



TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT
Economic & Community Development Department
2750 Dixwell Avenue
Hamden, Connecticut 06518

Dale Kroop, Director

Town of Hamden
Economic Development Commission

Minutes: The Economic Development Commission held Regular Meeting at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 9, 2012, in the Third Floor Conference Room, Hamden Government Center, 2750 Dixwell Avenue

Commissioners in Attendance: Bob Zambrano, Anthony Sacchetti, Anthony DelGREGO, Steve Rolnick, Don Moses, Steven Diaz, David DeNicola, Sheri Borrelli

Commissioners Excused: Dolores Giannini, Nathan Schatz, Anthony Inzero

Others in Attendance: Mayor Scott Jackson
Dale Kroop, Economic Development Director
Ginny Kozlowski, REX Development
Barbara Malmberg, REX Development

1. Call to order

Mr. Sacchetti called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. Reading and Approval of minutes from the previous Meeting

Mr. DelGREGO made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 11, 2012 meeting of the Economic Development Commission. Mr. Zambrano seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor.

3. New Business:

Review and Approval of RiteQuote Insurance Agency Tax Incentive

Mr. Kroop said this location is 1912 State Street, near Dollar General on the corner of State Street and Ridge Road and a little street called Farm Street. The building is an old two family, set way back from the road and is in dilapidated condition. Manny Bharara is looking to develop the building into an insurance business with a call center. He is also very interested in getting involved in the community, and plans to invest \$77,000 in the project. The tax incentive proposal is a tax abatement on the improvements of 50% for three years, a \$3,000 grant toward the project, and a permit waiver not including plumbing, electric and HVAC) totaling 50%. Mr. Bharara lives in Southington and has been in business since 2007. He will do over the first floor first, and later expand to second floor. There were no questions from the commissioners.

Mr. Zambrano made a motion to approve the tax incentive for Rite Quote Insurance Agency, LLC. Mr. DeNicola seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor.

3. Speakers from REX Development

Ms. Kozlowski introduced herself and Barbara Malmberg and said REX Development was formerly known as Regional Growth Partnership (RGP) and has evolved into Regional Economic Xcelleration (REX) This meeting was advertised to the Hamden Chamber of Commerce and to the press. REX is looking for input on the 2013 comprehensive economic development strategy. They also want to update the action agenda and review the methods of measuring our success.

Commissioners were asked to sign an attendance sheet for the EDA. A copy of the 2008 executive summary was part of the packet distributed at the meeting, as well as a copy of REX Development's "Bright Ideas" brochure. Ms. Kozlowski presented a slide show and copies of the slides were also distributed and are attached. Topics included the purpose of REX, Participating Communities, a Synopsis of the 2008 CEDS, Key Achievements of REX, Success Stories, a Snapshot of Hamden & South Central Region in 2010, Population Changes, Effects of Regionalization, Workforce Data, Local Business Data, Employment Data, and Regional Cluster Performance. Other slides contained questions, which were discussed.

The RGP name changed in 2010 to REX. REX is a facilitator and collaborator, and the economic arm for COG, assisting 15 towns. Because we do not have a county base, it is difficult to collect data. Mr. Kroop mentioned that Hamden received funding for Gallagher Road in the Hamden Business Park through REX. Ms. Kozlowski said Hamden has a population of just under 61,000. Hamden's per capita income is higher than the region's average, has a higher household income and a younger population than the region with an median age of 37.4. In terms of growth, Hamden has grown 15% as compared to 6% for the region, 8% for the state and 10% for the Country. Hamden has a diversified economy with health care, government and retail being the largest employers.

Ms. Kozlowski asked what is Hamden's vision of economic development over the next 5 years. Mr. DelGrego wants to see more cooperation between businesses and the Town, Mr. Sacchetti wants to see more dialog among the Town and businesses.

Ms. Kozlowski said grant funds for brownfields are based on applications submitted. Hamden is the most active community in remediating brownfields. Grants are available from EDA, EPA and state funding, for example, funds used in the Newhall remediation.

Mr. DelGrego would like to see some kind of circuit breaker where businesses in trouble have someone to call for assistance.

Mayor Jackson asked compared to other communities, where are we falling down. Mr. DelGrego told the story of his problems with Planning trying to get his shed installed. Mayor Jackson said that probably doesn't compare with a million dollar business trying to establish itself in Hamden. Mr. Kroop said 16% of Hamden's tax base comes from commercial, and only 6% of the land in Hamden is zoned commercial. The Town is mostly built out. Mr. Kroop also said we have to be careful and look at our land and see how much of it is tax exempt. Tax exempt institutions are taking a bigger share of

property all of the time. We have to stop taking properties off the tax rolls. Steve Rolnick said what we get from PILOT doesn't compare to what we lose. He feels some of the zoning changes we have made recently have been more helpful to businesses. Bob Zambrano said he would like to see some resolution to some of the more aged dormant properties, some of which are brownfields.

Mr. Moses asked Mr. Kroop what callers are looking for. Mr. Kroop replied location – you can't create geography. The lack of utilities (sewers) to the north is a problem. There are no sewers north of Westwoods Road. Mr. Kroop mentioned when Carl Amento was Mayor, a developer was looking at property in the Sleeping Giant Golf course area, for a Target and a Lowe's. Businesses know that the Cheshire market is huge and they have a higher median income than some of the surrounding towns. Mr. Zambrano said Hamden should look for a long term plan to provide sewers north of Sleeping Giant. Mayor Jackson said we have contacted the Greater New Haven WPCA, which is the sewer authority. Ms. Kozlowski mentioned some regional businesses are moving to Wallingford, because they can't expand their locations in the Towns where they are currently located.

Mr. Diaz said he feels it is also about jobs – what are employers looking for regarding skill set development. Mr. Kroop said he asks every business he talks to, if they are going to hire anybody. There are job training offers out there. Responses have been that they might hire one or two new employees, not 25. We also have the immigrant population and some language issues.

Don Moses asked what would be the ideal percentage of commercial/residential. Mr. Kroop feels Hamden's numbers are good at 16% commercial due to the only 6% land zoned commercial. We constantly replace one business with another, but we need to develop more buildings. Mayor Jackson mentioned Mr. Moses' previous experience on the Planning & Zoning Commission. Mr. Moses said one option is to redefine the usage of various parcels of land.

Mayor Jackson said we have to support development in other communities if we want to remain a bedroom community. Mr. Kroop said if we aren't creating manufacturing jobs, we should be supporting the connected jobs, like trucking, etc.

Ms. Kozlowski mentioned that Orange is building a 400,000 square foot building on the former Stu Leonard's property and once that is built, there is no more commercial land available for development in Orange. They have a 5% vacancy rate. We have to create jobs for our young people that are graduating from our six local colleges, to prevent the young people from moving out.

Mr. Kroop talked about a start up business we worked with in 1999, who rented a building, made wheelchairs, finally sold the patent to Johnson and Johnson, and made a lot of money. He is now back with a new idea. Ms. Kozlowski mentioned that Otis Spunkmeyer on Universal Drive closed, losing 200 jobs. 11% of those losing their jobs were North Haven residents. The remainder were from other Towns in our region.

Mr. Kroop said the problem is not just Zoning. A manufacturing company on Welton Street, one of our best success stories, grew from three to 110 employees. They are having problems with deliveries and have called Mr. Kroop no less than six times because the the business on the corner keeps parking their tow trucks in a no parking zone, blocking the access. This is a traffic/police matter according to Mr. Rolnick. Town Departments have to have a better appreciation of EDC.

Ms. Kozlowski said there has been a significant increase in unemployment in the region. Also large foreclosures in towns where you might not expect it.

Mr. Kroop said in the 2004 Plan of Development it was reported that there were 1,400 businesses in Hamden. He always thought that was too low. He called the Secretary of State's office, and they had a list of 4,400 businesses. People open businesses that no one even knows about. We have to craft strategies to help those small businesses. The Chamber of Commerce has formed an entrepreneur committee to help them.

In response to Ms. Kozlowski's question regarding indicators of economic growth or decline, commissioners DelGrego and Sacchetti mentioned the grand list is a good measure. Mr. Kroop also mentioned the lack of foreclosures.

The median age in Hamden is 37, New Haven 29, North Haven 45. Mr. Rolnick mentioned that population growth is really a regional factor. He feels the cost of housing is a big impediment to growth. Transportation is also a consideration.

Ms. Kozlowski asked about Tweed. Mr. Sacchetti said he hasn't heard a lot about that recently, but they claim that if they could expand, it would thrive.

Ms. Kozlowski and Mr. Kroop said large companies know exactly what they are looking for in order to locate in a particular area. If a town can't provide all of those requirements, the company will move on.

How can we work together to make the REX region more competitive? Mr. Rolnick mentioned shared services. Everything now stops at the town line. Look at the WPCA, which is a tremendous example of a shared service. Trash, snow plowing, etc. could be subject to sharing. Mr. Diaz also suggested more marketing as to what funds might be available for training and hiring more people.

Mr. Kroop asked if there is any organized effort to connect with the educational organizations to keep young people here. If we are that young a town because of Quinnipiac and SCSU, what opportunities are there. REX has decided to work with Southern and UNH on their intern program. They hope to develop a centralized location to post internships, and offer standardized paperwork, etc.

Mr. DelGrego mentioned the executive boot camp for veterans with disabilities to help the veteran start a business.

Mr. Sacchetti asked if there is a common thread among the municipalities she has met with. Ms. Kozlowski said that towns with volunteer positions are not as successful as those with paid staff. Mayor Jackson sits on the REX Board and is chair of the Strategic Planning Committee.

Mr. Kroop feels we over think the transportation item, we need to spend more on infrastructure, and we need more east west bus transportation.

Ms. Borrelli mentioned UI moving into Orange with a little over 1,000 employees and they put in a transportation program to bring people to their site from the New Haven train station. West Haven will have a train station soon. UI has two Hamden residents who ride their bike into Orange every day.

Mr. Sacchetti feels Ms. Kozlowski's and Ms. Malburg's participation was very helpful to us and he hopes our partnership continues to involve. Ms. Kozlowski appreciates the commission's enthusiasm.

A question was asked of Mr. Kroop as to how he knows about new businesses opening. Mr. Kroop replied that he and the Chamber constantly drive around town, and they call each other about the new businesses they see. There was discussion on the new Batteries Plus in the Tommy K plaza.

4. Report of the Director

Mr. Kroop announced the following:

- ▲ Planet Fitness will move to the Hamden Plaza in December or January
- ▲ Edge Fitness will be opening in the Hamden Mart on November 1st
- ▲ Fred Astaire Dance Studio will open in the old Curves space at Pathmark Plaza

Mr. Kroop also reported that the Zoning meeting is still on for the 24th. Mr. Pearce of the Business Assistance Center is putting together a four part business information program which will be podcast. He reminded Commissioners that the Chamber Choice Dinner is coming up. Ms. Borrelli said although it is early, the golf tournament will be new and improved.

Mr. Kroop said his Quinnipiac Fellow is now being paid and is helping out in the office. He also mentioned some staffing changes coming up. Ms. Villano is going to work in Meriden. There are possibly other changes coming up.

Mr. DeNicola asked what is the issue of the sewers being extended to the north. Mr. Kroop said rate payers will have to pay, and the fear of massive commercial development. Mr. DeNicola also asked if there is any news on the Centerville Lumber site. Mr. Kroop said nothing yet.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Sacchetti asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. DelGrego so moved. Mr. Diaz seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Submitted by: _____
Gerry Tobin, Acting Clerk