

## Canton Connections February Article

As we welcome in 2011, we at the Canton Economic Development Agency (EDA) are very, very busy. 2010 was a milestone year for our agency as we completed a major re-staffing along with several important projects. In this regard, we note a few of our more significant accomplishments:

- We completed a survey of town leadership concerning their views as to the critical drivers for our town's economic growth.
- We completed a cost of community services study that now tells us the costs of our town's services as it relates to each type of land use. You might be interested to note that for each dollar of residential property tax received, it costs the town \$1.10 of expenses, primarily for education services. You might also care to know that each dollar of commercial and industrial tax received costs our town only 32 cents in town expenses.
- We completed a commercial real estate template that allows us to analyze each proposed commercial or industrial real estate project, and determine quite accurately the future tax and income streams that each project will generate. In this manner, we can know in advance what each project will be worth to the town.

Now as to 2011, we have a very ambitious goal. As the Economic Development Agency, our goal for 2011 is economic development! You see, in recent years, other than The Shoppers at Farmington Valley which was built in 2003, there has been very little commercial development in our town. We have let our appreciation for open spaces and small town feel dominate our land use efforts, and therefore very little new commercial development has come to fruition. Accordingly, we have had to rely on residential property taxes and state support to pay for the growth in town expenses. We feel that there is a very positive balance that can be achieved between development and the look and feel of what make Canton the place we choose to live.

From our seat at the table, our review and research indicate our town faces an imminent economic crisis. We are facing significant cost increases for educational, public safety, and municipal salaries, as well as rising overhead and infrastructure costs (road and building maintenance). And, this time around, with our state in major crisis, we will have little state support to help pay our bills. So, unless we quickly begin substantial commercial real estate development to generate new tax revenues, we will be facing significant increases in residential property taxes. And, our residential property tax rates are already among the highest in our region.

We at the EDA now want to focus you, our residents, on the critical question of whether Canton's residents are willing to see residential taxes go up significantly. Or are we willing to make a conscious effort to refocus our town wide efforts to cultivate an environment that would encourage responsible commercial development to help relieve some of our tax load.

We at the EDA truly believe that commercial development can be done in an environmentally sensitive and responsible manner. We further believe that we must foster such development or risk losing some of our middle class taxpayers who cannot afford significant tax increases. But, to develop or not is not about “either/or”, “good/bad”: It is about being smart, and responsibly responding and adapting to 2011 financial realities. On all levels of government, people are feeling their way through new economic and demographic territory. On the town level, we are the closest to the action and have great opportunity to have a meaningful impact.

We as an agency intend to devote much of our 2011 effort to frame this issue for you, and to solicit your support for responsible commercial development. We are asking you to stand up and be counted. You might want to keep this list below handy as you find time and energy to help us in our mission:

- Please express your opinions on this subject to our Selectmen and all town elected officials
- Please express your opinions to our land use commissioners and commission members
- Please attend Board of Selectmen meetings or at the least take a look now and then at the meeting agendas and minutes posted on [www.townofcantonct.org](http://www.townofcantonct.org)
- Please attend Land Use committee meetings or at the least take a look now and then at the meeting agendas and minutes posted on [www.townofcantonct.org](http://www.townofcantonct.org). It is also as easy as going to [www.townofcantonct.org/content/490/default.aspx](http://www.townofcantonct.org/content/490/default.aspx) to sign up for meeting agendas to be sent directly to your email in-box.
- Please let us know what is important to you as it pertains to economic development. We welcome public comment at our meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, or you can drop your thoughts off at the Land Use Office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Town Hall. We need to know what you think if we are going to formulate a viable strategic plan for economic development. Whether you are congratulating us or berating us on our efforts, we are ready to listen!
- Educate yourself as to how your town hall works. Who are the decision makers and how do they support - or not - your goals and desires? Is how they spend your money make sense to you?
- VOLUNTEER for a town board, commission, or agency! Run for a political office if you feel that you are not properly represented by current leadership activity.

It is our very strong opinion that commercial development can be done in an environmentally and aesthetically responsible manner, and that the resultant commercial real estate tax revenues can be used to pay for and preserve the critical services that make Canton the town we love. In addition to the tax revenue benefit, we feel that development has the potential to bring new vitality and vibrancy to our town. It will be our primary objective in 2011 to ascertain your views on this matter so that you can be certain that your representatives pursue land use policies that reflect the views of our citizens. We are not only very enthusiastic about assisting business owners and developers maneuver through our land use process as efficiently and effectively as

possible, but more importantly we want to “sunlight” this process for our fellow residents so it becomes truly a town wide mission to make Canton the best place to live, work and play it can possibly be.

We thank you in advance for your support.