

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Town of Newtown, Connecticut

Prepared and approved by the Newtown Economic Development Commission on September 20, 2011

Approved by the Newtown Legislative Council on November 16, 2011

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Overview

This Strategic Plan for Economic Development for Newtown, adopted by the Economic Development Commission and the Legislative Council, sets forth a road map for continued economic growth and expansion in the community. It provides detailed strategy and action plans for successfully achieving six major goals. It utilizes a S.M.A.R.T. process by defining programs that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bounded.

The prior strategic plan, as approved by the Legislative Council in 2005, defined the EDC as implementing “an orderly and planned economic development for the town ... while always (recognizing) the character of the town.” That mission has not changed -- nor should it.

What has changed in the past six years is how the EDC approaches the Goals and Strategies and Actions it implements to resolve problems and capitalize on newfound opportunities.

One example of a successful and ongoing strategy has been the focus on investment in Newtown’s business centers, specifically Sandy Hook Center and the Borough of Newtown. The Economic Development Commission, town and borough land use agencies and the administration must continue to be responsive to changing demographics, opportunities and economic trends that will enhance the value of these areas for business growth and provision of services that cater to the needs of Newtown residents. Ongoing reviews of zoning regulations and infrastructure investment that support economic growth in such Design Districts is a responsible strategy to strengthen these important community assets.

A recent review of the development potential of Sandy Hook Center, for example, indicates that the area has the necessary land and infrastructure to attract additional infill development. A strategy that focuses on the reuse of properties that are currently underutilized, inappropriate or obsolete will facilitate the continued revitalization of Sandy Hook Center, the Borough business district, the area of Church Hill Road between the Borough boundary and exit 10 of Interstate 84 and other districts where underutilized and obsolete land uses currently exist.

It is also time to recognize that indigenous economic growth is an important way of increasing Newtown’s economy in terms of job creation, income and tax revenue. A strategy to maintain and strengthen existing commercial and industrial districts is appropriate while at the same time expanding this strategy to Hawleyville, the Fairfield Hills campus and the South Main Street corridor.

Hawleyville has only a few major tracts of undeveloped and underutilized land plus several obsolete land uses. The area is well positioned with an exit off I-84, is served by public water and the sewer infrastructure has capacity for additional use. Responsive property owners combined with proper zoning and an investment in extending a major sewer line hold the keys to major growth that will provide new economic opportunities, local services, jobs and new tax revenue.

The Mt. Pleasant Road corridor extending along Route 6 from the Bethel town line to Whippoorwill Hill Road and along Hawleyville Road north to Obtuse Road should be re-examined for its potential to attract desirable development and major economic growth. This area is still relatively undeveloped and has the potential to be a major growth center. Additionally, several properties along Mt. Pleasant Road that have land use approvals in place for new commercial buildings have not been developed. The Economic Development Commission expects to focus on this area for new development opportunities.

Land for the Newtown Technology Park which has a restriction mandating that it be used for economic development was deeded to the Town by the state in 2004. In 2006 the Legislative Council designated the EDC as the development agency for the Tech Park pursuant to Chapter 132 of the CT General Statutes. The commission pursued various development scenarios for the 37.5 acres and this year finally achieved local wetlands approval for a driveway to serve a 23-acre area that has the potential to support approximately 100,000 square feet of building area and adjacent parking.

The EDC will continue to promote the development of this property by targeting small- to medium-sized businesses involved in high tech services and support, as identified in the commission's recently completed Market Assessment Update.

The other town owned property that the commission continues to market for economic development is the Fairfield Hills campus where limited potential for commercial use has been identified. As a redevelopment parcel served by public utilities, it is an attractive property. However the costs for remediation, renovation and demolition have made it a challenge. The commission is committed to continue to work with the town to see that the economic potential for this property is realized.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What follows is an ambitious program that is built on facts from numerous meetings with leaders and members of the business community, a major 2010 survey aimed at approximately 1,750 Newtown businesses, discussions with the town's elected leaders and executives and reflections on the 2003 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). It is expected that this document will serve as the EDC's contribution to the POCD currently being revised by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

In order for these Strategies to succeed, additional resources specifically dedicated to implementing the various activities outlined herein are necessary. The director of the Department of Economic and Community Development has numerous assigned duties in addition to economic development and is supported by a part-time clerk, the occasional student intern and members of an all-volunteer commission with a \$30,000 operating budget. These resource constraints limit the use of consultants to assist in accomplishing major projects. The current budget also requires retaining outside experts necessary to obtain permits to allow development of town-owned properties such as the Newtown Technology Park and the Fairfield Hills Campus.

The six major Goals the commission will pursue in the next five years are, in order of perceived importance:

1. Reduce the burden of taxes on individual homeowners by increasing the commercial/industrial assessment portion of the Newtown Grand List from 6.94 percent by one percent or approximately \$43 million over the next five years. This requires a market investment of about \$62.6 million in land and/or buildings.
2. Promote economic development of town-owned commercial and industrial properties and facilitate lease/sale options.
3. Attract new business and commercial endeavors to develop vacant tracts of land and assist in bringing suitable businesses into existing vacant commercial and industrial spaces.
4. Increase the development potential of existing commercial and industrial properties by enhancing opportunities for economic growth within these areas. Explore opportunities for expanding into new areas where commercial and industrial development would be appropriate.
5. Nurture the hundreds of existing small enterprises in Newtown by fostering multifaceted efforts to encourage their growth.
6. Better serve Newtown's existing commercial base.

It should be emphasized that these six goals are closely integrated into a cohesive whole. Goals Two through Five, especially, will have a direct impact on achieving Goal One.

Please review the Implementation of Goals section for Strategy and Action plans, including detailed methods of implementation on page 7

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Margaret Oliger, co-chairman



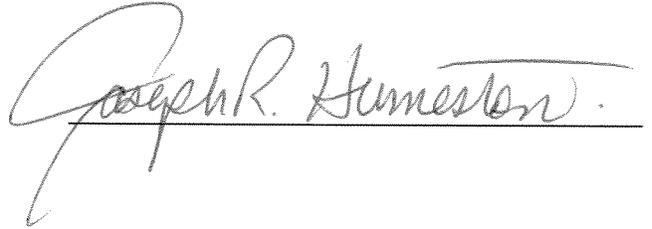
Donald Sharpe, co-chairman



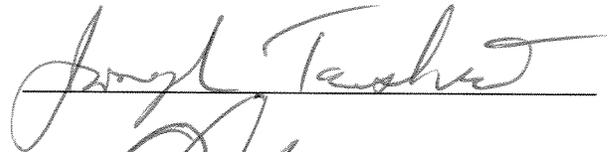
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Implementation of Goals

Goal One: Reduce the burden of taxes on individual homeowners by increasing the commercial/industrial assessment portion of the Grand List from 6.94 percent by one percent or approximately \$43 million in assessments over the next five years. This requires an additional market investment of about \$62.6 million.

Strategy: The EDC must engage with decision makers to rally support for this strategy and actively promote the development of commercial and industrial properties. Commission members can advance these ideas by marshaling the support of land use boards, industry leaders, civic groups and the public.

Actions:

- Expand direct links between small and large businesses and appropriate town officials to provide smooth communications and problem-solving procedures designed to make business growth as easy as possible.
- Remove roadblocks to this strategy through communication and education of other boards, councils and commissions.
- Work with other town departments to find viable ways to expand the availability of sewers to commercial properties.
- Facilitate direct links and smooth communication by utilizing the road map concept for processes, and making improvements to the EDC website.
- Develop an outreach program to new and existing business to be managed by the office of the director of economic and community development.

Goal Two: Support the economic development of commercially zoned town-owned properties and facilitate lease/sale options.

Strategy: Recognize the growth potential of Newtown's commercial properties and promote their development.

Actions:

- Complete governmental approvals and sell the Newtown Technology Park to a responsible developer or make the six approved sites available to individual buyers.
- Bring acceptable businesses commercial, educational institutions and non-profits to a portion of the Fairfield Hills Campus as approved in a 2011 Fairfield Hills Master Plan or later revisions.

Goal Three: Attract new business and commercial endeavors to develop vacant tracts of land and assist in bringing new or expanding suitable businesses into existing vacant commercial and industrial spaces.

Strategy: Develop marketing plans with the owners of privately owned structures, with their financial support, and help match owners with potential buyers or renters by publicizing their availabilities.

Actions:

- Increase promotion and marketing programs, including frequent updates of EDC Web site and e-mail blasts to brokers and potential developers.
- Increase abilities to quickly respond to multiple inquiries with direct, personal contacts. Put a system in place whereby staff responsibilities for rapid response to multiple inquiries are clearly assigned and tracked.
- Dedicate the resources necessary to implement a targeted marketing campaign as recommended in EDC's Market Assessment Report with follow-through and rapid response.
- Work with property owners and the town's administration to put all appropriate properties with land use approvals in place into CERC's Quick Tracks Program.

Goal Four: Increase the development potential of existing commercial and industrial properties by enhancing opportunities for economic growth within these areas. Explore opportunities for expanding into new areas where commercial and industrial development would be appropriate.

Strategy: Expand business/industrial zoning districts to incorporate more properties. Increase the density/development potential of existing business/industrial zones where appropriate.

Actions:

- Continue to collaborate with local and regional organizations, owners and brokers to enhance opportunities that will advance mutual long-term goals.
- Explore opportunities for working with other area towns to cooperatively further our economic development goals. (Example: Brownfields Partnership funds to clean up targeted properties that are contaminated and underutilized.)
- Explore new tools such as performance zoning or village districts that will enhance the development potential of industrial and commercial land while at the same time preserving Newtown's character and residents' core values for the community.
- Foster ongoing reviews of zoning regulations and infrastructure investment to support economic growth in such districts as a responsible strategy to strengthen these important community assets.

Goal Five: Nurture the hundreds of existing small enterprises in Newtown by fostering multifaceted efforts to encourage their growth

Strategy: Establish the EDC as an advocate for existing businesses and develop a business retention and expansion program to preserve such businesses and assist in their growth.

Actions:

- Facilitate and coordinate quarterly small business breakfast seminars.
- Develop a “Welcome” package for new and potential businesses that includes the road map and other key information.
- Investigate potential options for developing a business incubator that will nurture existing and potential home-based enterprises. Present near-term and long-term options which may include alternatives such as a bricks-and-mortar incubator or a virtual Web site or a “business hotel” where businesses can work and have central services provided by others. Consider a possible affiliation with a regional college or university.
- Develop Internet newsletters that push out news, such as grant funding opportunities, but also focus on various types of businesses (such as marketing, Web-based services, agriculture, artisan food enterprises and craft programs and their needs) especially via social media.
- Expand the usable list of e-mail addresses for Newtown businesses to enhance two-way communication to foster this and other goals.

Goal Six: Better serve Newtown’s existing commercial base.

Strategy: Launch a “Marketing Newtown” effort: in cooperation with other business-oriented groups.

Actions:

- Build on such events as Newtown Restaurant Week with other special events that dovetail with current town-wide civic club events.
- Maintain an outreach to organized citizen groups such as SHOP and the “Farmer’s Market” community to provide support and maintain an open door relationship.
- Promote a “Buy Newtown” campaign as an effective means to support local businesses by bringing them to the attention of residents and workers.
- Develop plans and partner with the Arts Commission and other cultural groups, to capture the spending dollars of art and special activity patrons.
- Create brochures and augment the EDC website with information that highlights shops/restaurants/recreational and cultural activities.
- Develop a business-to-business matrix.