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## **Newtown EDC implements orderly and planned economic development for the town**

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Winning at Economic Development in any economy requires a partnership and dedication from talented and creative individuals, businesses and the community. The "partnership" works best when all three groups share a common vision that will help existing businesses grow and new business startups flourish. But a vision is not enough; you need a workable plan that sets forth a road map for growth and expansion in the community that utilizes the S.M.A.R.T. process by defining objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bounded.

In Newtown, the Economic Development Commission is charged with implementing "orderly and planned economic development for the town ... while always (recognizing) the character of the town" and working with the Newtown Office of Economic and Community Development Director, Elizabeth Stocker, we are ready to be that partner to local businesses.

The change in Newtown's approach is how the EDC drives the goals, strategies and actions that are outlined in the most recent strategy. All across town, the impact of a focused strategy can be seen. One example of a successful and ongoing effort has been the focus on investing in Newtown's business centers, specifically Sandy Hook Center and the Borough of Newtown. The increased responsiveness to changing demographics, opportunities and economic trends are having an impact on the value of these areas for business growth. The Sandy Hook business district was identified as an area with the necessary land and infrastructure to attract additional infill development. A "streetscape" project is well underway and has been made possible by a partnership that combines private, municipal and state funds to improve the commercial district. The state recognized this partnership and awarded a Connecticut Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant to fund part of the project. The goal of increasing economic development in the district has already begun to take hold as new businesses move into the area and property improvements are made. A previous streetscape project in Sandy Hook successfully proved its impact with new economic activity. The current project involves aesthetic improvements such as decorative lighting, landscaping, curbing, crosswalks and sidewalks that provide visitors and residents with a safe and pleasant environment. The new grant and town funds will be used to continue the project and ideally bring further job growth to the community.

Indigenous economic growth is an important way of increasing job creation, income and tax revenue. In Newtown, another part of our strategy is focused on the reuse of properties that have the potential to contribute to economic growth but are currently underutilized or have inappropriate or obsolete land uses. We have already identified and targeted several key properties and have a plan in place that will help with revitalizing these underutilized sites thereby providing new opportunities for future growth.

Opportunities also exist in Newtown's other commercial and industrial districts. Hawleyville, which is

well positioned off exit 9 of I-84 and served by public water and sewers, is a key location. The M-2A (Industrial) zoning designation of large undeveloped acreage allows a variety of commercial and industrial land uses including a hotel and conference center. Development will require an investment in extending a major sewer line to the area. The potential for significant growth will provide new economic opportunities, local services, jobs and new tax revenue.

The Newtown EDC is also the Development Agency for the Newtown Technology Park which is located off exit 10 of I-84. The commission pursued various development scenarios for the land and has achieved local wetlands approval for a driveway to serve a 23-acre parcel that has the potential to support approximately 100,000 s/f of building area and adjacent parking. Appropriate zoning is in place and the EDC is targeting technology related businesses and service industries to occupy the park.

Another town owned property that the commission continues to market is the Fairfield Hills Campus where limited potential for commercial use has been identified. As a redevelopment parcel served by public utilities and major roadways, it is an attractive property. The town plans to use a \$400,000 state STEAP grant to make capital improvements at the campus, including new walkways, lighting, and parking areas. Remediation, renovation and demolition of several obsolete buildings are still a challenge but one worthy of creative solutions. In May of this year, the federal EPA awarded the Town a Brownfields cleanup grant of \$200,000 to assist with the ongoing redevelopment. The commission is committed to continue to work with the town to see that the economic potential for this property is realized.

We welcome your call and inquiries!

Margaret Oliger is co-chair of the Newtown Economic Development Commission, Newtown, Conn.

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