Branford, Connecticut

Economic Development Commission

Annual Report

JULY 1, 2006 – JUNE 30, 2007

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 (chairman), Julie Francis, Joe Gordon, Rhoda Loeb, Bill O'Brien, Robin Sandler and Doss Venema.* Chamber of Commerce president *John Cushing, and his successor Ed Lazarus,* also attended regularly and participated in the Commission's discussions.

Neal Crowley continued to keep the Commission informed and current as to activity with the Planning and Zoning Commission. The Commission appreciates Neal's continued efforts in keep everyone up to date.

The 2007 **"State of the Town Breakfast"**, an annual collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, featured ***James Boice, Deputy Commission for Policy and Planning at the CT Department of Transportation***. Mr. Boice **provided and overview of DOT's statewide plans as well as a focus on Branford and its shoreline neighbors.**

First Selectman Cheryl Morris reported on the status of the town budget process, emphasizing the expected mill increase to be one of the lowest in years and continued efforts to provide tax relief for the elderly. Attention was also given to non-budget issues, including **transportation projects**, particularly DOT work planned for Rte. 1 throughout town, the recently completed transportation study, implementation of a **sewer use fee**, and progress with the **"Vision Project"**. 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.

The Commission focused on several issues during the year, one of which was the Vision Project. The EDC was a leading proponent of the project from the beginning, advocating funding for the traffic study as a necessary first step for an updated town plan and critical for devising an economic development strategy. It followed through last year in playing a major role in helping to form the project's work group, define its mission, select consultants, reach out to the public for input and participation, and in ensuring that the project advances towards its goal of producing a long-range plan for Branford. EDC Chair Ray Figlewski and staff Terence Elton devoted much of their time and energy to this important project.

Other EDC activity throughout the year included raising the issue of the **impact of healthcare costs on small businesses** with Branford's legislators A meeting with congressional and state representatives was held to highlight the high level of concern in the business community and as a first step by the Commission in an effort to clarify and influence policy decisions aimed at reducing those related financial burden on small businesses. The Commission also placed more emphasis on traffic as a factor in development issues and the town's economic health, and expects that focus to strengthen in the future.

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The Commission also completed and launched a **new video stream on the town website.** Produced at no cost to the town and through the coordination of Special Projects Manager Terence Elton, the video went live in early 2007, expanding the town's exposure as a preferred site for new and expanding businesses. In a parallel effort, the EDC also became the **first municipal member of CURE**, [Connecticut United for Research Excellence] the state's biotech and life science industry association. This membership is expected further promote Branford as an ideal location in the biotech community for labs and research facilities.
The Commission also **initiated a business recognition program** to acknowledge Branford businesses that are "outstanding in their field and that contribute to making Branford a better place to work and live," the first effort of its kind for the Commission. Zane's Cycles, with founder and president Chris Zane, was the award's first recipient. A few months later, the EDC recognized CASMED, with Chairman Louis Scheps and CEO Andrew Kersey, and Operations Director Zachary Curello accepting the award.

The Commission **continued its work with various regional partners, particularly the Regional Workforce Alliance, the Regional Growth Partnership [RGP] and the Greater New Haven Convention and Visitor Bureau.** While we said good bye to RGP president Bob Santy and to Greater New Haven Convention and Visitor Bureau executive director Steve Paganelli, the EDC looks forward to working with their successors and further promoting Branford business. At the same time, the EDC welcomed Ed Lazarus to Branford as the new president of the Branford Chamber of Commerce.

In December of 2006 the **Commission voted Ray Figlewski as its new chairman**, succeeding Al Mignone who had relocated out of Branford. Ray has a long history in Branford as a business leader and community leader, and has most recently been serving as acting chairman for the Commission as well as its representative on the Vision project.

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

- Secured the services of **RGP** to assist with the work of the Vision Project
- Through the ***Workforce Alliance***, assisted local businesses in trying to meet their needs in recruiting a qualified workforce and in training existing personnel.
- Worked with the **Greater New Haven Convention and Visitor Bureau** to have Branford placed in a variety of tourism publications, ranging from Boston to Scotland.
- Writing and coordinating the publication of **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.
- Throughout FY 006-07, the Commission received and reviewed a total of **6 demolition application notices** for structures of 75 years or more.
- **Support for the *Town Center Merchants Committee's* work** as a resource and leader for the businesses around the green and in the town center. **Julie Francis** continued to spearhead the committee's work that involved plans to update and improve for the Town Green area, working with the Police Commission's Traffic Committee on vehicular and pedestrian safety issues, signage, coordinating promotional efforts to benefit both the businesses and the community, and participation in various Town activities, such as the Holiday Parade.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Figlewski

Ray Figlweski, Chairman