



Town of Simsbury

933 HOPMEADOW STREET

SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

Thomas F. Cooke - Director of Administrative Services

**Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting – Thursday, August 10, 2017 – 7:30 a.m.
Simsbury Town Offices – Main Meeting Room
933 Hopmeadow Street**

- 1) Call to order
- 2) Approval of the minutes from July 13, 2017
- 3) Update from First Selectwoman's Office-Tom Cooke
- 4) Review of NEDC draft report to Board of Selectmen (attachment)
- 5) Discussion of EDC recommendations regarding strategic economic development plan
- 6) Adjournment

June 20, 2017 ... Draft

MEMORANDUM

From: Simsbury Economic Development Commission

To: Simsbury Board of Selectmen

Attention: Lisa Heavner and Sean Askham

Earlier this year the current Economic Development Commission (EDC) was asked by two members of the Simsbury Board of Selectmen ... Lisa Heavner and Sean Askham ... to prepare a recommendation pertaining to the establishment of a New Economic Development Commission (NEDC) in 2018 as required by the revised Town Charter.

The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize the current EDC's recommendations regarding the establishment of a NECD by the Board of Selectmen that will be elected in November 2017 and seated shortly thereafter. This document contains 4 sections as follows:

- A. NEDC Duties and Responsibilities
- B. NEDC Plan of Organization and Operation
- C. NEDC Resource Requirements
- D. Suggested Economic Development Strategies

Sections A. and B. in this report are responsive to the task given to the EDC by Ms. Heavner and Mr. Askham. The EDC has decided to supplement the task by adding Sections C. and D. We feel that Section C. regarding NEDC Resource Requirements is especially important given the scope of duties and responsibilities that are being proposed.

SECTION A. ... PROPOSED NEDC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The EDC's proposals for NEDC duties and responsibilities are informed by the following: (a) state statute regarding the establishment of Economic Development Commissions in the State of Connecticut (Title 7; Chapter 97; Section 7-136); (b) a review of the Plan of Conservation and Development currently being prepared by town staff and the Planning Commission; and (c) the opinions of various members of the current Economic Development Commission as discussed in its meetings to date in 2017.

Our proposals with regard to NEDC duties and responsibilities are as follows:

1. Prepare a strategic plan for economic development in collaboration with the Board of Selectmen and other Boards and Commissions, and present it to the Board of Selectmen as soon as possible ... hopefully by mid-2018. This plan should provide strategic guidelines for economic development that is feasible and desirable for Simsbury. (mandated by the 2017 POCD)
2. Conduct economic development research to analyze economic conditions in and around Simsbury; and to assess economic resources that may be available to support new development as well as existing businesses in the town. (required by statute)
3. Co-ordinate and co-operate with organizations such as Main Street Partnership, Simsbury Historical Society, Simsbury Chamber of Commerce and Farmington Valley Visitors Association. (required by statute)

4. Make recommendations, consistent with the NEDC strategic plan, to officials and agencies in Simsbury, including the Town Manager, Board of Selectmen, Planning Commission, Tourism Committee, Design Review Board and Zoning Commission regarding actions intended to improve the town's economic condition. (required by statute)
5. Review new economic development projects with other boards and commissions, and advocate at local and state levels for strategically desirable projects that have potential to expand the town's grand list. (historical precedent)
6. Endeavor to assist and support economic developers in their attempts to initiate economic development projects in Simsbury. (historical precedent)
7. Co-operate with the Town Manager, staff groups and Main Street Partnership in the preparation and submission of grant applications that can support economic development activity. (seen as desirable by the current EDC)
8. Prepare and present an annual report of the NEDC's activities and recommendations to the Board of Selectmen; the Planning Commission and any other boards, committees and commissions that have an interest in economic development. (required by statute)

SECTION B. ... NEDC PLAN OF ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION

In order to develop recommendations regarding the organization of the NEDC, the current EDC conducted research regarding practices being utilized by towns in Connecticut that are similar in size and demographic make up to Simsbury. The EDC also used the experience of long serving current and former members of the existing EDC.

These recommendations are as follows:

Number of Members

We propose that there should be 7 members appointed by the Board of Selectmen to the NEDC. This recommendation is based on a review of EDC membership practices throughout Connecticut. Most towns similar to Simsbury have decided to have EDCs with between 5 and 7 members.

We suggest the higher number of 7 for the following reasons: (a) in order to take into account the possibility of meeting absences; (b) to provide opportunities for diversity in the membership; and (c) to insure that there are enough members to do the work of the NEDC.

Term of Office

We suggest a 4 year term of office for members of the NEDC which would be consistent with terms for the majority of commissions in Simsbury. It may be difficult to recruit members for terms longer than 4 years, while shorter terms would not provide enough experience for new members to get up to speed.

Meeting Frequency

We suggest that the NEDC should meet 2 times monthly rather than the current EDC practice of meeting one time per month. This increase in number of meetings will allow the members more time to accomplish the work needed to fulfill the NEDC's more extensive list of duties and responsibilities.

Member Qualifications and Characteristics

We recommend that the members of the NEDC should have some or all of the following characteristics:

- Multiple years of business experience in small, medium and/or large organizations
- At least 5 years of residency in Simsbury
- Personal flexibility to attend weekday meetings in early morning or early evening
- At least one member of the Simsbury Chamber of Commerce
- At least one active member of the Main Street Partnership, preferably an officer of that group
- Willingness to accept special project responsibilities in addition to meeting attendance
- Previous experience in Planning and/or Zoning Boards and Commissions
- Multiple members who do not work full time
- At least one person with previous experience as chair of a board or commission

Political Affiliation of Members

We would urge the new Board of Selectmen to populate the NEDC with a politically balanced group of members. Specifically, we would suggest ... 2 Republicans; 2 Democrats; and 3 unaffiliated.

The Economic Development Role of the Town Manager and the First Selectperson

The job descriptions of the Town Manager and the First Selectperson are still under review by the Board of Selectmen, so we do not know if either of those positions will have codified responsibility for economic development activities. We do however propose the following ...

1. That the Town Manager job description should include specific language relating to economic development. At minimum we believe that the town manager should have a responsibility to assist the NEDC in its work, and be available to interact with developers who may want to do business in Simsbury, and with existing business owners in town.
2. That the First Selectperson's job description should include specific language relating to interaction and outreach with current and prospective new business owners and to support their efforts to maintain and strengthen their businesses in Simsbury.

The Role of the Main Street Partnership and FVVA

We strongly recommend that the NEDC should continue to have a close working relationship with the Simsbury Main Street Partnership and the Farmington Valley Visitors Association. This should involve active communications from time to time. However, we propose that the current practice of having the SMSP and FVVA doing monthly status reports should be changed to brief bi-monthly reports. This will result in more time for the NEDC to deal with its expanded duties and responsibilities.

SECTION C. ... NEDC RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

We are unable to be specific about the resources required for the NEDC to do its work, but in general we believe the NEDC will need dedicated resources above and beyond its membership. This is because the duties and responsibilities that have been proposed for the NEDC are extensive and well beyond the capabilities of the commission itself, given that most of its members will have full time jobs and family responsibilities as well.

To give a perspective on this, here is a summary of the duties and responsibilities proposed by the EDC for the NEDC, most of which are mandated by state statute on by the new Plan of Conservation and Development ... see Section A. above for more details:

1. Prepare a Strategic Plan in collaboration with other boards and commissions
2. Conduct Economic Development Research needed to inform a Strategic Plan
3. Co-ordinate Activities of, and co-operate with, other relevant boards and commissions
4. Make recommendations for economic development
5. Review assist and support new economic development projects
6. Advocate for relevant economic development issues at the local and state level
7. Participate with state and regional agencies to foster economic development in Simsbury
8. Prepare and present an annual report of the EDC's activities and recommendations

Accordingly, it seems clear that the current financial and human resources available to the current EDC will be inadequate for the NEDC, since the responsibilities of the NEDC are significantly greater in number and complexity than the responsibilities of the previous Economic Development Commissions. And so, we suggest that the new Board of Selectmen should consider providing the following resources for the NECD during the first year of its existence ...

1. A staff person (0.25 FTE) dedicated to the work of the NECD.
2. Budget for an Economic Development consultant to assist in development of a strategic plan.
3. Continuation of funds earmarked to support the Simsbury Main Street Partnership

SECTION D. ... SUGGESTED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The EDC was not asked to provide suggestions regarding economic development strategies, but we do feel strongly that a set of agreed upon strategies must be in place to guide innovative work on economic development. These or other strategies should be codified in the Simsbury Economic Development Strategic Plan mentioned in Section A. above. To the best of our knowledge neither the Board of Selectmen nor previous Economic Development Commissions have ever developed a strategic plan for economic development. It is long past time to do so ... and in fact this task is mandated by the new Plan for Conservation and Development.

And so ... the current EDC takes this opportunity to suggest several strategic directions for economic development in Simsbury. They are as follows:

1. Insure that dedicated human and financial resources are provided to the NEDC. If Simsbury wishes to accelerate its economic development activity and seriously build the Grand List, we believe that dedicated human and financial resources must be provided. Volunteer resources are unlikely to produce an improvement in economic development in the town.
2. Give top priority to the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan. To our knowledge this has never been done and would provide a necessary framework for Economic Development activity. Ideally, this would be done using the services of an experienced strategic planning consultant. But if adequate financial resources are not available to fund a consultant, then at least 2 of the members of the NEDC should have experience with strategic planning and be willing to assist the town in developing a plan using volunteer resources.

3. Study Economic Development Success Models in Towns Similar to Simsbury. This can be done with the assistance of the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) and perhaps through the use of specialized consultants and/or volunteer members of the NEDC
4. Focus on “Target Sectors” suggested in the October 2013 Fairweather Consulting Report. These target sectors would include the following suggested by Fairweather and an additional target sector suggested by the EDC:
 - a. Niche Manufacturing and sophisticated support services
 - b. Specialty Retail Independents and Chain Organizations.
 - c. Tourism and Hospitality businesses
 - d. Senior Citizen Residential Facilities (suggested by EDC – not Fairweather)
5. Take note of Economic Development Guidance embedded in the new POCD. The new Plan of Conservation and Development includes two important relevant tasks as follows: (a) Seek grants that will support economic development efforts; and (b) Participate with state and regional economic development agencies to foster economic development in Simsbury.
6. Insure that the NEDC is tasked with the responsibility to report on an annual basis to the Board of Selectmen. This will increase the probability that the NEDC will be action oriented with a sense of responsibility to produce tangible economic development results.

This concludes our report to Ms. Heavner and Mr. Askham. We assume their intent is to pass this along to the new Board of Selectmen that will be elected in November for their consideration as they establish and populate the NEDC.

Submitted by:
