Branford, Connecticut

Economic Development Commission

Annual Report

JULY 1, 2005 – JUNE 30, 2006

The Economic Development Commission (EDC) met on the third Wednesday of each month (except August) throughout the year, with continued high attendance and participation. Our dedicated commission members include: *Neal Crowley, Bob Dow, Ray Figlewski, Julie Francis, Joe Gordon, Rhoda Loeb, Bill O'Brien, and Doss Venema.* Chamber of Commerce president *John Cushing* also attended regularly and participated in the Commission's discussions.

Neal Crowley graciously continued to serve as the EDC liaison to Planning and Zoning, keeping the Commission advised of the many, varied applications and action taken by the Planning & Zoning Commission. The Commission is very grateful to Neal for his diligent work in keeping the Commission informed.

The 2006 annual **"State of the Town Breakfast"**, an annual collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, featured ***Roger Joyce,* Vice President of Engineering at the Bilco Company and president of CBIA [CT Business and Industry Association].** Mr. Joyce, **shared his views on regional and statewide workforce needs**, particularly with respect to technical and engineering fields. In addition to this event, the EDC continued to work with the Chamber on a variety of issues through its Government Relations and Business Development Committees.

First Selectman Cheryl Morris also presented her views on town finances and the status of the budget process, recent developments affecting the community including transportation improvements, and other initiatives that are underway. Most notably she announced her intention to create a **task force to develop a "vision" or strategic plan** to complement the town's plan of conservation and development [that is required by state statute]. Of particular importance to **the EDC is that it will be charged with facilitating the task force's work and implementing its recommendations.**

A prelude to the task force announcement was the Commission's work over the past year focusing on various transportation issues. Through Special Projects Manager Terence Elton, the EDC helped to advance the decision to hire a consultant to assess the Town's current and projected traffic conditions and in assisting with the Town's work with DOT on the **completion of the new Shore Line East (SLE) Railroad.** Immediately following the opening of the new station and as a result of the facility's immediate success, the EDC acted through the Selectman's office and **requested that ConnDOT initiate plans to expand the SLE parking lot.** That effort is currently underway by DOT. The EDC will also continue working to **improve and expand SLE service in advocating a reverse commute schedule and weekend service.**

The Commission has also been in the forefront of the Town's ongoing efforts with DOT to **reconfigure Exit 53.** It was successful in working for passage by **General Assembly of a public act to convey state property along the connector to the Town** once the new access road to I-95 using Commercial Parkway is completed.

The new connector will both ease the traffic congestion that now exists at the old pretzel and allow that area to be redeveloped. Furthermore, in preparing to fund the construction of a new connector, the EDC worked closely with the offices of Senators Dodd and Lieberman and Congresswoman DeLauro for financial support of the project. That ongoing effort helped to win a commitment from the **Senate Appropriations Committee to set aside $3 million towards the Exit 53 project.** The Commission will continue to work closely with our congressional offices to realize a similar favorable vote by the full Senate and approval of the funding as part of the upcoming fiscal budget. The Commission will continue to work closely with all relevant offices to maximize that possibility.

Throughout FY 03-04, the Commission received and reviewed a total of **10 demolition application notices** for structures of 75 years or more. As it has in the past, the EDC notes a high rate of demolition of older structures. In the past, its concern on this matter resulted in the First Selectman asking the Town Building Official to review the demolition delay ordinance and suggested changes that might help towards better compliance. The RTM in fact passed a new ordinance that is better aligned with state statute with the hope that it will not be ignored or abused as the old ordinance was. The Commission is appreciative that the First Selectman's office acted on this issue.

Other action undertaken by the Commission throughout FY 2005-2006 includes:

- **Support for the *Town Center Merchants Committee's* work** as it establishes itself as a resource and leader for the businesses near the green. The committee's work includes working with the Police Commission's Traffic Committee to re-stripe Main Street between Home Place and Kirkham Streets, having pedestrian crosswalk signs installed along Main Street, coordinating advertising and promotional efforts to benefit both the businesses and the community, and participation in various Town activities such as the Holiday Parade.

- Having **Tery Elton appointed to serve as Branford's representative on the *Greater New Haven Convention and Visitors Bureau.*** Combined with his position on the board of the Regional Growth Partnership, the Town will be better positioned to promote itself beyond the greater New Haven region and outside Connecticut in attracting new businesses to our town.

- **Through the *Workforce Alliance*,** assisted local businesses in trying to meet their needs in recruiting a qualified workforce and in training existing personnel.

- **Placing articles** in the *New England Real Estate Journal* that highlight the Town's services and quality of life to promote Branford as a place to locate or expand a business. Projects Manager Tery Elton continued to author the articles and worked with the paper on their timing and placement.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Figlweski

Ray Figlweski, Acting Chairman