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Wallingford's economic development: A mindset, not a department - by Tim Ryan

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Tim Ryan, Wallingford EDC

Let's be real. When any of us as consumers or business people have to interact with a governmental agency, our expectations for courteous, timely, and effective service don't likely rank high on the customer satisfaction meter. And frankly, we deserve to have a reasonable expectation of a good experience. As municipal employees we work for the taxpayers...we work for the mutual benefit of our communities. Well, In Wallingford we're driven to provide a good experience when you engage our Economic Development office. And, it's certainly not breaking news that successful businesses are a critical component to a community's fiscal well-being and that a good customer experience leads to a good reputation which leads to an increase in the number of local businesses. Ah...fundamentals!

We're confident that if you were to ask: Innovative Engineering Services (IES) who purchased a new building and added over 40 new jobs; or Davenport Associates who built a new office warehouse facility; or Edible Arrangements who expanded their world headquarters; or GKN Aerospace who are fitting up their new facility adding over 80 new jobs; or Harte Infiti whose new auto dealership added over 35 new jobs; or Hobson Motzer who purchased and fit up a new facility adding over 50 new jobs, what their experience was in dealing with our Economic Development office we're confident their comments would be positive. Now that's not to say there weren't wrinkles that needed to be ironed out as part of the process...there always seem to be...but we worked through them and all of these companies have brought new economic growth to Wallingford.

The common cries of, "every project is riddled with complications and obstacles" and "nothing's easy anymore," are the realities we deal with in economic development.

"A community's ability to surmount obstacles is in direct correlation to a community's economic success," said Joe Mirra, chairman of Wallingford's volunteer Economic Development Commission (EDC) noting that growing the grand list takes focus, commitment and energy. "Making the time to work with potential businesses is not a function of a strong or poor economy, it's a matter of an operating philosophy."

In the fall of 2016 Wallingford's EDC engaged Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) to

facilitate a municipal training workshop that was attended by our mayor, municipal leaders, and representatives from the commercial brokerage and business communities. The objective was to establish an operating philosophy around economic development by recognizing that in a highly competitive marketplace, we can have a positive influence on potential opportunities by increasing attentiveness and streamlining processes in efforts to attract the type of development we'd like to see in Wallingford.

“We listen intently to our partners in the brokerage community; after all, brokers bring the deals,” said Tom Collette, a local physical therapist and chairman of the EDC’s marketing committee. “Our new GIS for commercial and industrial properties is receiving good reviews from brokers and site selectors who have longed for the ability to view our field card information on line.”

Properties are searchable by address, property type, and zoning designation while undeveloped land can be searched by entering acreage parameters, via a drop down menu. “We built the GIS with a great deal of input from the users...site selectors and brokers,” said Collette. Check us out at <http://wallingford.mapxpress.net/edc/app.htm> and please share your thoughts.

“Wallingford is not utopia, but we have many great amenities beyond the low cost and superior reliability of our electricity,” said Mark Gingras, owner of G&G Beverage Distributors and member of the EDC’s marketing committee. “We’re instilling the fact that economic development is not a department but rather a mindset that suggests that every citizen has a voice in how we manage the growth of the town.”

A series of articles have run in Wallingford Magazine introducing our ten-member, volunteer commission, describing their specific roles on the commission and reminding all citizens that these commissioners are their neighbors in ongoing efforts to have a steady dialog of development thoughts, ideas, and opportunities.

“We developed a business-card-size hand-out that lists Wallingford’s top ten strengths so that we’re all singing the Town’s praises from the same sheet of music,” said Gingras.

In addition, two short videos were produced recently...one that addresses why a company should relocate their business to Wallingford and a second that illustrates why their workforce would want to live here. The videos can be found at plugin2wallingford.com, and we encourage you to take a look.

Our mayor feels strongly about our unwritten non-poaching policy. In other words, we do not call upon businesses in other CT communities in efforts to attract them to Wallingford. We do however respond to all businesses that inquire about opportunities here. Our job in economic development is to create those opportunities and field the inquiries brought to us by brokers and site selectors. We want you to feel confident that your referrals will get the proper treatment and priority as we pursue our quest to exceed service related expectations when we’re engaged. We look forward to hearing from you!

Tim Ryan is economic development specialist for the Town of Wallingford EDC.

