

Town of Westerly Rhode Island



DEPARTMENT OF
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Westerly Town Hall
45 Broad Street
Westerly, RI 02891

Making Westerly a Great Place to Live, to Work, to Grow, and to Play!

EDC ADVISORY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

I. Introduction to the Economic Development Commission (EDC) and its Goals and Objectives

The Westerly Economic Development Commission (EDC) offers support to local business owners in the form of guidance, assistance, resources, and information in dealing with local and state government. The EDC provides advisory recommendations to the Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Town Council on a variety of topics throughout the town, and such recommendations have been well received in the past.

The vision of the EDC is that Westerly is recognized as one of the best places to live in the US.
“Westerly, a great place to live, to work, to grow, and to play!”

The EDC is a volunteer public body with no regulatory authority in the Town of Westerly. The EDC is a function of the Town Manager’s Office and its members are appointed by the Town Council. It is made up of seven (7) Westerly residents and is supported by the Planning Office staff. The Goals and Objectives of the EDC (Section 5 of the Town Code) are as follows:

1. To support activities that ***promote orderly growth and diversification of development*** that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land, its suitability for use and the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities.
2. To support activities that promote an economic climate which ***increases the quality and quantity of job opportunities and the overall economic well-being*** of the Town and its residents.
3. To ***support local business activities*** by promoting the revitalization and development of all aspects of Westerly's economy.
4. To ***support the implementation of the economic development goals and the intent of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan*** and/or make advisory opinions should a conflict arise.

The [2020-2040 Town of Westerly Comprehensive Community Plan](#), which is available on the Town website, is the “community land-use program that will guide all land-use and physical development in Westerly from now until the end of 2040.” This policy document identifies a variety of goals and visions for economic development in the Town, many of which were crafted by and/or significantly influenced by the EDC. The vision for Westerly in general, as well as for the economy, is a resilient and vital community. A resilient economy can be achieved through balancing development and conservation, promoting diversity in our job market and

economic base, and sustaining a local year-round economy. The various Goals, Policies and Actions under “Economic Vitality” in the Comprehensive Plan are pertinent to supporting the goals of the EDC. Appended to this document are a few excerpts from the Comprehensive Plan that may be of particular focus when the EDC is reviewing development projects.

The EDC has prioritized the following concepts of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Develop strategic plans for Westerly’s economic corridors
- Build a year-round economy
- Support tourism
- Promote Westerly
- Increase the quality and quantity of jobs
- Ensure economic resiliency of the community

More information on the EDC is available on the Town website at <http://westerlyri.gov/195/Economic-Development-Commission>. Also on the website are several studies and presentations prepared by the EDC that provide specific focus on areas of Town like Downtown Westerly and the Route 1 Corridor. Review of these documents may provide more insight into the objectives of the EDC and how new development and redevelopment can support Town objectives.

II. Connecting with the Economic Development Commission

The EDC can be reached through the Planning Office via phone at 401-348-2536 or via email at EDC@westerlyri.gov. Planning staff can put you in touch with specific EDC members or schedule your development project for a voluntary preview with the Commission.

The EDC meets monthly on the first Tuesday of every month at 4pm in Town Hall. These meetings are open to the public if you would like to join a meeting to discuss a topic of interest that is posted on the agenda. The EDC follows all Open Meeting protocols required by law. In addition, EDC agendas are posted approximately one week prior to the meeting on Westerly Clerkbases (<https://clerkshq.com/westerly-ri>). The EDC welcomes additional community “volunteers” to participate as non-members.

III. Advice and Recommendations

One of the services that the EDC offers to support the above goals and objectives is providing advice and recommendations to business owners, and informal reviews of development projects. The EDC may offer feedback and advice on a variety of topics related to your business or development project, such as:

1. Alignment with the Town’s overall economic strategy
2. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan
3. Potential market demand based on previous economic studies performed by the Town

4. Potential public perception
5. Overall corridor or neighborhood “fit”
6. Potential regulatory limitations and restrictions
7. Potential site planning issues or physical constraints to development

Recommendations from the EDC result from informal discussion or on more formal matters in aid of another Board, the Town Manager, or the Council, as described below. Both options represent an entirely voluntary process initiated on behalf of the applicant/business owner that can be terminated at any time.

The EDC’s primary goal is to support local business activities by promoting the revitalization and development of all aspects of Westerly's economy. Such support can be formalized if the business or project is also furthering the EDC’s goals and objectives listed above, most notably implementation of the economic development goals and the intent of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan.

IV. Public Meeting and Informal Discussion

An informal discussion can be scheduled during any EDC public meeting. Such informal discussions are meant to provide the EDC members with an understanding of obstacles and issues encountered by local businesses, and to network with professionals and business owners. An informal discussion at a public meeting will also allow the EDC to answer questions a business owner may have and provide feedback on matters fundamental to improving the local economy – including human resources, infrastructure, transportation, natural resources, and technology.

V. Public Meeting and Recommendation

The EDC may hold a public meeting and provide an advisory opinion for use by the Planning Board, Zoning Board or Town Council. Recommendations made by the EDC can provide extra support and advocacy for a project seeking local approval or grant. If a recommendation from the EDC is being sought, the applicant will need to provide sufficient information for the EDC to advise the approving body on the EDC’s objectives and implementation of the economic development goals and the intent of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan. An applicant should provide the EDC with a complete copy of a Master Plan or Development Plan Review submission made to the Planning Board. Information that *may also* be requested by the EDC includes:

1. Applicant’s indication of how the project supports the economic goals and values of the Comprehensive Plan (see relevant economic references from the Comprehensive Plan appended)
2. Number and types of jobs being created by the project and if there are indirect jobs created or eliminated
3. Market demand for the service or product (and generally how demand was determined)
4. Anticipated season of operation (year-round vs seasonal)

5. State or Federal EDA or Jobs program associated with the proposed development.

Process of Review

Step 1. Submit a written request through the Planning Office at EDC@westerlyri.gov.

Step 2. The Planning Office will forward the request to the EDC Chair for a preapplication discussion, including agreement on the information to be submitted and scheduling a meeting with the EDC.

Step 3. Submission of information. Deadlines for being placed on an EDC meeting agenda can be found on the Planning Office website (<http://westerlyri.gov/162/Planning>).

Step 4. At the public meeting, the EDC will discuss the project with the applicant informally or in preparation of a recommendation as described above. Below is a general outline of the meeting agenda.

- a. Brief introduction by the EDC Chairman on the goals and objectives of the meeting (informal or recommendation).
- b. Presentation by the applicant's team, including brief review of any site plans and supporting materials provided to the EDC. The applicant may assume all EDC members have read through the information submitted and only present a high-level overview of the project, hitting on important points. Specific details can be discussed as needed to explain specific issues, support specific goals, or answer questions from the EDC members.
- c. EDC members may ask questions and offer general opinion on the proposals fit with the vision/values, as well as specific aspects of the proposal that are of interest to the EDC.
- d. If a written recommendation is requested, the matter may be continued, and specific direction may be given by the EDC.

Step 5. The EDC may direct staff to draft a recommendation for the EDC's review and approval at a future meeting or the written recommendation may be assigned to the EDC Chairman or other member for signature.

APPENDIX A - COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXCERPTS

The Comprehensive Plan outlines a **vision for Westerly**:

“The vision for the Town of Westerly is to preserve and enhance its quality of life for all generations as a safe, resilient, and compassionate community with a healthy environment, a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, a strong, stable, equitable economy, and a responsible and publicly-engaged government.”

The following statements relate to economic development project in the Town:

*“**Westerly will remain a unique and special place**, retaining its distinctive neighborhoods, history, traditions, and natural beauty, while growing in a way to meet its residents’ needs for a vibrant place to live, raise and educate families, and work.”*

*“Westerly will have contained sprawl, blight, sign pollution, and the development of housing and commercial space will have been thoughtfully managed to meet the needs of residents of all generations and will have **promoted a prosperous economy with as little impact on the natural environment as possible.**”*

*“**Downtown Westerly will be a welcoming and attractive gateway** for visitors arriving by public transportation or otherwise, a premier cultural center for all, continue its legacy as an Historic District and Arts Center, and will be well-connected to all neighborhoods through its public spaces, programs, events, and services of community-wide interest.”*

*“Westerly will have achieved a condition of **economic and physical resilience** to natural and man-made events.”*

The following identified **Values** relate to economic development projects in the Town:

*“**2. Focus on redevelopment and revitalization of industrial districts and mill villages.** Mill villages and industrial districts shall retain traditional character and include a mix of uses.”*

*“**3. Permit commercial uses through innovative development regulations and techniques.** Commercial sprawl shall be avoided. Instead, integrate new commerce and maximize the development potential in existing commercial districts. Provide for shared or maximum parking requirements. Provide incentives to develop outparcels for single tenant retailers in the parking lots of strip malls. Continue to break down silos and be flexible with where businesses locate (e.g. “medical retail” moving into strip malls).”*

*“**8. Promote diversity in the type and the vitality of locally owned businesses.** New businesses will take on different forms (e.g. telecommuting, virtual reality, artificial intelligence), need different types of spaces (e.g. home offices, incubators, co-ops), and different infrastructure (e.g. telecommunications, broadband).”*

“9. Encourage a range of viable housing options for all income and age groups. Units that cost less because they are small and efficiently designed, such as micro-apartments, and in many cases do not come with a parking space, are an underappreciated, but potentially important, component of the housing market benefiting the middle-income workforce, as are multi-family homes and other shared-living spaces.”

The following **Long-Term Priorities** relate to economic development project in the Town:

“The Town of Westerly must **make the Downtown**, the traditional core of Westerly, the focus of its redevelopment and revitalization efforts.”

“The Town of Westerly must **preserve the unique character and importance of each constituent neighborhood and evaluate opportunities for redevelopment and revitalization in each.**”

The following **Goals and Policies** are particularly relevant to economic development projects in the Town:

GOAL ECON-1	A place-based approach to economic development will attract broad opportunities for all participants in the local economy.
Policy ECON-1.1	Focus on unique features and existing community assets to draw new investment.
Policy ECON-1.2	Encourage regulatory reform, incentives, and other tools to create the appropriate conditions for equitable, robust economic activity.
Policy ECON-1.3	Ensure that new economic development opportunities preserve community assets and character.
Policy ECON-1.4	Encourage the creation and retention of high-quality, well-paying workforce opportunities.

GOAL ECON-2	Diversification of local industries will create a more sustainable economic base for the community and the region.
Policy ECON-2.1	Promote a locally-based community food system that offers healthy, affordable products for the benefit of residents, businesses, and the environment.
Policy ECON-2.2	Encourage knowledge-based industries that attract telecommuting and work-from-home opportunities.
Policy ECON-2.3	Foster entrepreneurial activities in the community.

GOAL ECON-3	Sustain a local economy that is resilient to natural and human-caused disasters.
Policy ECON-3.1	Anticipate the impact of catastrophic events on the local economy.
Policy ECON-3.2	Reduce the burden of climate change impacts on municipal finances and the local and regional economies.
Policy ECON-3.3	Ensure economic resilience and sustainability through smart city and strong town strategies.