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Oliger tells how Newtown's economic development commission makes a big difference for local businesses

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Starting up a business can be a tough prospect in the current economy. In Newtown, new and existing businesses find an especially helping hand from the Newtown Economic Development Commission (EDC). The commission serves as an advocate for local businesses and has a full slate of ongoing initiatives to provide assistance. In the past few months Economic Development Commission members have committed significant amounts of time and resources to several large projects.

A major success this year was the campaign to bring a clean technology company, Advanced Fusion Systems' new headquarters, research and development and testing facility, to Newtown. The company is making a \$25 million to \$30 million investment in a 200,000 s/f facility. AFS will develop an exciting array of products with applications in electrical power generation, transmission and distribution, environmental remediation and semiconductor manufacturing for the defense and medical industries.

Another milestone for the Economic Development Commission was final approval by the Newtown Inland Wetlands Commission for the Newtown Technology Park. The 23-acre parcel of land designated for the "Tech Park" is located off Commerce Rd. approximately 1/2 mile from Exit 10 of I-84. The site will be served by public water and sewer service, natural gas and telecommunications. A conceptual site plan with six buildings ranging in size from 10,000 to 22,000 s/f with associated parking has been approved by the IWC. The Town of Newtown is offering the property for sale or lease for commercial development. Zoning (M-5) is in place and permits for the access way are under review. The Tech Park will make a unique campus for a corporate headquarters, research and development facility or a campus of buildings built around a common theme. It is adjacent to employee amenities including a child day care facility, a fitness center and a walking trail system. The setting has unmatched beauty, utilities are available and the location is convenient for business needs. And, it's near the new Advanced Fusion Systems headquarters.

The EDC is currently working on initiatives designed to better serve existing retail, commercial and industrial businesses, both large and small. The needs of the local business community were identified in the results of a survey late last year that reached out to over 1,750 local businesses.

One key initiative that surfaced from the survey was to develop and provide a "road map" of the various municipal departments for businesses that are new or looking to expand in Newtown. In response, detailed web-based road maps are being created to outline the various necessary permits and processes. The maps will also provide the municipal contact for businesses seeking permits or assistance with starting up a new business, whether in special design districts, the Borough of Newtown or other areas of the town.

In addition, a "Buy Local" campaign featuring town-wide public events is being coordinated to spotlight an array of goods and services available from town merchants. The EDC is sponsoring the first ever "Taste of Newtown" to be staged for 10 days in September and will feature special offerings from participating restaurants.

The EDC is in the early stages of discovery with the goal of helping home-based developing entrepreneurs grow to the next phase or level and help ideas become enterprises. Information is being gathered on ways to create an innovation center or incubator - whether bricks and mortar or virtual - for businesses focused on new innovations and emerging technology. This initiative is based on the concept of economic gardening and will initially focus on growing Newtown's home-based businesses that seem ready to expand.

Newtown offers a competitive cost of doing business. A Business Incentive Plan has been adopted to assist businesses and improve their bottom line. Town officials support the strategic development of properties within general business and industrial areas to encourage job creation and business expansion. The Business Incentive Program was created and recently upgraded to promote sustainable economic growth to benefit and improve the overall quality of life in the community. The plan's prime purposes are to encourage private investment, improve the physical appearance of the community, expand the local economic base, support strategic economic growth and foster a healthy business climate. Learn more by visiting our web site at www.newtown.org.

This article was written by Margaret Oliger, EDC co-chairman for the Town of Newtown.

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