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How to cope after a tragedy: The Newtown EDC playing a role in helping a town return to normalcy

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Newtown, Connecticut - indelibly marked by a crazed gunman who slew 20 first graders, six Sandy Hook School staff members, his own mother and himself less than a year ago - is battling back towards normalcy.

The Newtown Economic Development Commission (EDC) is taking a small but important role in that recovery and is implementing a robust plan for new economic growth and expansion in the community.

While continuing to be responsive to the town's changing character, demographics needs and trends, the EDC works to enhance business growth, increase employment opportunities and tax revenue by strengthening existing commercial and industrial districts, expanding areas such as Hawleyville, the Fairfield Hills campus, the South Main Street corridor as well as the Sandy Hook village center.

The EDC, and the Department of Economic and Community Development, headed by Elizabeth Stocker, is managing a \$500,000 CT state grant focused on helping the business district nearest the Sandy Hook School to recover from the tragic events of December 14, 2012. They have already distributed funds to about 30 businesses who experienced economic losses immediately following the tragedy and are moving ahead with a second phase to address long term economic recovery in Sandy Hook village.

On a broader scale, the town is planning and budgeting for an expected \$5 million sewer project to serve a little-developed area abutting Interstate 84 at the Exit 9 interchange. Two large tracts of land - one more than 100 acres - accompany numerous opportunities for "clean" development. The Hawleyville area has several shovel ready sites and will benefit from the new development projects expected with the extended sewer line.

Also available are sites totaling more than 25 acres on the Fairfield Hill campus, a central community of historic buildings in a suburban setting. To that end, the EDC has developed a 45-day Fast Track program for all applications submitted for development. The town has pledged to work with developers to assure that completed and appropriate applications are tentatively approved within 45 days. The town also owns a large pristine area earmarked for a Newtown Technology Park located directly off exit 10 of I-84.

Among strategies being explored to serve new and existing small business, the EDC is working with students in the MBA program at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn. on a Newtown Incubator Initiative. The study is assessing the need and feasibility of having a central facility to serve various types of small-business activity. Other projects which support local business owners include a first-ever "buy local" campaign in the community. Working with the Newtown Chamber of Commerce, the EDC strives to educate area residents about the many benefits of supporting local

businesses. A business directory has been added to the Commission's web site and new entries are added regularly.

The newly revised Newtown Business Incentive Plan, one of the most comprehensive in the region, seeks to build job creation and business development by encouraging private investment, improving the physical appearance of the community and expanding the local economic base. The Newtown EDC generated two applications that were recently approved for tax relief.

In addition, the EDC is actively working with the EPA, State of Connecticut and Regional Brownfields Partnership to secure Brownfields Grants to promote redevelopment of abandoned commercial sites. The Brownfields Program is designed to work with local communities to clean up and reuse sites which may require special preparation to be safe for future development.

The EDC currently offers several small business seminars on topics ranging from how to start a business to small business emergency preparedness. The seminars will assist business owners prepare for an emergency such as power outages to learning more about small business financing and the best ways to utilize social media and growing their businesses.

To explore these numerous opportunities, please visit our website at www.newtown.org or contact Stocker at elizabeth.stocker@newtown-ct.gov.

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