and better flow of people and goods.”

It’s not a standalone project; stretches of College Highway, or Routes 10 and 202 — the main commercial artery in Southwick — were similarly widened and reconfigured within the last five years, and Congamond Road, a key entry into town from Connecticut, is next on the docket, with a project commencing in the spring to improve the roadway and drainage, with a possible sewer component as well, which will help attract new business ventures to the busy neighborhood.

“That’s all serviced by septic today, which limits potential for pad sites,” Moglin said. “It would be a job creator if we can get sewer lines in there.”

Overall, though, the town offers plenty of incentives for businesses, both he and Stinehart noted, ranging from proximity to Bradley

International Airport to a singular tax rate of \$17.50 per \$1,000 for both residential and commercial properties. “That’s an overreaching goal of the Board of Selectmen,” Moglin said of the rate. “We have really tried to keep that reasonable and competitive.”

The town has also streamlined its permitting process, bringing together planning, zoning, and other officials to work together with prospective businesses, rather than fragmenting the process.

“We’ve got capacity for small, medium, and large employers to come to Southwick,” he continued. “We’re working collaboratively with employers in town who want to expand or who want to move to Southwick, and we’ll put together a partnership to go through the process.”

Stinehart emphatically agreed. “Southwick is open for business,” he said — and open for much more, as well. ♦

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The following is not part of the article

Update:

Median Household Income \$ 76,576 Median Family Income \$ 92,059

Source: *American Community Survey (2012 – 2016)* U.S. Census Bureau
census.gov

Estimated July 1, 2016 population 9,717 Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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