

IN THE REGION/New Jersey

Walk to All

By ANTOINETTE MARTIN

IN suburbs like this one, the term "town center" can signify anything from a crucial intersection to a public gathering place, from a housing development to a shopping center.

But the plan for the Livingston Town Center is for it to be all those things. What town officials and developers set out to do was create a new small town at the center of an existing township.

"The old Livingston basically had a hole at its center," said Jon Stein of Roseland Properties, one of three companies redeveloping a 14-acre site at Livingston and Mount Pleasant Avenues. "At the crossroads of the two most important streets in town, there was nothing but a beat-up strip mall, a few empty buildings and a lot of parking."

It took the better part of a decade to produce a detailed plan for transforming the site into a residential and retail hub and then another two or three years to build it.

This spring, as work nears completion on the collection of single-family homes, row houses and condominium apartments, and as shoppers and diners begin to cluster on a daily basis, it looks as if the plan may be working.

One recent day, several model condos were being outfitted with furniture and several newly occupied single-family homes were having flower beds installed, while an Italian restaurant, a family-style cafe and an ice cream shop at the center were already packed with customers.

There were people standing in line for sundries at Silverman's Card and Gift, and heading into the fitting rooms at the Nicole Miller dress shop. There were people sitting on every one of six sidewalk benches outside the stores, and the retail center's outdoor parking lot was full, so a stream of cars was heading into the adjacent garage.

Roughly half of the 114 housing units at the center are occupied, and a total of 76 have been sold.

All but 3 of the 17 single-family



Photographs by Dith Pran/The New York Times

CENTRAL PLANNING

Livingston Town Center has single-family homes, row houses, condos, stores and restaurants. This has replaced what one developer described as "a beat-up strip mall, a few empty buildings and a lot of parking."



homes that line the periphery of Livingston Town Center have been sold at prices starting above \$1 million. The houses are grand three-story structures with front porches and Victorian accents, a look that town officials felt so strongly about that they wrote the design requirements into the zoning ordinance.

Forty-four of the 66 town houses, which are classic brick three-story designs, have been sold at prices exceeding \$900,000. The three-bedroom homes have 2,600 to 3,400 square feet of space, elevators and two-car garages.

Fourteen of 24 condominium apartments and seven town homes set in a midrise building directly opposite the retail center have been



bought. Asking prices for the units, ranging in size from 1,500 to more than 3,000 square feet, run from the high \$600,000s to \$1 million. Each unit comes with two parking spaces in an attached garage.

"Part of the charm of Livingston Town Center — and Livingston in general — is its access to major roadways and commuter routes," Mr. Stein noted, "but the special thing about the town center is its walkability."

"There is no need for an automobile because everything is close at hand," he said. "We think this community is unlike any other in New Jersey, because it offers the convenience and liveliness of urban living, but in an established suburban set-

ting."

Sales agents at the center cited two factors as appealing to Orthodox Jews who live in Livingston or would like to move there: The synagogue is within walking distance, and a mikvah — a ritual bath house — has been built.

Other amenities at the center, which was developed by Roseland in partnership with the Eastman Management Company and Jacobs Enterprises, include a "neighborhood concierge" in the midrise building's lobby, which is available to all Livingston Town Center residents. The Roof Garden Club atop the condo building is also available, offering a glass-enclosed pool, a fitness center, and meeting and party rooms.

The whole project will be part of an owners' association. The monthly maintenance is about \$525 for a town house, about \$575 for an apartment-style condo and about \$475 for a single-family home.

The retail section was also designed for "neighborly" gatherings, Mr. Stein said, noting that there is considerable outdoor seating for the restaurants.

An evening outdoor concert series is to begin in July on the plaza near the clock tower; seating will be set up for these events to accommodate visitors as well as residents.

Deborah Cleary, director of marketing for

Livingston Town Center, said that a residents' discount program at the center's shops began this month, starting with a champagne reception. Last month, a fashion show at Nicole Miller drew "a big crowd spilling out the door," she said.

The roster of other retailers includes the clothing stores Roxy, Atrium, Atrium Kids, and two shoe stores: Pelle Line Shoes and Shoe Inn. Other stores include Sur La Table, Menzel Violins, Silverman's, Mason Barrister Interior Design, Dale & Thomas gourmet popcorn, Omaha Steaks and Seldom Seen Design.

The eating establishments include Cold Stone Creamery, Baumgart's Cafe, Fresh City and Mama Tucci's Italian Bistro.