

Canton Economic Development Agency (EDA) Strategic Plan (2026-2031)

AUTHORITY

The Canton Economic Development Agency operates under Canton Town Ordinance Chapter 155 and the Connecticut General Statutes, including CGS §7-136 and Chapter 132. Established in 1974 as the Canton Economic Development Commission, the Agency was formally designated as an Economic Development Agency in 1978, extending its powers to include those granted to town development agencies under state law.

As an advisory body, the Canton EDA does not exercise land use or regulatory authority and does not make zoning, permitting, or development approval decisions. The Agency's role is to research and analyze economic conditions, provide informed recommendations, and advocate for policies, programs, and investments that support Canton's economic vitality.

STRUCTURE

The EDA is composed of five voting members and two alternate members, appointed by the Board of Selectmen to staggered four-year terms, who serve voluntarily. The Agency elects its own Chair annually and may engage clerical and technical assistance within its appropriated budget.

RESOURCES AND CAPACITY

To effectively fulfill its advisory role and advance its goals, the Canton EDA requires adequate resources and organizational support. This includes staff support, access to reliable data, and sufficient tools for research, communication, and public engagement. Consistent resourcing enables the Agency to provide timely analysis, maintain regular communication, and offer informed recommendations to Town leadership and the community.

Key resource needs include:

- Staff and administrative support to assist with research, coordination, communications, and meeting preparation;
- Access to economic, market, and demographic data necessary to evaluate trends and inform recommendations;
- Communication and outreach tools to engage residents, businesses, property owners, and regional partners;
- Modest funding to support research and analysis, engagement and outreach materials, and other activities aligned with the Agency's mission.

Adequate and predictable resources are essential for the Agency to operate effectively, maintain continuity, and serve as a dependable source of economic insight for the Town.

MISSION

The Canton EDA's mission is to foster and support economic development to make Canton a better place to live, work, raise a family, conduct business, and enjoy a high quality of life. The Agency fulfills this mission under Connecticut General Statute (CGS) §7-136 and Chapter 132 through three core functions: researching and publishing economic conditions and trends, recommending strategies to improve Canton's economic well-being, and coordinating activities that promote economic development.

VISION

A resilient and well-informed local economy where Canton's businesses, residents, and decisionmakers share a clear understanding of economic conditions and work together to guide thoughtful, sustainable growth.

GOALS

The Canton EDA supports the Town's economic health by promoting transparency, informed decision-making, and a predictable, supportive business environment. To advance this role, the EDA's ongoing goals are to:

1. Provide reliable economic information: Consistently publish an annual economic snapshot to inform residents, businesses, and Town decision-makers.
2. Maintain open and regular communication: Engage routinely with residents, businesses, property owners, and developers to understand conditions and share information.
3. Build strong working relationships: Strengthen partnerships with local and regional organizations, elected officials, and other stakeholders involved in economic development.
4. Improve public understanding of economic development activity: Increase awareness of major economic development projects and their potential implications for the community.
5. Inform policy and regulatory discussions: Provide data-driven input and analysis to help inform Town policy and regulatory decisions related to economic development.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The following initiatives translate the EDA's mission, purpose, and goals into a concrete five-year work plan. They are organized around four functional areas – research and analysis, business and development support, partnerships and advocacy, and marketing and identity – along with the direct programs the EDA administers on behalf of the Town. Together, they reflect a deliberate focus on actions within the EDA's capacity as a volunteer board: building the informational foundation Canton needs to make sound economic decisions, strengthening relationships that move key projects forward, and maintaining a visible presence for businesses, developers, and residents. Progress will be reviewed annually as part of the "State of Canton's Economy" snapshot process.

1.0 Strengthen the understanding of Canton's evolving economic conditions using data-driven research and emerging tools and trends

- 1.1 Develop a simple, annual "State of Canton's Economy" snapshot presentation that includes vacancy trends, business openings/closings, and commercial real estate activity, highlighting evolving strengths, challenges, and opportunities
- 1.2 Conduct brief, recurring annual outreach to residents, business owners, and developers, ensuring the EDA's priorities reflect both what economic data shows and what the community experiences on the ground
- 1.3 Monitor and analyze changes in tax assessments for newly completed development to understand emerging market trends and fiscal impacts

2.0 Support the business and economic development environments by positioning the EDA as Canton's primary point of contact for information

- 2.1 Prepare a basic "Doing Business in Canton" guide (one pager using simple language)
- 2.2 Maintain a simple business directory and keep informal tabs on vacancies and opportunities, informing the development of a business retention, expansion, and retraction monitoring program
- 2.3 Partner with community groups and local and regional organizations to host co-sponsored events such as small business workshops or "meet the developer" forums

3.0 Build partnerships and assign EDA liaisons that support the advancement of projects through advocacy

3.1 Assign EDA liaisons to track and support key town initiatives as follows:

- Axe Factory Redevelopment
- Farmington River Trail Extension
- Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCA) Capacity
- Future studies, reports, and plans including Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) updates and those addressing land use, zoning, housing, redevelopment, infrastructure/utilities, and transportation

3.2 Host one public information session per year focused on major economic development projects, bringing in guest speakers from state and regional agencies, developers, and town leadership

3.3 Ensure that Canton's economic conditions are represented in town-wide planning efforts and grant applications for community development and infrastructure projects

4.0 Promote Canton's economic identity through marketing and an expanded digital footprint

4.1 Maintain a clean, simple EDA webpage with information on developments, the annual "State of Canton's Economy" snapshot, EDA-managed programs, business resources ("Doing Business in Canton" guide), and featured marketing content

4.2 Re-establish Canton's economic brand and social media presence for the "Make It Canton" campaign

5.0 Administer and advance EDA-managed programs that directly improve Canton's physical and commercial environment

5.1 Build out the framework for a Façade Improvement Program to support commercial property reinvestment, including identifying and securing funding

5.2 Define an implementation pathway for a Wayfinding Signage program to improve navigation and visibility for Canton's business districts, destinations, and points of interest

5.3 Identify opportunities to incorporate public art into Collinsville's streetscape to strengthen downtown Collinsville's character and economic vitality