

2010 Activities Report  
Economic Development Agency

Town of Canton  
Canton, Connecticut

Prepared: December 31, 2010

## Summary

In 2010, the Canton Economic Development Agency (EDA) transitioned from an agency re-establishing itself after a long hiatus, to an agency with an effective structure demonstrating measurable results. EDA meetings are consistent with the regular schedule and membership has increased to and remains constant with five members. The EDA now stands as an agency operating with consistency and in an effective manner.

While EDA's membership remained constant with five members, there were several changes to appointments and resignations. Leslie Wilson resigned her appointment in February, 2010; Betty Fiora was appointed in March 2010; Anthony Trelly resigned his appointment officially in May, 2010; Barry Dickstein was appointed in July, 2010; Betty Fiora resigned her appointment in October, 2010; and Eliot Bryan was appointed in November, 2010.

As membership has increased, the need to formalize the agency's structure resulted in a revision of the agency's Mission Statement and By-Laws (See Appendix A). The agency has experienced great progress under the revised structure enabling members to focus efforts and energies on key projects supporting our mission, thereby taking full advantage of the members' knowledge, skills, interests and abilities.

One result of these focused efforts is the development of the Commercial Real Estate Template. This template is an invaluable tool to be used in conjunction with Cost of Community Services (COCS) analysis project to provide critical financial analysis to the town's boards and commissions in order to facilitate informed decisions. The agency believes these types of tools and analyses are instrumental in supporting effective and constructive discussions to assess the economic potential of projects presented to the Town for its consideration. Completion and use of these two tools will be a major part of the agency's work going forward.

A core tenet to EDA's structure is the ability of the agency to build and expand on the contributions of past and present members. This tenet is fundamental to the continuity of EDA as well as a source of great encouragement as the agency moves forward.

A demonstrated outcome of this pursuit is the "Town of Canton's Availability Property List", which is posted on the town's website. This list was established and maintained by Ms. Fiora before she was an agency member, while she was an agency member and she continues to maintain the site after her resignation. The available property list has become (and continues to be) a very useful tool for our Town Planner and the EDA is extremely grateful for Ms. Fiora's time and continued contributions.

In 2010, the agency also created and administered a survey to 125 town board and commission members. The purpose of the survey was to solicit their opinions as to the strengths and weaknesses of our town to guide our agency's development of an economic development strategy to meet our community's needs (See Appendix B).

While we received excellent feedback from participants, the results of the survey illuminated another need our agency will play a key role to in addressing. The survey identified a need for cross-agency/cross-commission communications in order to share information and provide an environment for informed decision making. We strongly believe such communications will have a beneficial impact on the town's economic development and, as such, we will assume a more prominent role in facilitating such communications.

Strategic planning was a large part of our 2010 activity. To assist us, we reached out to SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business."<sup>1</sup> We plan to develop and strengthen the relationship with SCORE as our agency continues to develop a strategic plan.

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SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business" is a nonprofit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs and helping small business start, grow and succeed nationwide. SCORE is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). [www.score.org](http://www.score.org)

As we move into 2011, the EDA will be involved in many projects and initiatives. For example, serving on the POCD Super Committee to ensure plan updates result in a responsible plan addressing current and future economic challenges and opportunities, the continued evaluation of a community forum to educate our citizens of the economic development benefits of working with our neighboring towns on regional projects, and the development of best practices to communicate our work as it relates to addressing the needs of our community.

As implied from the results of our survey, communication - person-to-person, board and commission member to EDA member - will be crucial to making real progress in enhancing Canton's economic development. Therefore in 2011, the EDA will increase efforts towards public relations. The town web site, area print media, and local entrepreneurs will continue to be used as avenues for communication, in addition to increasing our participation in town boards and commissions meetings and activities.

As we shared in last year's report, "Canton has many challenges to the pursuit of successful economic development, such as limited infrastructure and land use challenges, but the EDA believes these challenges also provide opportunities in terms of premium characteristics of the town to be leveraged for targeted, favorable economic development." We will continue our work and development as an agency to be a significant part of building consensus and support for much needed economic development and look forward to 2011 to build on the progress made over the last year.

### **Summary of Current EDA Projects**

#### **Cost of Community Services Analysis / Commercial Real Estate Template**

With the goal of becoming a source of information and support to those individuals who can be active participants in the town's economic development, Mr. Danajovits and Mr. Dickstein are creating tools to accomplish that goal. Decision makers will have tangible measurement instruments with which to make meaningful evaluations. Bringing objectivity back to the economic strategic planning process is a major step forward in our

agency's role in Canton's smart growth and development. These instruments will be shared with the community throughout 2011.

### **EDA Forum**

Although a fixture in EDA's history, the current EDA has made a conscious decision to schedule forums based on a demonstrated need, rather than the calendar. The topic we are exploring as our next possible Forum is regionalization as it impacts economic development in a targeted geographic area. The area under consideration is the Route 44 and Route 176 intersection where Canton, Simsbury and Avon abut. With the assistance of our Town Planner, Neil Pade, the EDA is making overtures to his counterpart in Simsbury to explore where this topic would lend itself to becoming a viable topic for the Forum platform. We believe there is value in examining this specific area and discovering the opportunity to maximize the economic development by having towns work together, rather than pursuing stand alone projects without the consideration mutual development interests.

### **EDDI and Town of Canton Web Site Updates**

Every organization struggles with deciding what information is important to its audience and how that information is most effectively communicated. The EDA also struggles with communicating to two very different – but equally important – audiences. We have the community members and local decision makers on one hand and potential developers and entrepreneurs on the other. We are working to make our presence on the town web site a starting point for all audiences to search out information. On the state level, EDDI<sup>2</sup> is a data base for economic developers and site selectors as part of an initiative by the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) and we are working on updating Canton's profile with that platform. EDA will continue to make all efforts to keep information flowing to as many outlets as we can reach for both garnering support within town and throughout the country to build a stronger future.

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<sup>2</sup> Economic Development Data and Information for Connecticut and Western Massachusetts of CERC (Connecticut Economic Research Center, Inc.)

## **Promotional Materials**

With an eye to budget and purpose, the EDA has examined promotional materials to both communicate to the community and support our agency's work. We are also very interested in creating instruments to assist our Town Planner as he responds to inquiries and opportunities as he goes about the town's business. We feel the development of a promotional piece to promote the Cost of Community Services Analysis and the Commercial Real Estate Template, may be our first major piece. We hope this and other promotional materials and articles will begin to answer the question of what sets Canton apart – and will make it stand out - as individuals and companies look at Canton as a home to a new business or project.

## **Strategic Planning**

In early 2010, we began the process of establishing a strategic plan for economic development. The EDA met with SCORE for guidance in the development of a plan. From this meeting, it was clear the EDA did not possess a comprehensive understanding of the Canton Community's strategic intent. To gain a better understanding of the community's wants, we conducted the survey of town leaders to identify a consensus from which we would determine the goals and objectives of our town's leadership. Unfortunately, the survey results were inconclusive with respect to establishing a consensus.

As a result, during 2011 the EDA will engage community businesses, town commissions and other community organizations to more accurately determine the strategic intent of our community. We plan to have these perspectives by late 2011, so that we can resume the development of the economic strategic plan.

## **Summary of EDA Member Activities**

DECD State Economic Strategic Plan and Informative Forum, January 2010  
Connecticut 2050 Planning Symposium, June 2010  
Crash Course I: Basics of Economic Development and Planning, April 2010  
Crash Course II: Advanced Topics in Economic Development and Planning, November 2010  
\$'s and Dirt, Funding For Moving Dirt, November 2010  
Canton Chamber of Commerce Board Meetings  
Canton Zoning Commission Meetings  
Canton Planning Commission Meetings  
Canton Board of Selectmen Meetings

## **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Agency Mission Statement and 2010 By-Laws  
Appendix B – Survey Memorandum and Results Report to Board of Selectmen