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Instant community

Plans for multiuse complex integrate housing, hotel, shopping, dining within walking distance

**By John Davis**  
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**HYDE PARK** — Most villages like Rhinebeck, Red Hook and Millbrook developed over the course of 100 years or more from a rural crossroads to the bustling communities they are today.

Developer Pierre Gagne plans to fast-forward that process.

The president and CEO of Gagne Development Co. of Stamford, Conn., says he can build St. Andrews Village at Hyde Park in five years — if town officials allow him.

The developer proposes to transform 340 acres of woods across Route 9 from the Culinary Institute of America into a village with a hotel, stores, restaurants, offices, apartments and even a village green.

"Our design emphasizes people, and not the automobile," Gagne said. "We will be creating a walkable, workable and livable environment that encourages public access and public spaces."

Gagne's partner, the Baker Companies of Pleasantville, Westchester County, plans to build outside the village, and across the wooded parcel stretching from West Dorsey Lane to St. Andrews Road, an array of townhouses, duplexes and single-family homes.

A 200-room upscale hotel is the centerpiece of the village. Gagne said it will provide much-needed lodging in Hyde Park for the tourists who flock to the town's historic sites.

Side streets and tree-lined sidewalks would connect with trails for hiking and biking through the site's more-rural areas.

"The architecture and natural landscape will articulate the historic quality of the Town of Hyde Park," Gagne said.

Gagne plans also to cater to the culinary students across the highway. A pedestrian crosswalk is planned at the traffic light at the CIA main entrance.

Student Elbert Ma, 23, of New York City, said he would welcome having restaurants, cafes and shops in walking distance.

"If you don't have a car, there's nothing to do," Ma said. "That sounds like a really great idea."

Carrie Hudson, 19, of Oxford, Mass., agreed. She pointed out a few miles south on Route 9,

students at Marist College can walk across the highway to the Mid-Hudson Plaza and eat at restaurants, gather at cafes and shop at an Eckerd drug store.

"There's a few places they can go," she said.

Hudson also likes the idea of being able to run and bike on the trails Gagne and Baker propose.

"We go running on the road," she said pointing to Route 9.

Gagne is working with the CIA to set aside a 10-acre parcel for the college to construct a continuing-education building.

"It's really for the professionals," said Charles O'Mara, CIA senior vice president for finance.

The hotel will provide accommodations for professional chefs, as well as campus visitors.

"We have graduations every three weeks," O'Mara said.

Culinary student Jesse Pita of Queens said he wouldn't mind gaining experience working across the street in the proposed hotel.

"A work-study — that would be cool," he said.

The 340-acre site is owned by Dutchess County. The county Legislature in May 2004 approved selling the land to Gagne and Baker for \$2.75 million. A three-year option agreement gave the developer time to get all the necessary town and agency construction approvals before making the investment.

County Executive William Steinhaus said his office and the county planning department have played major roles in designing the project with Gagne and Baker.

St. Andrews Village, he said, is a first-rate plan that, when built, would benefit the CIA and Hyde Park's tourist economy.

"We could have just auctioned the property and Hyde Park would have been at the mercy of some land developer there," Steinhaus said. "I made a decision to seek a class-A land developer. I was not going to allow an eyesore across from the CIA."

### **Economic impact a worry**

As the town board and planning board consider approval of the large project, a major issue is one of economic impact — whether the new village's stores, eateries and movie theater will draw business away from Hyde Park's traditional town center.

"I think it will be fabulous but I think for our own protection, we need to be careful," said Dot Chenevert, owner of Green Oak Florist on Route 9, just north of West Market Street.

Both town and planning boards members vow to consider carefully the economic impact of St. Andrews Village, which would be a little more than one mile south of the town center.

On Feb. 15, the planning board voted unanimously to recommend the town board approve the St. Andrews Village plan.

Attached to the recommendation were several conditions, including a request the developer provide more details on the project's effect on traffic, the town center and regional economy.

"This is a great project," Supervisor Pompey Delafield said. "Provided it does not detract from our town center, this will be good for the town. We need the center of our town to be a strong, walkable community."

Gagne said the hotel, village shops and eateries will draw more visitors to Hyde Park's historic sites and existing businesses.

"It will reinforce Hyde Park as an important destination," he said.

The offer of Gagne to build a sewer plant and extend service up Route 9 to the town center is a welcome one to many in Hyde Park.

Chenevert has worked with town officials for years to overcome the financial hurdles to build a central sewer system downtown.

Without sewer, business and landowners in the town center haven't been able to develop properties fully because of the limited capacity of underground septic systems.

"I think it's the most exciting thing that has happened to us since we started talking about sewer," Chenevert said.

Steinhaus said the county is spearheading the plan to finally bring central sewer to downtown Hyde Park by working with the developers, the CIA and BBL Development, which plans to build a 455-unit retirement community on the north side of St. Andrews Road.

"Hyde Park has been unable to bring in sewer for decades," Steinhaus said. "I have been able to create the critical mass with St. Andrews Village at Hyde Park to create a regional sewer system."

Angela Lobianco owns, with her family, the Hyde Park Brewing Co. across Route 9 from the Franklin D. Roosevelt estate. She welcomes the possibility of sewer service. She is not worried about restaurants in St. Andrews Village hurting her business.

"I'm all for the development," Lobianco said. "I'm all for the sewer system. That's what we really want. I think it will help all of us."

Bob Delarm, owner of Delarm's Auto Body on Route 9G, is a member of the Hyde Park Chamber of Commerce. He helps maintain the shrubbery and greenery at the "Welcome to Historical Hyde Park" gateway sign on Route 9 just south of St. Andrews Road.

Delarm is undecided on the proposal of Gagne and Baker to move that sign one mile south near the proposed village entrance. But he said the development, especially the hotel, could boost business throughout Hyde Park.

"We definitely need some economic growth. It's just a matter of fine-tuning," Delarm said. "We're

trying to get the tourists to stay more than a few hours."

The number of dwelling units — 558 — has members of the Hyde Park school board concerned, especially with classroom space at a premium in all seven schools.

But the developers say the 330 village apartments are not suited for families and a good percentage of the 178 townhouses and duplexes will be targeted to empty-nesters and young professionals.

Gagne and Baker project between 99 and 138 school-age children would be living in their development, mostly in the 50 single-family homes.

"Ninety-nine to 138 students is not an insignificant number," Hyde Park school board member Stephen Hughes said. "You're looking at three or four classrooms in schools that are already pushing 100 percent capacity."

The developers project the project would generate \$3 million a year in tax revenue to the school district. They say that figure more than offsets the \$986,700 it costs locally — excluding state aid — to educate as many as 138 students.

Hughes said the developers' enrollment impact figures are on the low side. In light of an affordable housing shortage, some families will be attracted to the townhouses and apartments.

"I think it will be considerably more," Hughes said. "The way housing is, it doesn't matter who you market it to."

Gagne said the \$325 million being invested in constructing the development will provide an economic boom for Hyde Park and the entire region.

"The St. Andrews Village project brings huge economic investment to Hyde Park that will generate significant tax surpluses," he said.

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