

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Canton Economic Development Agency
Agency Members: J. Danajovits Chairman, B. Dickstein, M. Dube, B. Fiora, and A. Raftery

TO: Canton Board of Selectmen

SUBJECT: Report of Survey Findings

DATE: August 2010

During the past year, the Canton Economic Development Agency (CEDA) has been reconstituted, with four of our 5 members new to the Agency. In this regard, under the leadership of Chairman Joe Danajovits, the Agency has a new sense of purpose and commitment to its mission of facilitating sound economic growth for Canton.

We believe in order for Canton to continue to prosper in coming years, it will have to balance key quality of life issues and concerns with the need for steady, responsible economic development. We feel certain that responsible economic development is essential to the creation of sustainable revenues required to support our Town's current population and the requisite funding of infrastructure, education, safety, and other social services needed to maintain acceptable level of services into the future.

We view ourselves primarily as a facilitator responsible for identifying and fostering favorable economic development. Central to our new Agency's initial efforts, is the completion of two key initiatives:

- The development of a cost of community services study to properly allocate the costs of government to the various users of town services.
- The establishment of an economic development strategic plan that will map out responsible, future economic growth.

As a first step in the completion of these initiatives, CEDA conducted a brief survey of individuals, which it believes are most influential and responsible for Town governance. The purpose of this survey was to explore their views on several key issues. The survey was conducted between May 1st and May 31st 2010. It was distributed to 125 members of the Canton's Board of Selectman Commission Member list dated March 19th 2010. (See Appendix A of the attached report for a complete listing of survey recipients).

The survey was comprised of six questions intended to gauge the recipients' perspectives on issues impacting Canton's future economic growth. The questions were:

- Please identify what strengths or advantages Canton possesses, which could lead to future economic growth.
- What would you say are some of the biggest problems and /or obstacles faced by Canton in achieving future growth?
- Please prioritize the following issues which are most important to Canton's growth.
- In your opinion, what individuals are most influential to Canton's growth?
- What organizations, clubs, businesses, or groups have accomplished the most good for the growth of Canton?
- Do you have any other ideas or ways to improve Canton's tax revenues and/or the quality of life for Canton residents?

Questions 1, 2, and 3 offered multiple choice aided responses.

The results of the survey were both disappointing and eye-opening to CEDA. In this regard:

- Of the 125 commission members solicited, only 51, or 41% responded to the survey. Of 30 commissions solicited, only 25 had any representation at all. As the survey recipients theoretically represent the most engaged and active members of our community in town government, CEDA was especially disappointed in the low response rate.
- The responses indicated a clear lack of consensus as to key issues facing the Town. Even with the aid of multiple choice questions (e.g., 1, 2 & 3,) the responses did not indicate a course of action which would easily lead to a consensus opinion.

For example, Question 1 asking about strengths or advantages of greatest importance to future economic growth. The number one answer "Downtown Collinsville" achieved only a 35% response.

Question 2 asking about problems or obstacles to economic growth. The number 1 answer "no strategic plan" achieved only a 25% response.

Question 3 asking what priorities should be considered when developing a strategic plan. The number one answer "quality of life" achieved a 47% response.

The remaining responses were even more fragmented. Please refer to Appendix D in the attached report for complete summary of survey responses.

- We see this fragmentation as an indication of poor communication channels within commissions membership specifically, and between town leaders and commission members in general. This leads us to believe there is a lack of shared knowledge and awareness of issues relating to economic development.
- Of particular significance to our agency, almost none of the respondents identified CEDA or its members as having influence on economic growth in Canton. We will place great emphasis on identifying steps we can take as we move forward to change this perception.

As you review the level of participation by each commission and the individual responses to the questions shown in the attached report of findings, we believe you will share our conclusion that our key town boards and commissions operate in a “silo” structure decision making environment. In this regard, each commission seems primarily concerned with its own parochial issues, and makes little attempt – or are not made aware of any mutually beneficial need or opportunity - to integrate or coordinate its views with those of other boards or commissions key to the Town’s development.

As an agency primarily concerned with future economic planning and development for Canton, this conclusion causes us great concern as we go forward with strategic and economic planning for the Town. Our fear is as future planning activities are delegated to one or more board or commission; those activities will not reflect a consensus of views or goals of our Town leadership or its citizens. Rather, as the survey results indicate, future planning efforts conducted by a single board or commission will most likely reflect the singular thinking and agenda of that specific group.

Therefore, while we were disappointed that our survey did not result in clear answers to our six economic development questions, perhaps more importantly, we do believe that it has provided some clear insight as to a proper approach to future planning initiatives.

Our town is now preparing to start its 10 year review and update of our Plan of Conservation and Development. We believe that this planning process is crucial to establishing a clear blueprint for economic development and land use. Accordingly, CEDA recommends that the Board of Selectman consider forming a new standing commission to be made up of a single delegate from each of our existing key boards and commissions as well as other key community group stakeholders that have direct interest in the economic development of our town.

We hope that our survey helped to point out the limits of our present approach to town planning, and that it will lead to a revised approach that is more inclusive and reflective of broad based citizen representation.