

*From Hartford Courant*

# Developer Will Demolish Buildings On The Former Campus Of The Hartford In Simsbury

Jordan Otero | Feb. 23, 2016

**SIMSBURY** — The new owner of the former campus of The Hartford will demolish the office buildings on the property, town officials confirmed Tuesday.

The 172-acre property was sold for \$8.52 million in late December, including 641,000 square feet of building space and farmland to the north.

Thomas Cooke, director of administrative services, said Tuesday morning that The Silverman Group, a New Jersey real estate development firm, filed an application for demolition of the 200 Hopmeadow St. site with the conservation commission Monday.

“In many ways, this is not a surprise,” Cooke said. “The good news is that The Silverman Group has been meeting with staff and moving forward with plans to get permits for mixed development.”

Cooke said there is no formal timeline for the project, but the developer is “very anxious” to get started. .

“Every indication is that they want to move forward quickly with the new plan and it’s not going to be a long, drawn-out process,” Cooke said.

Cooke said the developer will continue to discuss design plans with Town Planner James Rabbitt and, at this point, has not settled on a single proposal.

Cooke said that the town will lose about \$1.5 million from the demolition and removal of personal property, but “conservative estimates of revenue from other developments in town, including construction planned by The Silverman Group, is likely to offset this loss in a couple of years.”

“In addition, once fully built, revenues from The Hartford’s former property are likely to exceed the \$1.5 million standing alone,” Cooke said.

The Hartford contributed roughly 2 percent to the town’s tax base as one of the largest taxpayers in town and, as of spring 2014, contributed \$1.6 million annually. It’s not known how the new development will affect the grand list.

The Silverman Group announced last summer that it is proposing commercial and residential development.

A representative from The Silverman Group declined to comment further Tuesday morning.

In a Feb. 4 letter to the town, the developer wrote: “The redevelopment of the functionally outdated suburban office makes us proud to follow Simsbury’s foresight and action to invest as a partner in a unique mixed use community along the scenic Farmington River. We look forward to a great and successful future together.”



*The Hartford's sprawling campus in Simsbury will be demolished. This photograph is the back side of the campus as seen from Talcott Mountain near Heublein Tower. (Hartford Courant File Photo)*

The developer and Cooke have said they expect the town to have a say in what happens to the property as laid out in a form-based code agreement The Hartford made with the town in August 2014.

The firm said in the letter that it is working with Gateway Planning of Dallas, Texas, the group that wrote the agreement, as well as VHB Engineering of Wethersfield and Minno & Wasko Architects of Lambertville, N.J., to further the plans.

Cooke said: "Gateway Planning has done other work in Simsbury and has demonstrated an understanding of the town's development preferences."

Simsbury resident Andy Estell said he's concerned that residents have yet to be presented with a plan for the property.

"It's a little early to gauge a reaction. As citizens in town, we're still waiting for the first idea of what the plan is," Estell said.

"[If it's] commercial development, go for it. Professional development, go for it. We do not need any more residential development in this town," Estell said. "[Residential development] is not doing much for the property values, not to mention the grand list. We have to wait and see what this development is and how that can impact the grand list."

Resident John Lucker echoed those concerns, saying the project, as presented in its preliminary stage, would add to a surplus of residential development in town. He said there is "no clear plan as to how to attract immigration into town" by which to fill those homes.

"The Silverman Group has said very openly that their plan is to build residential and commercial, but it remains to be seen what that means," Lucker said. "They have every right to do whatever they want with the property, since our town very foolishly preapproved how that property can be developed. I'm not sure what this means for our town, with all this kind of runaway residential development."

"The town must begin to think about the concept of net economic benefit, not gross economic benefit or gross taxes," Lucker added.

The Hartford first announced it would close its Simsbury campus in February 2013. It funneled 1,500 employees to offices in Hartford and Windsor.

The Silverman Group is not new to Greater Hartford. It owned the 18-story office tower at 100 Pearl St. in Hartford before selling it in March 2015 for \$36.85 million to Shelbourne Global Solutions LLC.

Overall, the firm owns and manages more than 6-million square feet of office, industrial, retail and aviation properties, as well as owning 5,000 multifamily units throughout the country, according to figures released this summer.