

Economic Development Commission 2021 Strategy and Implementation Update



August 16, 2021

The EDC is an advisory group for the Town Council

We are chartered to:

- Ensure orderly growth
- Help create a quality job environment
- Support local businesses
- Aide the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan

The EDC comprises a group of 8 volunteer residents and town staff

- Fully staffed; diverse backgrounds (entrepreneurs, developers, consultants, university student, investors, corporate)
- Working collaboratively with Planning Office Staff and Town Council Liaison
- Non-voting member volunteers welcome to support initiatives
- Improving operational effectiveness: potential project lists, assigned accountability, liaisons with other groups



For most of 2021 we have been focused on Comp Plan action items

- **Economic development strategy for Downtown (1) & Route 1 Corridor (2)**
 - Interviewed broad array of stakeholders to develop a high-level concept
 - Presented the concept to the Planning Board for further collaboration
 - Key elements include:
 - Permission for mixed-use in grey fields, empty lots and tired strip malls;
 - Create “Main Street USA” vision of walkable commercial and recreational environment;
 - Street-scaping for North Canal & Main;
 - Water and sewer extensions along Route 1;
 - Riverfront revitalization and clean-up
- **Climate Impact on Property Values & Tax Revenue (5)**
 - Phase I collaboration with Northeastern University targeting Winnapaug Pond complete
 - SLR impacts Breach Road; Coastal Storms results in minor impact
 - Need to reconcile results with Army Corps of Engineers project to raze structures
 - Phase II broaden model to incorporate other areas of Westerly
- **External Marketing of Westerly (3) and Tourism Friendliness (4) depend on the above and stakeholder band-width**



The EDC has also been working on Orderly Growth, Job Opportunities, and Support of Local Business

- **Orderly growth**
 - Resiliency management recommendations
 - Support to the Main Street Stormwater project
 - Engagement and collaboration with Stonington EDC
 - Monitor effective use of grant funding
- **The EDC spearheaded a job fair at the Westerly Education Center**
 - EDC to support WEC in promoting and enhancing job fair going forward
- **We support local businesses by:**
 - Direct engagement with businesses, investors, other stakeholders
 - Providing commentary on business applications

(See appendix for summaries on Orderly Growth, Job Opportunities, and Local Business Support)



The EDC will advance in the following manner; Town Council input is welcomed:

- EDC will play a proactive and engaged role versus being a strictly strategic advisory group
- The EDC will continue to drive the implementation of the economic development plan
- The EDC will assess the effectiveness of the town resiliency planning efforts
- The EDC will monitoring the town's grant and funding approach to ensure it is actively accessing available resources from alternative sources
- The EDC will make recommendations to facilitate and enhance the interaction between businesses and the town staff



Appendix

- EDC Charter
- 2019-2020 Activities
- Orderly Growth
- Job Opportunities
- Local Business Support
- EDC Organizational Effectiveness
- EDC Membership and local government participants



The four chartered goals of the EDC

Article VIII. Economic Development Commission §5-34. Goals & objectives – “To Support...”

- “...**orderly growth** and diversification of development that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land...”
- “...an economic climate which **increases quality and quantity of job** opportunities and overall economic well-being...”
- “...**local business activity** by promoting the revitalization and development of all aspects of Westerly’s economy”
- “...the implementation of the economic development goals and the intent of the **Town’s Comprehensive Plan** and/or make advisory opinions should conflicts arise.”



EDC 2019 – 2020 Activities

- **Survey conducted in 2019 of local businesses (74 respondents)**
 - Identified nine key focus areas (including: year-round economy, promote the town; protect the “charm”, attract skilled workforce, simplify business entry to town)
- **EDC incorporated survey themes into the Comprehensive Plan**
 - Strategic plans for the economic corridor
 - Build a year-round economy
 - Support tourism
 - Promote Westerly
 - Ensure resiliency
- **EDC prioritized the twenty-seven economic type action items identified in the Comprehensive Plan**
 - Criteria based on orderly growth, job opportunities, supporting local business, EDC capability to deliver
 - The top five action items became the focus for the EDC Comprehensive Plan projects



Status of Orderly Growth

- **Westerly Town Resiliency Planning**
 - EDC encouraged creation of list of resiliency projects to update, maintain, and monitor; initial draft created
 - EDC will ensure Westerly is coordinating resiliency activity and building a comprehensive strategy
- **Support SRICD Stormwater Project**
 - Project aligns with EDC Downtown economic strategy of a greener and more welcoming footprint
 - EDC provided \$2,500 of funding support for SRICD stormwater project; provides matching grant access
 - Monitoring project and will support where applicable
- **Grant Funding**
 - EDC will ensure Westerly has processes in place to leverage available grant funds
- **Engagement with Stonington EDC**
 - Coordinating downtown development strategies
 - Leveraging best-practices



Status of Quality Job Environment

- **Job Fair**

- Co-sponsored event June 10, 2021 w/ Chamber of Commerce, Stonington EDC, Westerly Education Center
- Strong support from employers (~40); limited engagement of candidates
- EDC is evaluating whether to institutionalize the Job Fair as an annual event



Status of Supporting Local Businesses

- **Business Engagement**
 - Created welcome letter for new businesses coming to Westerly
- **Providing commentary on business applications**
 - Inviting businesses to engage with EDC prior to Planning Board process
 - EDC provided commentary opinion on Golf Course verbiage for Comp Plan
- **Engaging with investors, developers, property owners**
 - Conducting preliminary discussions with developers/owners on potential hospitality development; riverfront collaborations; and other projects which support the economic development strategy



Status of EDC Organizational effectiveness

- **Staffing**
 - All EDC positions filled!
 - Town Council liaison appointed, active, and engaged
 - Identify(ing) EDC Liaisons for Chamber, Planning Board, Resiliency, Grants, Others?
 - Seeking non-member volunteer support for specific projects
- **Operating Mechanism**
 - Creating a project list with detailed action plans, responsibility assignments, and time lines
- **Communication**
 - Improve web-site to be more descriptive, informative, and helpful
 - Considering a communication strategy for businesses, residents, town government



EDC members and local government participants

Leadership

- Jim Torres – chair, (finance, quality, process improvement)
- Doug Brockway – vice chair (management consultant, digital & IT)
- Tim McLaughlin, Jr – secretary (Bryant University senior, politics & law)

Members

- Ralph M. Abruzzese – (general manager, manufacturing)
- Dan Lathrop – (business owner, insurance)
- Joe Montesano – (practitioner, commercial real estate)
- Mary Scialabba – (financial analyst, advocate)
- Lucy Wang – (vc investor, startup, machine learning expert)

Town Support

- Brian McCuin – (town council liaison)
- Nancy Letendre – (town planner, use land attorney)
- Alyse Oziolor – (principal planner, environmental scientist)

