

# Ridgefield, Connecticut Economic Development Action Plan

Adopted: January 11, 2010



# Ridgefield, Connecticut

## Economic Development Action Plan

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## **Ridgefield, Connecticut**

# **Economic Development Action Plan**

### **Introduction**

The Town of Ridgefield has established an Economic Development Commission (the EDC), whose purpose, as stated in the Town's Code of Ordinances, is to implement orderly and planned economic development, in keeping with the character of the town. In fulfilling this purpose, the EDC's mission includes:

- Developing a proactive program to facilitate the location and expansion of quality businesses and community assets in keeping with the character of the town.
- Attracting jobs with above average wages for Ridgefield residents.
- Promoting Ridgefield as a business destination.
- Ensuring that community development activities support business growth and prosperity, promote a strong economy, and develop and follow an economic development plan.

This document provides the Economic Development Action Plan referenced above. In addition, it was prepared as a companion to, and implementation tool for accomplishing the Town of Ridgefield's goals related to economic and business development as reflected in preparation of the Town's 2009 update to its Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). In assisting in the POCD process, the EDC provided detailed testimony to the Town's Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC); a copy of that testimony is provided in Appendix A.

In the EDC's testimony to PZC, and in the preparatory work leading to it, eight primary and interrelated goals were identified that should shape the Town's economic development efforts over the next three to five years (a typical period for an economic development strategy). These goals are:

- Maintaining an adequate business portion of the Town's Grand List
- Providing adequate locations for future business development (particularly along appropriate portions of the Route 7 and Route 35 corridors which are already primary business locations)
- Improvement of Ridgefield's gateways
- Maintenance of the economic vitality of the Town's villages, in particular, Downtown Ridgefield and Branchville

- Business retention, expansion and replacement
- Creation of an Arts Cluster and District
- External and internal marketing
- Enhancement of Ridgefield's economic development team.

The EDC has paid particular attention to the first item on the list above. Prior POCDs have set a goal of having a business portion of the Town's Grand List as high as 25% (compared to a current business portion of just over 13%). The relatively limited areas available for new business growth, coupled with the strong commitment by most residents to not cause a noticeable change in the community's character, makes it highly unlikely that the business portion of the Grand List can be substantially increased to nearly double its current percentage of the Town's Grand List. Accordingly, the EDC has set a goal of maintaining the business portion of the Grand List in the 13 – 18% range, which is where the Town has been historically, or slightly higher.

By way of comparison, Table 1 shows the business portion of the Grand List for Ridgefield and several neighboring communities. Although not the highest of these communities, Ridgefield has a reasonable level of business tax payments that must be maintained so that more of the Town's tax burden is not shifted over time to residential tax payers.

Table 1  
Business Portion of 2008 Municipal Grand Lists

<b>Town</b>	<b>Total 2008 Grand List (Before Exemptions and Adjustments)</b>	<b>Business Portion of 2008 Grand List</b>
Newtown	\$3,945,748,551	10.56%
Redding	\$2,218,011,617	9.44%
<b>Ridgefield</b>	<b>\$5,531,189,707</b>	<b>13.04%</b>
Wilton	\$5,040,479,802	17.36%

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Ridgefield as a Location for Business**

Prior to the commencement of preparing this Action Plan, the EDC had conducted a series of roundtables to provide a background understanding of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Ridgefield as a location for business. During the process of conducting research interviews for this Action Plan, Garnet Consulting Services, Inc., the consulting firm that assisted the EDC with this project, accumulated additional information related to Ridgefield's business strengths and weaknesses.

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A summary list is presented in Appendix B. This list is structured to provide information in terms of the location criteria and evaluation categories most typically considered by businesses, plus other categories frequently suggested during the roundtables and interviews. This consideration of strengths and weaknesses is important in the context of an economic development strategy because it should identify:

- Marketable strengths on which the community can capitalize
- Deficiencies that can be corrected cost-effectively to improve competitiveness
- Obstacles that must be recognized and worked around

The most commonly cited strengths of Ridgefield as a location for business include:

- The attractiveness and character of the community that both contributes to its desirable quality of life and attracts visitors; these must be protected and enhanced
- The quality of the school system
- Proximity to Connecticut's "Gold Coast" and New York City

Conversely, the major deficiencies and obstacles impacting Ridgefield as a location for business include:

- A location considered by some as somewhat isolated and "off the beaten path"
- A need for continued infrastructure improvements (roads and utilities)
- Limited areas suitable (in terms of zoning and infrastructure) for new business development
- A high cost of living and doing business
- A perceived difficult regulatory climate (a combination of both local and state requirements and procedures)
- Some unsightly entrance routes that may create a negative image for the first-time visitor
- A lack of a plan and team for promoting economic development

The recommended initiatives that follow are intended to begin the process of capitalizing on opportunities and addressing the issues.

## **Ongoing Efforts**

It should be noted that the EDC, Town government, or allied organizations such as the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce are already working on several important initiatives, and this

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plan does not duplicate areas that are already adequately covered at the time this plan was written. However, in some instances, additional related initiatives are recommended.

These ongoing efforts include the following:

- Reuse of the Schlumberger Property
- Increased occupancy of the Pond's Edge Property
- Creation of an Arts and Culture Cluster and District
- Continuing attention to the economic health of Downtown Ridgefield, including use of tools such as an electronic newsletter to promote businesses and events
- Stimulation of business growth in Branchville
- Assistance to a developer of a "Sustainable Design Center"
- Installation and support of a vigorous Economic Development Commission.
- Improvements to the Town's economic development website

In addition to these items on the EDC's agenda, there are several other initiatives the EDC has recommended, but where implementation is the responsibility of other agencies such as the PZC. Those items can be found in Appendix A. In particular, this includes the creation of a Ridgefield "brand", something the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce is already working on.

## **The Recommended Action Plan**

This Economic Development Action Plan provides a limited number of specific initiatives that were selected because they can yield important benefits for Ridgefield and its economic development efforts. There are many other possible initiatives that were considered or may be identified in the future. The limited number contained herein specifically recognizes limitations inherent in any smaller community with budget constraints, no staff dedicated to economic development efforts, dependence on the efforts of volunteers, and multiple organizations whose responsibilities focus on portions of an economic development program.

The existence of multiple organizations with similar missions is a strength that must be managed. Economic development, if performed well, is a "team sport" that focuses on maximizing cost-effective efforts and eliminating service duplications and gaps. Ridgefield's economic development team is comprised of many organizations and individuals, some of whom may not overtly realize they are part of that team. Of particular note are the Town's Board of Selectmen and Economic Development Commission (EDC), the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Ridgefield, Inc, and the Ridgefield Arts Council. In addition, every Town staff person and members of boards and commissions that come into contact with the business recruitment, start-up, retention and expansion process are part of this team.

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Many of the organizations have limited resources, while the individuals comprising them have diverse skills and interests. As in any situation where there are multiple entities with differing agendas, a conscious effort must be made to coordinate the system effectively. Success in implementing this Action Agenda is dependent on enlisting and focusing the efforts of these organizations and individuals in a coordinated fashion.

The concept of an effective Ridgefield economic development team should be a core component of the mission of the EDC and the Ridgefield community. Periodic convening of an interagency team meeting should occur.

**It is also important for Ridgefield's leaders and residents to understand that little progress will be made toward implementing the recommended initiatives and the goals to which they relate, unless the community is willing to fund the effort. Economic development is one of the few areas of community expenditure that is a true investment – with the expectation that there will be a reasonable return on that investment.**

Development of this plan reflects significant preparatory work undertaken by the EDC through a series of roundtables with businesspeople and community leaders; multiple meetings of the EDC to discuss community strengths, weaknesses, issues and opportunities; detailed interviews with 30 individuals selected to represent a cross-section of responsibilities, experiences and viewpoints; review of many relevant documents and websites; and interaction with Planimetrics, the firm assisting the PZC with preparation of the POCD update.

The six initiatives presented in this plan are the result of this process. They are prioritized using a process that considered the following criteria:

- Importance to the economic health of the Town of Ridgefield
- The Ridgefield Economic Development Commission's evaluation of the initiative
- Estimation of what the initiative could accomplish over and above current conditions
- Likelihood of enlisting other agencies and the probability of success
- The probability of public support

The following six major initiatives will be the focus of the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission's efforts for the near-term future.

## **Town of Ridgefield Economic Development Action Plan**

### **Initiative #1: Investment Attraction and Retention**

#### **Related Goals**

- Maintaining an adequate business portion of the Town's Grand List
- Maintenance of the economic vitality of the Town's villages, in particular, Downtown Ridgefield and Branchville
- Business retention, expansion and replacement
- External and internal marketing

#### **Background Information**

The Ridgefield Economic Development Commission (EDC) exists, in large part, for the purpose of attracting and retaining capital investment by high quality businesses in the Town. There are numerous ways this can be done. The following four elements will comprise a major, but not the sole aspects of the EDC's efforts to attract business investment to Ridgefield and retain it there.

#### **Business Attraction/Expansion Incentive Policy**

Communities today are competing in a global marketplace and those seeking to expand and diversify their business tax base do so by retaining existing businesses that want to expand and by attracting new business and investment into the community. Increasingly, an incentive policy is a necessary tool in the toolbox.

In *Area Development Magazine's* 2008 survey of site location consultants and corporate executives, the consultants ranked the availability of state and local incentives as the #1 factor of 25 evaluated as "very important" or "important"; corporate executives ranked this item #7. Similarly, the corporate executives and consultants ranked the availability of tax incentives #4 and #5 respectively of the 25 site selection factors considered.

Smart use of such incentives – that is, making a strategic investment – requires a careful cost-benefit analysis of projects considered for support. "Investment" by the Town through the use of incentives should focus on projects determined to meet the Town's return on investment criteria and that help advance the Town's vision of the future it intends to build.

Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) 12-65b, 12-65h (as amended) and 12-81t allow municipalities to enter into an agreement with owners or lessees of certain real property within the community to fix or defer tax assessments on real and personal property for a certain period of time. However, it should be noted that there are many other forms of incentives besides the tax abatements covered in these statutes.

While Ridgefield has used this tool in the past, the Town does not have a formal incentive policy. It is recommended that Ridgefield develop a Business Incentive Policy and have the "economic development tool" in place before negotiating with projects the Town is interested in recruiting or retaining. This will allow for agreement within the community about the policy itself rather than putting a proposed project at center stage. The Town's incentive policy should be applicable to both new businesses being recruited to town and the expansion of businesses

already there. Negotiation of an incentive agreement should include the review by or for the Economic Development Commission of project costs and benefits in accordance with an objectively created set of project review criteria.

### **Rapid Response Team**

Like every community, Ridgefield has its share of vacant business buildings. Recently, significant attention has been paid by residents to the vacated Schlumberger property and its reuse possibilities, as well as vacant space in the Pond's Edge property. These vacancies are likely short-term in nature; more importantly, the fact is that additional business buildings or spaces of significant size will most certainly become available in the future.

The most important question is what Ridgefield does about it when these vacancies occur. In every case, the town must aggressively and creatively seek to reoccupy the space with another business user as rapidly as possible. While the commercial real estate brokerage community will be at the forefront of working to reoccupy these properties, the town should both assist in the process and assure that these properties are not converted to residential use unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the net tax benefit (that is, tax revenues less public service costs including education) does not decline significantly from the prior use. Each vacant property will have its own set of challenges and opportunities. Efforts should focus on high value target sectors such as technology-oriented businesses, light office uses such as financial services, research and development, and eco-friendly firms.

Coordinated by the EDC, the town should establish a Rapid Response Team that is ready to respond when a business indicates or is known to be at risk of closure, relocation out of Ridgefield, or significant down-sizing; or respond to a significant vacancy by taking action to assist with reoccupancy; or respond to other important business needs and opportunities as they arise. The team would include the First Selectman, Town Planner, representatives of the EDC and PZC, and others as appropriate.

### **Existing Business Contact and Assistance Program**

An essential part of any local economic development program is taking care of the businesses already in the community. An often quoted statistic is that about 75% of new business activity in a community comes from the businesses already there or within a short distance. This relationship was verified a number of years ago in research conducted for the American Economic Development Council by Arthur D. Little, Inc. with funding provided by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Keeping informed about how local businesses perceive the local business climate is an essential aspect of economic development marketing. Periodic surveys by Development Counsellors International consistently find that "Dialog with industry peers" is one of the top 2 means by which business prospects obtain information on local business climate when evaluating potential locations. Similarly, expressions of dissatisfaction about a community's business climate are a leading indicator of a company that may leave.

The Ridgefield Economic Development Commission is available to assist local businesses that request such assistance; the EDC should move beyond a reactive posture and become more proactive in dealing with the Town's businesses.

A major component of an effective Existing Business Assistance program is communications and relationship building. Increasingly, electronic technology is being used to facilitate the process. In order to do so efficiently and effectively, an up-to-date list of e-mail addresses (an electronic mailing list) of all local businesses is needed so that mailings do not require the manual insertion of multiple e-mail addresses. Such lists can be segmented to allow different groupings for different purposes.

One possible approach is for the EDC to develop and maintain a "Listserv" of all the Town's businesses to facilitate this communications. [Note that the term LISTSERV, which is commonly used as a generic term, is actually a trademarked term by L-Soft international, Inc., one of the providers of e-mail list management software.] This list should be segmented (e.g., retail merchants, manufacturers, life sciences cluster, real estate brokers and developers, prospects, etc.) to facilitate customized mailings.

A useful tool for doing this is the ExecutivePulse (E-Pulse) software, which is now in use across the country. Northeast Utilities has purchased the program and is making it available to communities in Connecticut at no cost. The E-Pulse software streamlines survey development, data collection and analysis and allows the users to look at customer data in different ways to make strategic decisions about how to best apply economic, community and workforce development resources. The training sessions for using the system are on-demand and will be provided by Northeast Utilities. The number of people and proposed dates are needed to set up a session which is conducted like a webinar and lasts about an hour for a small group.

All local companies should receive regular contact from the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission using E-Pulse or a similar system. Indications of potential problems or assistance needs should be dealt with as expeditiously as possible by the EDC.

### **Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau**

Local businesspeople talking to prospective businesspeople is one of the most effective ways to promote both business attraction and retention. Similarly, hearing about the attributes (both positive and negative) of the community from other residents not associated with the government is generally the most effective way of educating community members about economic development and the role they can play in the process. Ridgefield should institutionalize this process through a Business Ambassadors and Speakers Bureau program.

Coordinated by the EDC, the Ambassadors program should develop a cadre of local business people who are available to represent the Town when meeting with business prospects (both locally and out of town) and who have been trained to convey the Town's business recruitment and retention message.

As a companion effort, the EDC should create and train a small group of effective speakers who are willing to make presentations to community service groups, on public access television, and in other appropriate venues to inform the community and others about the "myths and realities" of economic development in Ridgefield and the role the EDC and Town government play in the process.

### **Initiative #1 Major Action Steps and Schedule**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
<b>Business Attraction/Expansion Incentive Policy</b>	
1. EDC researches Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) 12-65b, 12-65h and 12-81t.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010
2. EDC identifies other communities that have developed Business Incentive Policies and discusses their experiences negotiating with developers using this economic development tool.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010
3. Board of Selectmen forms a committee made up of a member of the Board of Selectman, Board of Finance and Economic Development Commission (and others as appropriate) to oversee preparation of a draft incentive policy.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010
4. EDC identifies specific types of business considered to be of greatest benefit to the Town.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
5. For these priority types of projects, primary site selection criteria and most common incentives should be identified. [This may require paying a site location consultant to meet with the EDC to discuss this issue.]	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
6. EDC conducts a Google or similar search for the term "local incentives" and researches the types of programs being used by other communities and the procedures they follow in negotiating incentive investments.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
7. EDC prepares or has prepared a Draft Business Incentive Policy.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
8. EDC presents the draft incentive policy to the Town Attorney for preparation of an incentive ordinance.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
9. Board of Selectmen approves an incentive policy ordinance.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
10. EDC works through the Northeastern Economic Developers Association (NEDA) and the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) to research project evaluation procedures and forms being used by other communities.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011
11. EDC develops a Project Review Form to be used by the EDC in evaluating potential projects and making recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011
12. Incentive Policy is used as needed.	As needed
<b>Rapid Response Team</b>	
1. The First Selectman establishes a Rapid Response Team and designates the Economic Development Commission to be the team coordinator.	2 <sup>nd</sup> 1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2010
2. The Rapid Response Team chooses a team leader.	2 <sup>nd</sup> 1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2010
3. The Rapid Response Team researches similar programs.	1 <sup>st</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
4. The Rapid Response Team identifies typical scenarios with which it	3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010

<p>might be confronted (e.g., major business closure, business property destroyed by fire, sudden need for additional or different space) and prepares contingency plans for dealing with these challenges.</p> <p>5. Availability of the Rapid Response Team is noted on the Town's economic development website; discussed in the Speakers Bureau presentation (see Initiative #10); and promoted in other ways.</p> <p>6. Rapid Response Team responds to real estate and business as they arise.</p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</p> <p>As needed</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Existing Business Contact and Assistance Program</b></p> <p>1. EDC contacts Northeast Utilities to obtain additional information about the E-Pulse system and to arrange and conduct a training session.</p> <p>2. The EDC, in association with the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and other appropriate allies, identifies data fields desired in a Ridgefield Business Database.</p> <p>3. EDC works with the Ridgefield Assessor's office, Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and other agencies as appropriate to create a database of Ridgefield businesses.</p> <p>4. Using the E-Pulse software, the EDC creates an electronic mailing list and begins to populate the database.</p> <p>5. EDC publicizes the availability of the electronic mailing list and uses multiple forms of communications to solicit e-mail contact information from companies not currently on the list. Company information is added as it becomes available.</p> <p>6. EDC develops a program of work for regular communications with companies on the list.</p> <p>7. EDC uses the list as needed for regular and special communications (for instance, notification of Bills at the Legislature that companies may be interested in).</p> <p>8. EDC maintains the list continually.</p> <p>9. As individual or shared business problems are identified, the EDC takes appropriate action.</p> <p>10. EDC conducts quarterly roundtable conversations with members of the business community to assess the climate and to daylight any hidden business needs or issues.</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010 and as needed</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing As needed</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau</b></p> <p>1. The EDC prepares a concept paper on the responsibilities and use of a Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau.</p> <p>2. The EDC, with input from other sources, prepares a short statement about why Ridgefield should be considered as a location for business.</p> <p>3. Using the communications system established in Initiative #9, the EDC solicits and enlists participants in the Business Ambassadors program and Speakers Bureau.</p> <p>4. The EDC creates a script for a standardized Speakers Bureau presentation discussing the importance of economic development to</p>	<p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010</p> <p>4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010</p>

Ridgefield and the role of the EDC in the process.			
5.	Upon approval of the script, the EDC creates a PowerPoint (or other appropriate from of) presentation to accompany the script.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011	
6.	The EDC conducts a training program to familiarize Business Ambassadors and Speakers Bureau participants with the contents of the presentation and discuss likely questions and accurate answers.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011	
7.	The EDC contact service clubs, public access television, radio stations and other appropriate opportunities to arrange speaking engagements.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011	
8.	Business Ambassadors meet with prospect companies and Speakers Bureau participants deliver presentations on an as needed basis.	As needed	
<b>Responsibility</b>			
<b>Primary:</b>		<b>Support:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ First Selectman/Board of Selectmen</li> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>▪ Board of Finance</li> <li>▪ Town staff, boards, commissions and councils</li> <li>▪ Volunteers for the Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau</li> <li>▪ Commercial real estate brokers</li> <li>▪ Ridgefield Assessor</li> <li>▪ Northeast Utilities</li> </ul>	
<b>Resources Needed</b>			
<b>Business Attraction/Expansion Incentive Policy</b>			
	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
<b>Funding:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Input from site selection consultant if needed</li> </ul>	\$1,000	EDC Budget Town General Fund
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consultant Review/ Assistance if needed</li> </ul>	\$750	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quarterly roundtable meetings with business community</li> </ul>	\$200 for refreshments	
<b>Other:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>		
<b>Rapid Response Team</b>			
	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
<b>Funding:</b>			
<b>Other:</b>	Staff and volunteer time to create and operate the program		
<b>Existing Business Contact and Assistance Program</b>			
	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
<b>Funding:</b>			
<b>Other:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ E-Pulse system from Northeast Utilities</li> <li>▪ Volunteer time to manage the Electronic Mailing List</li> <li>▪ EDC member time to respond to business needs</li> </ul>		

<b>Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau</b>			
	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
<b>Funding:</b>	▪ Assistance in writing the basic positioning statement if needed	Up to \$1,000	EDC Budget Town General Funds
	▪ Preparation of Speakers Bureau Script	Up to \$5,000	
	▪ Preparation of Speakers Bureau visual presentation	Up to \$1,500	
	▪ Group training of Speakers Bureau participants	Up to \$1,500	
<b>Other:</b>			
<b>Performance Measures</b>			
<b>Business Attraction/Expansion Incentive Policy</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Draft Business Incentive Policy completed 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Business Incentive Policy adopted by Board of Selectmen 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Project Review policy and forms developed 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011</li> </ul>			
<b>Rapid Response Team</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rapid Response Team established 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Research on other Rapid Response Teams completed 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Rapid Response Team contingency planning completed 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Availability of Rapid Response Team publicized 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Rapid Response Team successfully responds to challenges as they arise.</li> </ul>			
<b>Existing Business Contact and Assistance Program</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ E-Pulse system in place for use and EDC members and others as appropriate trained to use it during 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Initial business database created 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2010 and maintained thereafter</li> <li>▪ System used to maintain regular (at least quarterly) contacts with all Ridgefield businesses</li> <li>▪ Quarterly business roundtable discussions begin 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2010 and maintained thereafter</li> <li>▪ Identified business needs responded to expeditiously and effectively</li> </ul>			
<b>Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Concept paper on the responsibilities and use of a Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau prepared 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Short statement about why Ridgefield should be considered as a location for business prepared and in use 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Business Ambassadors program and Speakers Bureau participants enlisted 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Speakers Bureau script and visual presentation created 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Speakers Bureau participants trained 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Solicitation of speaking opportunities begun 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ First speaking engagement completed by 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Additional speaking engagements arranged on an ongoing basis</li> </ul>			

### Timeframe

This Initiative is:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Short-term (1-2 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate-term (3-5 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term (5+ years)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuing
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### Additional Information

Many Connecticut communities have adopted incentive policies under the applicable state statutes. These policies should be obtained and reviewed. As examples, see:

[http://www.ci.east-hartford.ct.us/Public\\_Documents/EastHartfordCT\\_Building/incentive](http://www.ci.east-hartford.ct.us/Public_Documents/EastHartfordCT_Building/incentive)

[http://www.torringtonct.org/Public\\_Documents/TorringtonCT\\_EcDev/abatment.pdf](http://www.torringtonct.org/Public_Documents/TorringtonCT_EcDev/abatment.pdf)

As examples of other incentive policies from around the country, see:

<http://www.ci.galesburg.il.us/development/incentivepolicy.htm>

<http://www.gsc.org/pdf/IncentivePolicy.pdf>

<http://www.kaufmantx.org/business/incentive.html>

[http://www.ecodevsanmarcos.org/pdf/SM\\_Incentive\\_Policy\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ecodevsanmarcos.org/pdf/SM_Incentive_Policy_2008.pdf)

#### Rapid Response Team

Most Rapid Response Teams found by internet search are related to medical, environmental, public safety or workforce related challenges. There may be lessons to be learned from researching these.

The State of Vermont has created an Economic Response Team, or ERT, which exists to identify and assist Vermont companies to mitigate the impacts of the economic downturn; see:

<http://www.economicdevelopment.vermont.gov/Home/EconomicResponseTeam/tabid/379/Default.aspx>

Other states have similar efforts worth researching.

#### Existing Business Contact and Assistance Program

For general information on electronic mailing lists, see:

<http://www.imagescape.com/helpweb/mail/lists.html>

<http://www1.umn.edu/umcf/listserv.html>

For information on the E-Pulse System, see <http://www.executivepulse.com/>

#### Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau

For an example of a community with an economic development related Speakers Bureau, see

<http://www.greensboro-nc.gov/residents/prosperous.htm>

For an example of the contents of a Community Network Marketing Brochure used by Morris County, New Jersey, see <http://www.morriscountyedc.org/document.asp?id=61>. This presentation is actually contained in a fold up brochure that is slightly larger than a business card but measures 4 ½ by 24 ½ inches when fully extended.

## **Town of Ridgefield Economic Development Action Plan**

### **Initiative#2: Route 7 Developability Study**

#### **Related Goals**

- Maintaining an adequate business portion of the Town's Grand List
- Providing adequate locations for future business development
- Maintenance of the economic vitality of the Town's villages, in particular, Branchville
- Improvement of some of Ridgefield's gateways
- Business retention, expansion and replacement
- Providing convenient services and amenities currently lacking to Ridgefield residents living near the Rt. 7 Corridor

#### **Background Information**

Maintaining Ridgefield's historical level of business development will require locations for new development. The most likely and most frequently mentioned portion of Ridgefield for new business development is along the Route 7 corridor between the Danbury border and its intersection with Route 35 and continuing to Branchville. This corridor already contains a scattered business presence and limited residential development. Some of the existing business properties would lend themselves to improvements, which would support several of the goals listed above. Additionally, commercial property along Route 7 north of Route 35 presently lacks a cohesive look and plan for future development.

It is worth noting that the neighboring town with a business percentage of its Grand List (17.36%) closer to Ridgefield's target of 18%, is Wilton. This business success could be attributed in part to Wilton's more accomplished Route 7 development.

Even with suitable zoning, development in this corridor will be limited in scope by the topography of some of the adjacent land, which is quite steep; the presence of the nearby Metro-North rail line running parallel to Route 7 (the US Department of Transportation generally requires the closing of one or more existing on-grade crossings over a rail line in order to receive permission for a new one); the Norwalk River with associated flood plains and wetlands, which may require a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers for development that impacts those wetlands; and other site specific features.

A list of pre-evaluated and sometimes pre-permitted sites is one of the most necessary characteristics a community can have in order to be competitive in the economic development arena. A developability study should be prepared by an interagency town group for the Route 7 corridor to identify most likely sites for development; areas unsuitable for development; types of uses that would best match with land characteristics; calculate maximum development potential within existing physical features and suitable site preparation work; and evaluate the suitability of current zoning for accommodating development potential. Such a study can be done in-house, taking advantage of existing documentation and other work such as the evaluation of Route 7 currently being prepared for the South Western Regional Planning Agency. This effort will be especially important for stimulating additional development in Branchville, where opportunities are currently limited. This study should be sensitive to avoid or minimize any potential adverse impact on downtown Ridgefield businesses.

<b>Initiative #2 Major Action Steps and Schedule</b>			
<b>Action Steps</b>		<b>Schedule</b>	
1. Board of Selectmen establishes a Town Task Force (including but not limited to the EDC and Planning & Zoning Commission and/or staff) to undertake this project.		2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010	
2. Task Force identifies parcels that are of adequate size or can be combined to provide an adequate site for development.		2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010	
3. Task Force evaluates physical conditions of potential sites on a GIS system or by other available means.		3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> Qtrs 2010	
4. Task Force assesses how the site can best be used, maximum potential coverage and utilities needed and determine development feasibility.		1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011	
5. EDC contacts the property owner(s) of sites identified as most developable to ask about willingness to develop and/or combine parcels with another owner.		2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011	
6. Task Force presents findings to Planning & Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen and others as appropriate.		2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011	
7. List sites for development on CERC's SiteFinder Inventory and elsewhere as appropriate.		3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2011	
<b>Responsibility</b>			
<b>Primary:</b>		<b>Support:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Board of Selectmen</li> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission</li> <li>▪ Town Planner and PZC</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Route 7 Property Owners</li> <li>▪ State of Connecticut including DOT</li> <li>▪ Metro-North Railroad</li> <li>▪ Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	
<b>Resources Needed</b>			
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ None</li> </ul>		
<b>Other:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Town staff time</li> <li>▪ EDC and PZC member time</li> </ul>		
<b>Performance Measures</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Route 7 Developability Study Task Force established 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Task Force work completed 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Task Force report made to appropriate Boards and Commissions 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Developable sites identified and listed on CERC SiteFinder 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2011</li> </ul>			
<b>Timeframe</b>			
This Initiative is:			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Short-term (1-2 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate-term (3-5 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term (5+ years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuing

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### **Additional Information**

For an example of a comparative site study prepared by Garnet that includes the important elements of a Developability study, see:

[http://www.ocalaedc.org/pdf/%7B81E16FDC-F7C1-4EF2-950C-EEE96F2425C5%7D\\_Ocala%20Business%20Park%20Final%20Report%20Back%20up.pdf](http://www.ocalaedc.org/pdf/%7B81E16FDC-F7C1-4EF2-950C-EEE96F2425C5%7D_Ocala%20Business%20Park%20Final%20Report%20Back%20up.pdf)

<b>Town of Ridgefield Economic Development Action Plan</b>	
<b>Initiative #3: Retail Leakage Study</b>	
<b>Related Goals</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintenance of the economic vitality of the Town's villages</li> <li>▪ Business retention, expansion and replacement</li> </ul>	
<b>Background Information</b>	
<p>Considerable concern has been expressed about the long-term health of Downtown Ridgefield, with a fear that its noteworthy retail cluster is being replaced with service businesses that will not draw as many visitors. Branchville, on the other hand, is seen by many as an underutilized asset with potential for expanded economic growth but no clear direction.</p> <p>Because of Ridgefield's location and significant out-commuting each work day, it is likely that the community suffers from a major retail leakage problem because Ridgefield residents shop in other communities where they work, or through which they commute. This deprives Ridgefield merchants of sales and probably contributes to a lack of desired goods and services in the Town. The Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce currently runs a "Buy Local" program to encourage residents to support local merchants.</p> <p>The severity of this problem is currently a matter of conjecture. A retail leakage study is needed to quantify the problem. Once residents understand the amount of their aggregate disposable income that is actually supporting merchants in other communities, they often make more of an effort to support their local businesses. In addition, this type of study frequently identifies unmet market segments that can be used to attract new businesses.</p>	
<b>Initiative #3 Major Action Steps and Schedule</b>	
Action Steps	Schedule
1. EDC prepares a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify firms with experience in preparing retail leakage studies.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
2. EDC makes RFQ available, evaluates responses, and prepares short-list of qualified firms or selects preferred consultant.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
3. EDC distributes Request for Proposals (RFP) to short-listed firms or negotiates with preferred consultant.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
4. EDC executes contract with selected consultant.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
5. Consultant prepares retail leakage study.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
6. EDC provides retail leakage study to Board of Selectmen, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Ridgefield, Inc. and others as appropriate.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011
7. Retail leakage study is made available on Town website and relevant marketing is begun.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011
<b>Responsibility</b>	
<b>Primary:</b>	<b>Support:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission</li> <li>▪ Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Downtown Ridgefield Inc.</li> <li>▪ Other interested organizations and merchants</li> </ul>

<b>Resources Needed</b>			
	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
<b>Funding:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consultant contract</li> </ul>	\$12,000 - \$15,000	EDC Budget Ridgefield Chamber Downtown Ridgefield Inc.
<b>Other:</b>	EDC time to manage project		
<b>Performance Measures</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Request for Qualifications ready for issue 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Retail leakage study consultant selected and under contract 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Retail leakage study completed 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Results of retail leakage study used to promote Buy Local program and recruit new businesses 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011 and thereafter.</li> </ul>			
<b>Timeframe</b>			
This Initiative is:			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Short-term (1-2 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate-term (3-5 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term (5+ years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuing
<b>Additional Information</b>			
<p>For examples of retail leakage studies, see:  Rutherford County, NC - <a href="http://www.rutherfordncedc.com/assets/files/PDFs/Rutherford%20County%20Leakage%20Study.pdf">http://www.rutherfordncedc.com/assets/files/PDFs/Rutherford%20County%20Leakage%20Study.pdf</a>  Tehachapi, CA - <a href="http://www.tehachapicityhall.com/DocumentView.aspx?DID=461">http://www.tehachapicityhall.com/DocumentView.aspx?DID=461</a>  Bixby, OK - <a href="http://www.choosebixby.com/opportunity_profile.html#retailLeakage">http://www.choosebixby.com/opportunity_profile.html#retailLeakage</a>  Wayne County, IN - <a href="http://www.edcwc.com/BuxtonRetailAnalysisStudy.htm">http://www.edcwc.com/BuxtonRetailAnalysisStudy.htm</a></p> <p>A nearby leader in downtown studies and strategies is DANTH, Inc. (<a href="http://www.danth.com">http://www.danth.com</a>).</p>			

## **Town of Ridgefield Economic Development Action Plan**

### **Initiative #4: Downtown Development Blueprint**

#### **Related Goals**

- Maintenance of the economic vitality of the Town's villages, in particular, Downtown Ridgefield

#### **Background Information**

Downtown Ridgefield (or the Village Center) is widely recognized as the heart of the community and a primary reason why Ridgefield draws visitors who support local businesses, both in the Downtown and elsewhere in the community. Much discussion has occurred recently about maintaining the economic health of this area, with differing opinions expressed. Examples of important issues include:

- Some support limiting the use of first floor space to retail or services that will generate "feet on the street" – that is, potential customers for downtown merchants. Others believe that such a limitation is artificial, penalizes property owners, and may result in space remaining vacant longer than necessary, and perhaps properties going into foreclosure.
- Some residents find the mix of small, boutique specialty shops to be an attractive shopping opportunity, while others have no interest in shopping downtown at all because the stores do not offer what they are interested in. Some perceive downtown shopping to be oriented toward women, with little of interest to men.
- There is a difference of opinion on the adequacy of downtown parking. Some believe there is an adequate amount of conveniently located parking spaces, but that vehicle circulation is a problem, while others support the development of a parking garage.
- Creation of a road parallel with Main Street joining Bailey Avenue with Governor Street is supported by some, but not all.
- The creation of a Special Services District (frequently called a Business Improvement District) for the Downtown has been suggested. There are many questions and misperceptions about what such a district is, how it is established, what powers it has, and how much it would cost. In particular, many perceive it to be "another layer of taxation" despite the fact that the Town would not create it, set any of the costs, or receive any of the revenues it might generate.
- Some support the conversion of upper floor space to residential uses, either affordable or market rate, to provide more customers and disposable income living in the Downtown.
- Some support the creation of a downtown property owner task force, while others believe the creation of another group will further complicate planning for the area.
- Some support the expansion of the Downtown area. This includes a variety of ideas such as:

- renaming as North Main Street the portion of Route 35 between Route 116/Main Street and Copps Hill Road
- expansion of the area defined in Zoning Regulations as the Central Business District (CBD)
- expansion of the downtown to the east
- amendment of the CBD regulations to allow a Residential-Office use for limited conversion of homes to professional offices. This last suggestion has also been made for a broader area surrounding the current CBD.

A Downtown coordinating group comprised of merchants/businesses, property owners, Town government, and others as appropriate should be established to collaboratively identify and address concerns and capitalize on opportunities for Downtown Ridgefield. This coordinating group, led by the EDC, should plan and conduct one or more forums to consider all of the topics listed above and others as appropriate. The intended outcome of this process is to create a widely shared vision of what Downtown Ridgefield should be in the future, and what needs to be done to make that vision a reality. This would include any recommendations for municipal improvements Ridgefield should invest in.

The management of a downtown is too complex to be left to merchants groups or other volunteer committees; staff assistance is almost always needed to assure that continual progress is made in a cost-effect manner. Consideration should be given to the appointment of a "Downtown Administrator" to be the contact person and coordinator for downtown planning and activities if such a position has the backing and authority to implement necessary actions. The Downtown Administrator's office should function as a central point of contact and clearinghouse for information and operations related to the downtown.

Part of the ongoing discussions about Downtown Ridgefield is about who is supposed to be providing what forms of service for the Downtown. The companion debate has to do with the costs of such services and who pays for them. One approach to dealing with this issue in many concentrated retail and service areas is the creation of a Business Improvement District, in Connecticut called a Special Services District.

A business improvement district (or alternative terms) is defined in Wikipedia as "A **business improvement district (BID)**, **business improvement area (BIA)**, **business revitalization zone (BRZ)**, or **community improvement district (CID)**, is a public-private partnership in which property and business owners of a defined area elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and marketing/promotion of their commercial district."

Research for this Action Plan demonstrated many misconceptions of what a Business Improvement District is, what powers it has, the relationships between government, merchants and property owners, costs, and other related issues.

The EDC should host a forum on "The Myths and Realities of Special Services Districts." The forum should include a presentation by an attorney familiar with the process for establishing a Special Services District and their powers and limitations under Connecticut Statutes. It should also include one or more presentations by individuals involved in such a district (from the operational, property owner and business occupant perspectives) on how they are working and

what they have accomplished. All Downtown property owners and businesses should be invited to attend. This forum should provide a solid foundation upon which to base a decision as to whether or not a Downtown Ridgefield Special Services District is a useful tool.

**Initiative #4 Major Action Steps and Schedule**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
1. First Selectman or Board of Selectmen designates the Town's Economic Development Commission (or some other group) to manage this initiative.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
2. The EDC, in collaboration with the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce, prepares and maintains a master list of all downtown businesses and property owners.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
3. The EDC, in collaboration with the Chamber and Downtown Ridgefield, Inc. prepares an initial list of topics requiring discussion.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
4. The EDC prepares and distributes a survey of potential issues for distribution to all Downtown businesses and property owners. The intent of this survey is to help prioritize the issues so that the coordinating group can work on the most important first.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
5. Survey responses are analyzed and priority issues are identified.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
6. The coordinating group plans and conducts an initial Community Forum to discuss priority issues and potential actions. As needed, additional Forums are planned and conducted.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
7. Based on all input above, the coordinating group publishes a "Future of Downtown Ridgefield" whitepaper discussing priority issues and recommended initiatives.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
8. The coordinating group presents initial recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
9. Board of Selectmen or other appropriate boards, commissions and departments begin to implement recommendations.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011
10. Coordinating group continues to meet to discuss and make recommendations on additional priority or new discussion items.	As needed

<b>Special Services District Forum</b>			
	1. The EDC commits to planning and running a forum on Special Services Districts (SSD).		3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
	2. EDC reviews state statutes on SSDs.		3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
	3. EDC contacts the Connecticut Main Street Center to research the legalities and powers of SSDs under Connecticut state statutes.		3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
	4. EDC contacts the City of New York's Department of Small Business Services to obtain information on BIDs and the process for establishing one.		3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
	5. Date, location and invitation list for forum established.		4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
	6. Speakers for the forum are identified and invited.		
	7. Forum on "The Myths and Realities of Special Services Districts" is held.		4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
	8. Based on the forum, EDC and allies decide if creation of a Downtown Ridgefield SSD is desirable. If found desirable, EDC recommends to the Board of Selectmen that an SSD be established.		1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
<b>Responsibility</b>			
	<b>Primary:</b>		<b>Support:</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Board of Selectmen</li> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>▪ Downtown Ridgefield Inc.</li> <li>▪ Downtown businesses and property owners</li> </ul>
<b>Resources Needed</b>			
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Materials and refreshments for Community Forums</li> </ul>	\$500 each	EDC budget Town General Funds
<b>Other:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission time for planning and management</li> <li>▪ Time of other Town staff, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Ridgefield</li> <li>▪ Pro bono forum participation by attorney and other speakers</li> <li>▪ Volunteer time of merchants and property owners</li> </ul>		
<b>Performance Measures</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordinating group designated 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2010 and EDC asked to manage the project</li> <li>▪ Downtown issues survey completed 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2010</li> <li>▪ Initial Community Forum held 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2010</li> <li>▪ "Future of Downtown Ridgefield" whitepaper published 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2010</li> <li>▪ Implementation of recommendations begun 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011</li> </ul>			
<b>Special Services District Forum</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Forum planned and held by 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010</li> <li>▪ Recommendation by EDC to Board of Selectmen on establishment of a Downtown Ridgefield EDC made by 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010</li> </ul>			

### Timeframe

This Initiative is:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Short-term (1-2 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate-term (3-5 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term (5+ years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuing
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### Additional Information

For an example of Downtown Task Forces see:

Kenmore, WA [www.ci.kenmore.wa.us/DTF/Plan/Plan.html](http://www.ci.kenmore.wa.us/DTF/Plan/Plan.html)

Denton, TX [www.dentonedp.com/downtown\\_development/about\\_us\\_downtown\\_task\\_force.asp](http://www.dentonedp.com/downtown_development/about_us_downtown_task_force.asp)

Wayland, MI [www.ci.wayland.mi.us/downtown.html](http://www.ci.wayland.mi.us/downtown.html)

See <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2005/pub/Chap105a.htm> for information on Connecticut's statutes regarding Special Services Districts.

For information on New York City's Business Improvement Districts (one of the most active and multi-faceted collections of BIDs), see:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/sbs/html/neighborhood/bid.shtml>

## **Town of Ridgefield Economic Development Action Plan**

### **Initiative #5: Development Process Review**

#### **Related Goals**

- Maintaining an adequate business portion of the Town's Grand List
- Business retention, expansion and replacement
- External and internal marketing
- Enhancement of Ridgefield's economic development team

#### **Background Information**

The Town of Ridgefield can do a better job of communicating the details of its development process to the public, and in particular to businesses the Town seeks to attract and retain. There is an unhealthy level of complaint from the development sector about the regulations and procedures that comprise Ridgefield's development process, including those who report having had a difficult time, those who know someone who had a difficult time, and those who are concerned about what they consider to be that unhealthy level of complaint.

Often this situation is a function of lingering perception from long-past "horror stories", while in other instances there is good reason for the dissatisfaction. Frequently it is a reflection of an incorrect understanding of what is required. Whatever the cause, other communities dealing with this situation (in the past, Raleigh, NC has been a good example) have had good success by creating a working group comprised of key staff, representatives of land-use boards and commissions, and representatives of the real estate development community including brokers, architects and engineers, who meet together to get specific problems about the development process onto the table, explore all sides of the issue in a non-hostile environment, and jointly identify the most effective way to make the system work more effectively.

It is much more effective to do this when there is not a specific development project involved, and can result in case studies about what is working effectively and why, as well as what can work better and how to make that happen.

A Town – Development Sector Task Force should be established to identify regulatory issues (both policies and procedures) impeding the Town's economic development and work collaboratively to make improvements.

As a related issue, many communities attempt to make their development process more understandable by creating flowcharts and/or manuals to make the process easier to understand. Ridgefield's Architectural Advisory Committee and related Architectural Review Checklist is an excellent start in this direction; however, the development process involves other Town departments, boards and commissions. The Economic Development Commission, working with the appropriate Town staff, boards and commissions, should seek to provide additional materials that help developers and business prospects understand the process more fully. As a part of this process, the efficacy of creating more detailed design guidelines and a design or development advisory committee should be considered.

<b>Initiative #5 Major Action Steps and Schedule</b>	
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
1. EDC requests that the Board of Selectman establish a Town – Development Sector Task Force.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
2. Establishment of Task Force approved.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2010
3. Contact the City of Raleigh, NC and other locations that have had a similar Task Force to research their setup and operations.	3 <sup>rd</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> Qtrs 2010
4. Identify Town departments, Boards and Commissions that should be involved.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
5. Prepare a list of developers, architects, engineers and commercial real estate brokers who might be involved.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
6. Select 5± development sector representatives to be invited to be part of the initial Task Force. (While Town staff and Board and Commissions will have permanent slots on the Task Force, representatives of the development community should be rotated annually to assure fresh thoughts and allow a reasonable time commitment.)	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2010
7. Schedule the first meeting of the Task Force.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
8. At the initial meeting of the Task Force, discuss procedural matters for the functioning of the Task Force.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
9. At the second meeting of the Task Force, prepare a list of issues related to regulations and permit and approval procedures for future discussion. Identify top priority issues.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
10. At the third meeting of the Task Force, begin consideration of priority issues; make recommendations for improvements expeditiously.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2011
11. Communicate recommended changes in regulations and the development process to appropriate agencies and departments.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011 and ongoing
12. Task Force members should testify as needed at any meetings or hearings called to consider the Task Force recommendations.	As needed
13. Development Process flowchart and/or manual prepared and available from Town website	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2011
14. The Task Force considers establishment of a new Development and/or Design Review Advisory Committee or designates an existing board or commission to be such Committee.	3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> Qtrs 2011
<u>If such a body is found desirable:</u>	
15. If a Development and Design Review Advisory Committee is established, Board of Selectmen designates Town Department or staff member to provide staff services for it.	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr 2011 if
16. Conduct national research on similar municipal bodies, their operations, forms used, and similar items.	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr 2012
17. Customize material gathered from research to meet Ridgefield's needs.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2012
18. Standard Operating Procedures created by Development and Design Review Advisory Committee.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2012
19. Development and Design Review Advisory Committee SOP	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2012

approved by Board of Selectmen and/or other appropriate Boards. 20. Development and Design Review Advisory Committee begins operations.		3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2012	
<b>Responsibility</b>			
<b>Primary:</b>		<b>Support:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Board of Selectmen</li> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission</li> <li>▪ Planning &amp; Zoning Commission</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Other applicable Town departments, boards and commissions</li> <li>▪ Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	
<b>Resources Needed</b>			
<b>Funding:</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Possible Sources</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Refreshments for Task Force meetings</li> </ul>	\$50 per session	EDC budget Business donations
<b>Other:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff and volunteer time</li> </ul>		
<b>Performance Measures</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Town – Development Sector Task Force established by September 2010</li> <li>▪ First Task Force meeting held by October 2010</li> <li>▪ Monthly meetings of the Task Force held throughout 2010 and 2011</li> <li>▪ Permit &amp; Approval flowchart and/or manual prepared by June 2011</li> <li>▪ Task Force meetings held regularly on a schedule to be determined 2012 and beyond</li> <li>▪ Decision made on establishment of a Development and Design Review Advisory Committee by September 2011</li> <li>▪ If appropriate, Development and Design Review Advisory Committee SOP drafted and approved by May 2012</li> <li>▪ If appropriate, Development and Design Review Advisory Committee begins operations by June 2012</li> </ul>			
<b>Timeframe</b>			
This Initiative is:			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Short-term (1-2 years)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intermediate-term (3-5 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term (5+ years)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuing
<b>Additional Information</b>			
<p>For an example of a good website devoted to a permit and approval process, see:  <a href="http://www.co.shasta.ca.us/Departments/Resourcegmt/drm/permit.htm">http://www.co.shasta.ca.us/Departments/Resourcegmt/drm/permit.htm</a> For examples of communities with Design or Development Review Committees, see:  <a href="http://www.chulavistaca.gov/City_Services/Development_Services/Planning_Building/Boards_Commissions/Design_Review.asp">http://www.chulavistaca.gov/City_Services/Development_Services/Planning_Building/Boards_Commissions/Design_Review.asp</a>  <a href="http://www.spokaneplanning.org/Design_Review/Design_Review.htm">http://www.spokaneplanning.org/Design_Review/Design_Review.htm</a>  <a href="http://www.castlepinesvillage.org/designreviewcommittee.htm">http://www.castlepinesvillage.org/designreviewcommittee.htm</a>  <a href="http://www.montvillenj.org/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=105&amp;Itemid=118">http://www.montvillenj.org/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=105&amp;Itemid=118</a>  <a href="http://www.cityofmesquite.com/drc/index.php">http://www.cityofmesquite.com/drc/index.php</a>  <a href="http://www.ci.longmont.co.us/planning/drc/drc.htm">http://www.ci.longmont.co.us/planning/drc/drc.htm</a></p> <p>To view Simsbury's "Guidelines for Community Design", see:  <a href="http://www.simsbury-ct.gov/public_documents/simsburyCT_Downloads/community_design/DesignGu.pdf">http://www.simsbury-ct.gov/public_documents/simsburyCT_Downloads/community_design/DesignGu.pdf</a></p>			



<p>6. The Committee and EDC research possible incubator locations and decide whether Ridgefield will create an incubator with or without walls program.</p> <p>7. The Committee and EDC decide whether there will be any application cost to be eligible for services or minimal costs to receive services.</p> <p>8. The Committee and EDC obtain resources necessary to provide intended services. This will rely heavily on existing businesses that are willing to donate time to mentor entrepreneurs.</p> <p>9. The EDC publicizes the availability of the Incubator Without Walls services. This should include a portion of Ridgefield's website devoted to this program.</p> <p>10. The Committee services clients as needed.</p> <p>11. Based on client needs, the Committee and EDC identify additional services that may be needed.</p> <p>12. The EDC publicizes program availability and successes continually.</p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2012</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtrs 2012</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2012</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p>						
<b>Responsibility</b>							
<p><b>Primary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incubator Without Walls Committee</li> <li>▪ Economic Development Commission</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Area businesses willing to provide services</li> <li>▪ Western Connecticut State University SBDC</li> </ul>						
<b>Resources Needed</b>							
<b>Funding:</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="376 968 881 1003">Item</th> <th data-bbox="881 968 1097 1003">Amount</th> <th data-bbox="1097 968 1443 1003">Possible Sources</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="376 1003 881 1146"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase resource library materials and equipment for client use</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="881 1003 1097 1146"> <p>\$3,000 Initially \$2,000 per Year</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1097 1003 1443 1146"> <p>EDC Budget Town General Fund Business Donations</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Item	Amount	Possible Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase resource library materials and equipment for client use</li> </ul>	<p>\$3,000 Initially \$2,000 per Year</p>	<p>EDC Budget Town General Fund Business Donations</p>
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<p><b>Other:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Volunteer time</li> <li>▪ Pro bono time by area businesses to provide services to entrepreneurs</li> </ul>							
<b>Performance Measures</b>							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incubator Committee established 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2011</li> <li>▪ Program services, procedures and regulations identified 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr 2012</li> <li>▪ Necessary resources obtained 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2012</li> <li>▪ Incubator Without Walls Program launched 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr 2012</li> <li>▪ First entrepreneur(s) assisted 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2012</li> </ul>							
<b>Timeframe</b>							
This Initiative is:							
<input type="checkbox"/> Short-term (1-2 years)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intermediate-term (3-5 years)	<input type="checkbox"/> Long-term (5+ years)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuing				

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### **Additional Information**

For information on incubators without walls, see:

<http://www.oame.org/incubator.htm>

<http://www.mwcc.edu/devens/erc/incubator.html>

<http://www.cfrcdc.org/iww.asp>

[http://www.whcacap.org/forms/ET-IWW\\_%20FactSheet.pdf](http://www.whcacap.org/forms/ET-IWW_%20FactSheet.pdf)

<http://www.cdconline.org/businessincubator.htm#Incubator%20without%20Walls%20Outreach%20Program>

<http://www.cityofselma.com/development/business.htm>

## Summary of Economic Development Action Plan Funding Needs

The Economic Development Action Plan set forth in the prior pages recognizes the budget limitations confronting most smaller towns, particularly in light of the recession from which the country is only beginning to emerge. Implementation of this plan is heavily dependent on volunteer efforts, and in some cases, donated services. Nonetheless, as noted earlier in this plan, there will be little success without the Town investing some money in carrying out the plan.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of Economic Development Action Plan Funding Needs**

Initiative		Cost
1	Investment Attraction and Retention including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Business Attraction/Expansion Incentive Program</li> <li>▪ Rapid Response Team</li> <li>▪ Existing Business Contact and Assistance Program</li> <li>▪ Business Ambassadors Program and Speakers Bureau</li> </ul>	Up to \$1,750 0 \$200 Up to \$9,000
2	Route 7 Developability Study	0
3	Retail Leakage Study	\$12,000 - \$15,000
4	Downtown Development Blueprint	\$500 per forum
5	Development Process Review	
6	Incubator With or Without Walls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unknown cost for facility, equipment and management if Incubator With Walls is established</li> <li>▪ \$3,000 to set up Incubator Without Walls program</li> <li>▪ \$2,000 annually to run Incubator Without Walls program</li> </ul>

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## Other Items

In addition to the six Initiatives presented on the prior page, there are many other possible recommendations that do not lend themselves to a full-fledged Initiative.

One of particular note is the establishment and maintenance of a state of the art economic development website, something the Economic Development Commission is already working on. Items that should be included in this website include:

1. A current listing of all available business spaces and sites, and a link to those included in the Connecticut Economic Resource Center's (CERC) SiteFinder Inventory.
2. A Master Calendar of Events occurring in Ridgefield to promote tourism.

A somewhat related issue is the age and quality of data available about Ridgefield from CERC's Town Profiles and Economic Development Data and Information (EDDI) system. While CERC tries to keep information up to date, frequently local communities have access to more current information that CERC gets from the standardized databases it monitors. The Economic Development Commission should review its Town Profile and data in the EDDI system frequently and inform CERC of items that are inaccurate or where newer information is available. As one simple example, the Town Profile for Ridgefield currently shows Grand List information from 2006.

# Ridgefield, Connecticut Economic Development Commission

## Business and Economic Development Issues

### For

## Update of Ridgefield's Plan of Conservation and Development

The Town of Ridgefield has established an Economic Development Commission (the EDC), whose purpose, as stated in our Town Code of Ordinances, is to implement orderly and planned economic development, in keeping with the character of the town. In fulfilling this purpose, the EDC has as its mission to:

- Develop a proactive program to facilitate the location and expansion of quality businesses and community assets in keeping with the character of the town.
- Attract above average wage jobs for Ridgefield residents.
- Promote Ridgefield as a business destination.
- Ensure community development activities, support business growth and prosperity, promote a strong economy, and develop and follow an economic development plan.

As residents of Ridgefield, EDC members recognize the importance of preserving and enhancing the character of the town. Part of that character is an adequate balance of residential and business development that shares the tax burden between residential and business property owners, provides desirable employment opportunities within the community, provides conveniently available goods and services desired by residents, and maintains an attractive environment that encourages visitors to come to our town.

As Ridgefield updates its Plan of Conservation and Development for the next ten years, the EDC has identified the following issues requiring attention, and has provided recommendations for further consideration. It should be noted that over the next several months the EDC will be developing a more detailed Action Plan to provide specific direction on priority items requiring the EDC and town's attention. We also realize that the Planning & Zoning Commission is already considering some of initiatives recommended below, but want to take this opportunity to state the EDC's support for them.

### **1. Maintaining an Adequate Business Portion of the Town's Grand List**

The 1980 Town Plan proposed a goal of 10-15% of the Grand List from office and industrial development and noted at the time that office, industrial and retail real estate represented 10±%, with business motor vehicles and taxable personal property adding another 5±%. In 1999, business property (both real and personal property) was found to total 16+%, and projected that a continuation of growth patterns and valuations would bring Ridgefield's business portion of the Grand List to nearly 23%. The 1999 Plan therefore set a goal of maintaining the non-residential tax base between 15% and 25% of the Grand List.

Those growth patterns and valuations have not continued. Residential demand and values in Ridgefield, as in many other places, have exceeded demand and values for business property. Portions of town originally zoned for business development, in particular the creation of corporate campuses in Corporate Development Districts, have been converted to residential use, reducing our opportunities for the development of more taxable business space.

The EDC estimates that the current business portion (as of the 2008 Grand List) of Ridgefield's Grand List is slightly above 13% as shown in the following calculation:

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>RIDGEFIELD BUSINESS PORTION OF THE 2008 GRAND LIST</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>Real Property</b>	
Commercial	\$544,520,607
Industrial	\$19,737,950
Apartments	\$11,782,440
<b>Motor Vehicles</b>	
Commercial	\$3,744,936
Combination (1)	\$1,032,234
Farm	\$92,750
<b>Personal Property</b>	
Industrial/Manufacturing Machinery & Equipment	\$12,987,870
New Manufacturing Machinery & Equipment	\$23,593,140
Machinery & Equipment	\$13,881,160
Commercial Furniture & Fixtures	\$30,908,750
Farm Machinery & Tools	\$90,930
Mechanics Tools	\$151,250
Electronic Data Processing Equipment	\$33,575,740
Telecommunications Equipment	\$796,950
Cable, Conduits, Pipes, Poles, Towers, Telephone, Water, Etc.	\$22,143,490
Monthly Average Quantity of Supplies	\$659,020
All Other Taxable Property, Chattels & Effects	\$1,736,180
<b>TOTAL BUSINESS PROPERTY</b>	<b>\$721,435,397</b>
<b>TOTAL 2008 GRAND LIST (2)</b>	<b>\$5,531,189,707</b>
<b>BUSINESS PORTION OF 2008 GRAND LIST</b>	<b>13.04%</b>
Notes:	
(1) 10% of Combination Motor Vehicles treated as business use	
(2) (2) Assessment before exemptions	

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This calculation is consistent with an estimate of 13 – 15% provided by the Town’s Assessor in early June 2009.

We believe it is unrealistic to establish a goal of increasing the business portion of the Grand List to a substantially higher portion such as the 25% suggested in the 1999 Plan of Conservation and Development. To attain such a level of business development – in particular, by new construction – would most likely require an amount of development that would fundamentally change the character of Ridgefield. Given the limited amount of land currently zoned and suitable for business development, it may be impossible to find locations for this level of growth, even if it were desirable.

**Recommendation:** The 2009 Plan of Conservation and Development Update should state that it is the intention of the town to maintain an effective balance of residential and business development with a 13 – 18% business portion of the Grand List, so as to assure a continuing reasonable tax rate for all Ridgefield residents. This is consistent with, or slightly higher than our historical average.

## **2. Providing Adequate Locations for Future Business Development**

To maintain even our historical level of business development will require locations for new development. While some of this should be infill development in areas already used for business, new locations or increased density and/or mix of uses in existing locations will also be required. Maintaining a desirable business portion of our Grand List in the future to reduce the tax burden on residential tax payers cannot be accomplished in the long run merely by increasing the density of development in existing business districts. Eventually we will need additional business areas; if we do not identify and appropriately zone the most desirable areas now, they may not be available in the future.

### **A. The Route 7 Corridor**

The most likely and most frequently mentioned portion of Ridgefield for new business development is along the Route 7 corridor between its intersection with Route 35 and Branchville. This corridor already contains a scattered business presence and limited residential development for which business development would be an incompatible neighbor. Additional development in this corridor, including provision of suitable zoning, is shown in Planimetrics Booklet #2 on Planning Issues as an area of agreement by those participating in a community forum held on March 31, 2009.

Even with suitable zoning, development in this corridor will be limited in scope by the topography of some of the adjacent land, which is quite steep; the presence of the nearby Metro-North rail line running parallel to Route 7 (the US Department of Transportation generally

requires the closing of one or more existing on-grade crossings over a rail line in order to receive permission for a new one); the Norwalk River with associated flood plains and wetlands, which may require a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers for development that impacts those wetlands; and other site specific features.

The majority of this corridor is zoned RAA, a residential district with a required 2 acre minimum lot size. From a business perspective, lots along Route 7 may lend themselves to a broad cross-section of uses, including offices, personal and business services, research and development, retail and food services and even small-scale, light manufacturing. Many of these uses may require less than a 2 acre site. The town's current Business B-2 Zone comes closest to allowing this mix of uses (with research and development and manufacturing or similar uses requiring a special permit). However, the town's B-1 zone allows a higher density of development.

**Recommendation:** Portions of the Route 7 corridor currently not zoned for business development but most suitable for future development should be rezoned to Business B-2, or a Route 7 Corridor District allowing a broad mix of business uses and maximized density should be created for this area. A building size limitation should be stipulated to preclude "big box" uses that residents find objectionable. The EDC would be happy to collaborate with the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) on defining the best mix of uses for this area.

**Recommendation:** A developability study should be prepared for the Route 7 corridor to identify most likely sites for development and calculate maximum development potential within existing physical features and suitable site preparation work. With permission of the owners, these sites should be marketed by the EDC and/or the real estate brokerage community.

## **B. Route 35**

Another location identified for additional business growth is the business portions of Route 35 that are (1) immediately east of Route 116/Main Street, and (2) west of Route 7. These areas are currently a mix of Business 1, 2 and 3 (B-1, B-2, B-3) districts, which differ in allowed uses and maximum coverage. While these areas are largely developed, additional taxable development and related jobs could be attained by increasing the allowable density in the area. The most likely additional uses in the area would be retail, services or small offices of a variety of kinds. Ridgefield's B-1 Zone allows both the anticipated uses and a greater maximum coverage than the B-2 and B-3 Zones.

**Recommendation:** Portions of Route 35 between Main Street and Route 7 currently allowed for business development under the town's B-2 and B-3 Zones should be rezoned to B-1 to allow greater density of development due to a greater allowable maximum coverage. A building size limitation should be stipulated to preclude "big box" uses that residents find objectionable. Once again, the EDC would be happy to collaborate with the Planning and Zoning Commission

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on defining the best mix of uses for this area. It is important to note that this recommendation is not for rezoning current residential portions of Route 35 for business use; rather, it is for increasing the density of development and mix of uses in those areas already zoned for business use.

### **C. Town-Owned Property**

The Town of Ridgefield is a major property owner, with substantial holdings of land and buildings. While much of the vacant land has been obtained for the purpose of maintaining it as open space, some town owned property may have utility for business uses. Small parcels might be sold and the proceeds used to buy larger tracts for open space use. Some buildings may no longer meet town needs, or may become excess in the future. Planimetrics has been working on an inventory of town-owned land, particularly that which is dedicated open space.

**Recommendation:** A complete inventory of town-owned property (land and buildings) should be prepared and compared with planned or anticipated municipal needs. Properties that are deemed "surplus" (that is, either no longer needed by the town or significantly underutilized) should be considered for sale. Those in appropriate locations for business development should be sold or developed for that purpose.

### **3. Improvement of Ridgefield's Gateways**

For places that want to attract visitors, particularly by car, gateways or primary entrances are particularly important because they provide the first visual impression of the community. While there are many such entrances into Ridgefield, four are of particular concern because they are the primary gateways with high traffic count and linkage to Interstate 84 to the north and Interstate 95 and the Merritt Parkway to the south. These are both the northern and southern entrances on Route 7 and the northern entrances on Old Ridgebury Road and George Washington Highway. (We would note that while our discussion here focuses on these four gateways to Ridgefield, equal attention should be paid to all gateways into our community.)

Most recent Average Daily Traffic Counts (ADT) from the Connecticut Department of Transportation show 20,700 vehicles per day crossing the Danbury-Ridgefield town line (traveling in both directions) and 27,400 vehicles per day crossing the Wilton-Ridgefield town line. Although the ADT on Old Ridgebury Road just south of the Danbury town line is only 3,600 vehicles per day, and the ADT on George Washington Highway is 4,600 just west of Scondon Avenue, these entrances to Ridgefield are also important because they are a primary access point for the Boehringer Ingelheim complex.

None of these entrances to Ridgefield is as attractive as is desirable. On Route 7, this is the case for properties on both sides of the town line. When the widening of Route 7 between Ridgefield and Danbury is completed, it is possible that more land will be opened up for development. Expectations for the quality of any new development should be established now.

On Old Ridgebury Road, development on the Danbury side of the town line is more of a concern than in Ridgefield, but since there is no sign at the town line, a stranger to the area might not know which community he/she is looking at.

Ridgefield's stature as a high quality community is reduced because of the appearance of these entrances, which could have a negative impact on return visits by tourists and on business recruitment. Similarly, Danbury, Wilton and Redding are also impacted.

**Recommendation:** Ridgefield should contact the leadership of Danbury, Wilton and Redding to explore cooperative efforts on improving the visual quality of development in the gateway areas noted above.

**Recommendation:** The Ridgefield EDC should investigate creation and capitalization of a low interest façade improvement loan program to improve the appearance of business buildings at gateways to the town. This may entail a commitment of funds by the many banks in town as part of their Community Reinvestment Act responsibilities.

**Recommendation:** In appropriate situations, when unattractive buildings become available in gateway areas, Ridgefield should consider purchase of these properties, rehabilitating or demolishing them, and use of the property to meet town needs or resale of the property after improvements are made.

#### **4. Maintenance of Village Economic Vitality**

Ridgefield has two discernable villages with clusters of business activity – Downtown Ridgefield and Branchville. Both are areas of concern and opportunity.

##### **A. Downtown Ridgefield**

Downtown Ridgefield (or the Village Center) is the heart of our community and a primary reason why we draw visitors who support our businesses, both in the Downtown and elsewhere in the community. Much discussion has occurred recently about maintaining the economic health of this area, with differing opinions expressed. Examples of important issues include:

- Some support limiting the use of first floor space to retail or services that will generate "feet on the street" – that is, potential customers for our merchants. Others believe that

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such a limitation is artificial, penalizes property owners, and may result in space remaining vacant longer than necessary.

- Some residents find the mix of small, boutique specialty shops to be an attractive shopping opportunity, while others have no interest in shopping downtown at all because the stores do not offer what they are interested in. Some perceive downtown shopping to be oriented toward women, with little of interest to men.
- There is a difference of opinion on the adequacy of downtown parking. Some believe there is an adequate amount of conveniently located parking spaces, but that vehicle circulation is a problem, while others support the development of a parking garage.
- Creation of a road parallel with Main Street joining Bailey Avenue with Governor Street is supported by some, but not all.
- The creation of a Special Services District (frequently called a Business Improvement District) for the Downtown has been suggested. There are many questions and misperceptions about what such a district is, how it is established, what powers it has, and how much it would cost. In particular, many perceive it to be "another layer of taxation" despite the fact that the Town would not create it, set any of the costs, or receive any of the revenues it might generate.
- Some support the conversion of upper floor space to residential uses, either affordable or market rate, to provide more customers and disposable income living in the Downtown.
- Some support the creation of a downtown property owner task force, while others believe the creation of another group will further complicate planning for the area. (We would note that the EDC would be happy to serve in a facilitation role if such a group is created.)
- Some support the expansion of the Downtown area. This includes a variety of ideas such as:
  - renaming of the portion of Route 35 between Route 116/Main Street and Copps Hill Road to North Main Street
  - expansion of the area defined in Zoning Regulations as the Central Business District (CBD)
  - expansion of the downtown to the east
  - amendment of the CBD regulations to allow a Residential-Office use for limited conversion of homes to professional offices. This last suggestion has also been made for a broader area surrounding the CBD.

We point out these topics because they indicate how complex a topic our Downtown is. Achieving broad agreement on exactly what should be done cannot and should not be decided by a small group of people.

**Recommendation:** The Economic Development Commission, in collaboration with other appropriate Boards and Commissions, should plan and host a community summit on "The Future of Downtown Ridgefield." This summit should present a summary of relevant planning and development topics related to Downtown (for example, improvements to Main Street included in the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials' 2005 Route 35 Traffic Study; permitted uses and use limitations included in CBD zoning regulations); allow detailed discussion in small groups on critical issues; and seek to identify majority opinions that should provide the direction for downtown development and management for the future.

**Recommendation:** The EDC should host a forum on "The Myths and Realities of Special Services Districts." The forum should include a presentation by an attorney familiar with the process for establishing a Special Services District and their powers and limitations under Connecticut Statutes. It should also include one or more presentations by individuals involved in such a district (from the operational, property owner and business occupant perspectives) on how they are working and what they have accomplished. All Downtown property owners and businesses should be invited to attend.

## **B. Branchville**

Branchville is important, in part, because it is the major gateway into Ridgefield from the south (see Item #3 above). However, there is also a significant cluster of businesses in Branchville which provide shopping, dining and other services for residents in that portion of Ridgefield, serve visitors to the community, and contribute to the town's business tax base.

Branchville was the subject of a detailed Village Plan study prepared by Planimetrics in 2002 that sought to provide direction on how to:

- reinforce Branchville as a community focal point,
- promote its economic vitality, and
- preserve and enhance the character of the area.

Many of the recommendations in this plan were incorporated into the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development and remain relevant today.

There are several topics that must factor into any plans for the future development of Branchville:

- 
- The appearance of the area, which as noted above is an important gateway into Ridgefield (although some improvements are already occurring)
  - Increased traffic congestion as Route 7 is widened
  - Existing or proposed development in other communities, in particular the Georgetown Mill project, which may create valuable synergies for collaborative development, but may also create competition for Branchville merchants
  - Adequacy of train service and related parking, and the impact of the proposed train station at the Georgetown Mill.

Additional development in Branchville is constrained by nearly full development, the Norwalk River, the Metro-North rail line, steep topography to the east, and the lack of sewer service. Nonetheless, this area is an important location for economic activity in Ridgefield and requires our attention and support.

**Recommendation:** Branchville should be positioned as a transit-oriented development (TOD) location; this would take advantage of Branchville's intermodal car-rail capability. TODs are an emphasis of the State's Plan of Conservation and Development and Office of Responsible Growth. Positioning Branchville as a TOD may make it eligible for state and federal funding for appropriate projects in the future.

**Recommendation:** Future development in Branchville should focus on the creation of a village environment through upgrading of existing properties (see the discussion above in Item #3 about the importance of Branchville as a gateway), identification of infill opportunities, replacement of functionally obsolete structures that cannot be rehabilitated cost-effectively, and maximization of allowable density. The B-2 zoning district should be changed to some alternative such as the Route 7 Corridor District suggested in Item #2 above to allow a higher density and broadest possible mix of uses. Mixed use development combining business uses with upper floor residential should be encouraged, particularly for dwelling units meeting the state's affordable housing criteria.

**Recommendation:** The town's efforts to improve and increase parking at the Branchville Metro-North station should continue to be aggressively pursued. If a parking garage is constructed, first level retail space should be included.

**Recommendation:** Ridgefield should immediately begin discussions with the town of Redding about extending sewer service to Branchville while simultaneously evaluating other options for providing sanitary sewer service to this area.

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## 5. Business Retention, Expansion and Replacement

A critical element of any economic development program is the retention and expansion of businesses already in a community. A companion effort is the rapid replacement of businesses that leave or vacate space by moving elsewhere in the community.

Our Plan of Conservation and Development should state this commitment by the town and actions taken by town boards, commissions and staff should reflect this commitment.

Recently, significant attention has been paid by residents to the vacated Schlumberger property and its reuse possibilities, as well as vacant space in the Pond's Edge property. These vacancies are likely short-term in nature; more importantly, the fact is that additional business buildings or spaces of significant size will most certainly become available in the future.

The most important question is what Ridgefield does about it when these vacancies occur. In every case, the town must aggressively and creatively seek to reoccupy the space with another business user as rapidly as possible. While the commercial real estate brokerage community will be at the forefront of working to reoccupy these properties, the town should both assist in the process and assure that these properties are not converted to residential use unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the net tax benefit (that is, tax revenues less public service costs including education) does not decline significantly from the prior use. Each vacant property will have its own set of challenges and opportunities. Efforts should focus on high value target sectors such as technology-oriented businesses, light office uses such as financial services, research and development, and eco-friendly firms.

Because Ridgefield has no dedicated economic development staff, it is dependent on the efforts of volunteers and town staff who have other duties to carry out its economic development efforts. Efficiency and effectiveness will depend on taking advantage of the efforts of multiple agencies and organizations in a coordinated manner (see Item #8 below – Ridgefield's Economic Development Team).

**Recommendation:** The 2009 Update of the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development should articulate a commitment to business retention, expansion and replacement. Wherever applicable, this commitment should be reflected in the purpose or mission statement of town boards, commissions and departments.

**Recommendation:** The EDC should compile and maintain a list of all businesses in Ridgefield with contact information, particularly e-mail addresses. The EDC should use this list to maintain regular contact with all Town businesses, both to establish and maintain relationships, as well as to regularly solicit information on business operations and needs. These contacts should be proactive by the EDC rather than reactive (such as waiting for businesses to visit and respond to the EDC website).

**Recommendation:** Coordinated by the EDC, the town should establish a Rapid Response Team that is ready to respond when a business indicates or is known to be at risk of closure, relocation out of Ridgefield, or significant down-sizing; or respond to a significant vacancy by taking action to assist with reoccupancy; or respond to other important business needs and opportunities as they arise. The team would include the First Selectman, Town Planner, representatives of the EDC and PZC, and others as appropriate.

**Recommendation:** The EDC should establish a Business Ambassadors program which would both maintain personal contact with the town's businesses and also serve as a host group to meet with business prospects. Participation should not be limited to EDC members; rather, it should also include key town staff members and recruit other interested parties in the community so as to spread the work load.

## **6. Creation of a Cultural Cluster and District**

Ridgefield is blessed with a cluster of arts, culture and historical organizations, venues and events that is unusual for a community our size. This is not only an important quality of life consideration for our residents, but also provides a basis for promoting Ridgefield as a place to visit for day-trips or extended stays to enjoy these opportunities. Simply stated, arts and culture can be an essential draw for tourists, and tourism spending will support our existing and future merchants.

The Ridgefield Arts Council is a committee of town government tasked with supporting and developing ways to extend the arts into the community, and by extension, use the arts to attract more visitors.

Establishment of an arts and cultural district has been proposed and is an idea worthy of further consideration. If officially established, this will provide a recognized location in which a number of arts venues can be found within convenient walking distance. However, many of the town's arts, culture and historical opportunities are not in this district. It makes sense to position and market Ridgefield as having a noteworthy arts, culture and historic cluster at the core of which is an official arts district.

**Recommendation:** The mission of the Ridgefield Arts Council should be expanded to state clearly that it includes the promotion and coordination of the town's arts culture and historical opportunities for the purpose of attracting visitors.

**Recommendation:** The town's Plan of Conservation and Development should acknowledge current plans to create a Cultural District and recognition of its significant arts, culture and historical cluster as an aspect of business development.

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## 7. External and Internal Marketing

Economic development does not happen by aggressively waiting for the phone to ring. It requires focused marketing, the cost of which should be considered an investment intended to generate a return through increased business activity in Ridgefield. The economic development arena is fiercely competitive. There are significantly more economic development organizations in the United States (an estimated 15,000 – 18,000) than there are annual projects of significant size. (In 2008, Conway Data counted 4,888 business projects that were \$1 million or more in capital investment; or occupied 20,000 or more square feet; or involved 50 or more jobs; only 11 of these were in Connecticut.)

Therefore, aggressive and effective external marketing is required as a business attraction tool. Equally important, internal marketing is necessary both to maintain contact with existing businesses and educate residents about the importance of economic development to Ridgefield.

There are many forms of economic development marketing, many very expensive and of questionable efficacy. However, the use of websites and the internet has risen to the top of the list in terms of cost-effectiveness. The EDC is in the process of updating its website; however, websites are only effective if they include the appropriate information and are kept current, which will require an annual expenditure.

Coupled with the new website, the establishment and use of an internet-based business contact system, and the Business Ambassadors program described above in Item #5 – Business Retention, Expansion and Replacement, will be primary forms of internal marketing.

**Recommendation:** The town's annual budget should include an adequate amount for administrative support of the town's Economic Development Commission including maintenance and periodic upgrading of the EDC's website. This includes the development of current data and other information about Ridgefield and the sharing of this information with allies. Much information about Ridgefield that may be found by a company looking for a location comes from sources such as the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC). CERC uses most recently available data sources wherever possible, but some of this is quite old; the current Ridgefield profile available from CERC includes some data as old as 1998. Information on top employers and tax payers is from 2006 and includes Schlumberger. Wherever possible, more recent information developed by the town should be provided to CERC, and information on the CERC and town websites should be consistent.

**Recommendation:** The town, through the EDC, should participate in the establishment, maintenance and communication of a Ridgefield brand. The Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce is currently in the initial stages of brand development, which should have equal applicability for many purposes including promotion of the Downtown and Branchville, promotion of the Arts, Culture and History cluster and district, and recruitment on new businesses to the community.

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## **8. Ridgefield's Economic Development Team**

There are many organizations involved in Ridgefield's economic development efforts including the Economic Development Commission, the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Ridgefield, and the Ridgefield Arts Council. Equally important are the town staff and board and commission members who come into contact with the economic development process, and can either help or hinder it. Frequently, many staff, board and commission members do not realize they are part of the community's economic development team.

This fragmentation is not unusual, but can make it confusing for a business needing assistance. On top of a potentially confusing system, Ridgefield is perceived by some as having a permit and approval system that is less friendly than it could be.

**Recommendation:** The town should create "Team Ridgefield", comprised of all organizations and entities engaged in efforts related to economic development. The EDC should serve as the coordinating entity, assuring that overlap and duplication is minimized, all important issues are addressed, and maximum teamwork exists to get the greatest results from limited resources.

**Recommendation:** The EDC, working with the First Selectman's office, should periodically conduct a team-building workshop for town staff, boards and commissions. This workshop should be similar to the highly successful "Economic Development for Public Officials" program created by the MetroHartford Alliance for its member communities.

**Recommendation:** The PZC and EDC should convene a meeting with representatives of all land use related boards and commissions and Ridgefield's development industry to discuss the town's permit and approval regulations and processes and identify areas where improvements are warranted. This session should include representatives of the real estate, architectural, engineering, and contractor sectors. If found to be useful, this process should be institutionalized as a regular quality management initiative.

**Recommendation:** The EDC and PZC should create a Permit & Approval Manual and/or Flowchart(s) to provide a simplified overview of the steps and timeframes that should be anticipated in obtaining necessary approvals for development in Ridgefield.

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF RIDGEFIELD AS A LOCATION FOR BUSINESS

EVALUATION TOPIC	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<b>Access to Markets</b> (How easy is it to provide products or services to customers or potential customers from a Ridgefield location?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draws visitors from outside</li> <li>• Good proximity to NYC yet far enough away</li> <li>• General location</li> <li>• Proximity to Connecticut's "Gold Coast"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centrally isolated with no mass transit</li> <li>• There is no access (middle of nowhere)</li> <li>• No visibility</li> </ul>
<b>Transportation</b> (Road, rail, airport, waterborne)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion/widening of Route 7</li> <li>• HART buses in news for parking woes (gaining attention in town)</li> <li>• Danbury branch line gaining popularity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic in the downtown area is tough</li> <li>• Town hasn't invested in infrastructure improvements</li> <li>• Regional transportation a problem</li> <li>• Poor access to major arteries – roads a disaster</li> <li>• Need better train station and parking</li> <li>• No public transportation</li> </ul>
<b>Labor Force</b> (Supply, skills, costs, labor relations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to recruit executives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CT is #1 export state for jobs</li> </ul>
<b>Utilities</b> (Electric power, public water and sewer, natural gas, telecommunications)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town hasn't invested in infrastructure improvements</li> <li>• Inadequate cell phone service in northern part of town</li> <li>• Lack of sewers in Branchville</li> </ul>
<b>Available Sites and Buildings</b> (including construction and occupancy costs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vacant Schlumberger facility is excellent site with multiple possibilities</li> <li>• "Smart growth" infill and redevelopment opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not much vacant land for business development</li> <li>• Conversion of business sites to residential use</li> </ul>
<b>Taxes</b> (State and Local)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't think people feel over-taxed (yet)</li> <li>• Schlumberger paid \$400,000/year</li> <li>• Tax base supported by age-restricted housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schlumberger equates to loss of \$300,000 in personal property tax to the town</li> <li>• High tax rates - residents want to pay lower taxes</li> </ul>
<b>Availability of Supplies, Support Services and Sub-contractors</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of business infrastructure (businesses supporting other businesses)</li> <li>• Few good places to stay</li> </ul>

EVALUATION TOPIC	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><b>Business Climate</b> (Regulations and procedures, imposed costs by government)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actual experience with P&amp;Z is better than how it is perceived</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perception in business community that P&amp;Z is inflexible and not friendly to business and is a hurdle (3)</li> <li>Need more specific design guidelines (3)</li> <li>Perception is Ridgefield is too tough &amp; arbitrary – over-regulated (2)</li> <li>Uncertainty with P&amp;Z – and a time tax for business</li> <li>P&amp;Z working without a long-term community supported plan</li> <li>Review process is more than what some developers want to go through</li> <li>Environment for real estate development is not good</li> <li>Citizens don't want development</li> <li>Historically community has not supported development</li> <li>Powerful elderly voice (typically anti-development)</li> <li>Can't build any higher</li> <li>Need better support for landlords</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capital Availability, Incentives and Business Assistance Programs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots of banks (3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town hasn't invested in tax abatements/need incentives (3)</li> <li>Need tax abatements for landlords who push first floor retail</li> </ul>
<p><b>Public Services and Facilities</b> (Police, fire, recreation and other services provided by local government)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excellent new recreation center</li> <li>Excellent outdoor recreation opportunities</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fine school system (2)</li> <li>Good part of home value is in the school system</li> </ul>	

EVALUATION TOPIC	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><b>Quality of Life Factors</b> (Crime, housing availability and cost, recreational and cultural opportunities, shopping, climate, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of disasters in town</li> <li>• Low crime levels</li> <li>• Quality of life in general</li> <li>• Exemplary open space</li> <li>• Mix of housing availability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some primary entrance routes are unsightly (3)</li> <li>• Regional housing a problem</li> <li>• High cost of living – perception that it is getting worse</li> <li>• Housing an issue for bringing youth back to town</li> <li>• No local hospital (but good medical services)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other Topics</b></p>		
<p><b>Town Character</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P&amp;Z continues to preserve</li> <li>• Natural beauty</li> <li>• Protected from major highways</li> <li>• Big success in the residential business</li> <li>• Character of Town Center</li> <li>• Small retail[ers]</li> <li>• Attractiveness is in town’s centrality</li> <li>• Ridgefield shouldn’t try to be something it’s not – we are residential!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many downtown stores don’t sell what local people want/need (3)</li> <li>• Must define what Ridgefield wants to look like 10-15 years from now (2)</li> <li>• Developers attempt to blackmail P&amp;Z by threatening affordable housing is the don’t get what they want (2)</li> <li>• Need more specific design guidelines (2)</li> <li>• No economic development plan. Town doesn’t have a clearly-defined vision for business attraction/“what the town wants to become” (tech, science, health care) (2)</li> <li>• No “connection from here to there” with cohesive public spaces in town/and with types of retail</li> <li>• Limited big box retail (few anchor stores)</li> <li>• Town should encourage diversity in types of development</li> <li>• Difference of opinion on adequacy of downtown parking and circulation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leadership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong political leadership &amp; political will</li> <li>• No major issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many complaints about P&amp;Z/Town permit and approval process (see Business Climate)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Miscellaneous</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple/high number of executives/CEOs live in town (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate coordination of multiple organizations focused on pieces of economic development (3)</li> <li>• Need more B&amp;Bs/lodging (2)</li> <li>• EDC website is poorly positioned and developed</li> <li>• Hard to market our way out of the problem</li> <li>• Create more shopping options</li> </ul>



## Economic Development Competitive Realities

As part of identifying the economic development potentials and needs of your community, and carrying out a program that capitalizes on your potentials and meets your needs, it is necessary to understand the broader context in which current economic development occurs. Economic development is a continually evolving process and discipline. How it occurs today is much different than how it occurred as recently as five years ago. It is important to understand some of the key philosophies and trends upon which modern economic development is dependent:

### Economic Development Is Extremely Competitive

Conway Data Inc.'s New Corporate Facilities and Expansions Database reports that nationwide in 2008, there were 4,425 project announcements (new construction and expansions for manufacturing, distribution, offices, R&D, and mixed-use facilities) that met any of 3 tests: an investment of at least \$1 million, 50 or more employees, or a facility of 20,000 square feet or larger. The 2008 activity was a slight decline from 2007 (4,888 projects), but was 65% below 2000 when there were 12,529 such announcements.

Activity in Connecticut since 2000 has been:

Year	New Mfg	Mfg Expand	Other	Total
2000	0	1	7	8
2001	6	2	4	12
2002	11	7	39	57
2003	2	2	3	7
2004	7	1	18	26
2005	3	1	10	14
2006	4	6	7	17
2007	3	1	7	11
2008	3	2	6	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>163</b>

Over this nine year period, Connecticut has claimed only .25% of the total 64,336 projects in the United States.

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According to The Wadley-Donovan Group, Ltd., one of the nation's most active site location consultants (based in Edison, New Jersey) on average each year there are only 2,200 to 2,400 new (as opposed to expansions) manufacturing and office facilities employing 20 or more announced in the US. These projects represent both new facilities and relocations. This level of activity is currently down 60±% from normal.

There are an estimated 15,000 – 18,000 economic development organizations in the United States competing for these projects. In other words, in the United States alone, there are at least 6 times as many economic development agencies as there are new projects of substantial size announced annually. Many of these locations have master-planned business parks intended to attract those projects. The competition to attract the capital investment and jobs brought by business locations is fierce.

## **Avoiding Elimination**

Due to the abundance of locational opportunities, the site selection process relies on an initial phase that emphasizes rapid elimination of regions and communities so as to reduce to a workable number the areas to be studied in detail. Companies in a search mode begin by evaluating regions; if they like a region, they will consider the individual communities in it. Even the smallest regional or community flaw can result in elimination. Critical regional and community attributes currently are:

- Essential community/regional data available from an easily navigable website and the ability to quickly produce customized reports
- Adequate labor supplies and skills
- An inventory of available, fully serviced sites and buildings
- A friendly business climate and expedited permit and approval procedures
- Incentives and assistance programs
- A business climate that shows the community is seriously interested in the project.

There are many other variables evaluated, and different industry sectors and companies will have their own set of priorities, but those listed above are usually the most important to most companies.

Companies already in a community, but in need of new space, will also consider these and other factors, and compare their current community with alternative locations.

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## **Speed Has Become Essential**

The duration of the typical site location process has been cut in half from 5 – 10 years ago. The Wadley-Donovan Group reports that the typical time frame for larger projects now allows 6 to 8 weeks from the beginning of the process to the selection of the “preferred” community, and another 6 to 8 weeks to have a site under control. These companies would like to receive all local permits and approvals within a 14 day time frame (with 7 days preferred) and all state permits and approvals within a 45 day period (30 days is preferred). Smaller companies may have longer time frames, but delay is still a project killer. Connecticut’s statutory requirements make the entire state less competitive than other states with the ability to expedite the permit and approval process. Communities like Ridgefield must do what they can to overcome this problem.

## **Staff Empowerment to Expedite Projects**

Due to this need for expeditious project processing, an increasing number of communities are responding by creating clear land use regulations and empowering staff to issue necessary permits and approvals when projects are found to be in full compliance with regulations after careful review. While our ability to do this is severely limited in Connecticut, nonetheless, competitive communities are constantly evaluating their project approval procedures in order to streamline them.

## **Available Sites and Buildings are Essential**

Between 65% and 75% of all prospects conducting a site search begin looking for an existing building into which they can move quickly. In most states, about 50% of projects that actually occur use existing buildings. Again, this is a function of the need for speed. This puts a premium on having available both vacant space and fully serviced sites on which construction can begin immediately and be completed in a short time frame. The majority of companies are unwilling to wait for a community or private land owner to debate whether to help make a site ready, prepare designs, commit financing and undertake infrastructure construction. There are too many other communities already fully prepared. If you are not ready, you lose.

## **You Must Be Aggressive**

For some time now we have been in an era of a “global jobs auction”. Companies have jobs to offer (and the capital investment and tax revenues that comes with them) and can put them in a multitude of locations. Ridgefield competes not only with neighboring communities, but with

locations in other states, and places such as Barbados, Ireland and India as well. It is a buyers' market, and communities are both the sellers and the commodity being sold. Having an adequate inventory of available buildings and sites and a website targeted at business prospects are two common community responses. Increasingly, communities are also creating aggressive incentive and assistance packages and comprehensive informational databases in order to increase community competitiveness. The work is being done before the prospect arrives – not after.

## **Home Occupations Have Become More Important**

For more than the past decade, there has been an entrepreneurial explosion occurring. Annually more than 1 million new businesses are created in the US (source: Dun & Bradstreet; some sources say as many as 2 million), and beginning in 1997, for the first time more than half were home-based. A report prepared for the Small Business Administration in 2004 found that as many as 68% of new proprietorships, partnerships and S-Corporations were home-based. This trend, expected to continue, makes the availability of reasonable home occupation regulations important, which requires a periodic review of those regulations. Regulations should include a registration process to assure that the host community receives applicable tax revenues. This trend has also led to a growth in “incubator without walls” programs.

## **The Changing Nature of Retailing**

Retailing as we have known it continues to change. Many communities are experiencing a decline in the vitality of older shopping areas. Communities are being impacted by many regional and national trends, which have been exacerbated by the current recession:

- Overbuilding of retail space has resulted in increased retail competition, retailer bankruptcies and increased vacancy rates. The International Council of Shopping Centers estimates that retail space in the United States increased from 29 square feet per capita in the 1970-1979 decade to 40.5 square feet per capita in 2004-05, with more under construction. Some estimates put the US supply of retail space at more than 50 square feet per capita.
- Department store consolidations have caused store closures in commercial centers where sales were below par and where similar merchandise was offered.
- Catalogue and Internet shopping are reducing sales in traditional retail establishments.
- Big box and category killer stores have caused closures and bankruptcies among local stores and smaller store chains that cannot match their prices and promotional budgets. This has resulted in fewer tenants for shopping centers and more competition for those fewer tenants.
- Bankruptcies and closures within the big box category (e.g. Kmart, Caldors, Ames, Linens 'n Things, Circuit City) have created large blocks of vacant space that are being used for non-

retail purposes. Call centers are a common use, but this space lends itself to other uses. (Two former Kmart stores in Lee County, Florida have been purchased by the County for conversion into schools. *National Real Estate Investor*, February 2004. A 2008 article in the International Economic Development Council's *Economic Development Now* newsletter discussed the conversion of under-performing malls into medical malls in Prince George's County, Maryland and other places.)

- Big box developers such as Home Depot, Wal-Mart and Best Buy have been developing smaller stores (40,000 – 50,000 square feet) for smaller population centers. Other chains such as Target, Kohl's and Toys R Us are expected to follow this trend. (*Newsweek*, June 3, 2002)
- Retail establishments are seeking to cluster in larger, master-planned and coordinated environments to draw larger numbers of shoppers and then pass them among multiple stores. Lifestyle centers (defined as "an open-air design with upscale architecture and a critical mass of specialty retailers and restaurants" are generating between 20 – 50% more per square foot than stores in older U.S. malls. (*National Real Estate Investor*, July 1, 2003; *CNN/Money*, January 12, 2005 )
- Entertainment retailing is intended to give shoppers an experience beyond just the purchase of goods. Usually this requires larger amounts of space. The Mall of America in Minnesota is the most famous. The DestiNY USA project in Syracuse is planned to contain over 5 million square feet, have more than 400 stores, restaurants and entertainment venues, and contain a 100,000 square foot tourism exposition center. Although the project has been slow to gain traction for full development, a 1 million square foot first phase started construction in 2007.
- Grocery stores are expanding in size and drugstores are moving toward larger freestanding stores. Wal-Mart is experimenting with freestanding 40,000 square foot grocery stores. A 2007 ICSC email newsletter reported that "Wal-Mart Stores is working on a smaller-store concept, partly to counter the U.S. arrival of British grocer Tesco, sources report. The new locations are described as convenience stores located in urban areas that would sell groceries that appeal to a wealthy consumer base -- and have a footprint less than a tenth of the size of Wal-Mart's supercenters."
- Chain restaurants are proliferating, causing more competition for local restaurants.

## **E-Commerce is Changing the Need for Space**

A common fear is that the expansion of electronic commerce will cause a significant reduction in the demand for space. While this may be true at the retail end of the chain as more people buy more goods without visiting a store, the opposite is occurring at the distribution end. More e-commerce vendors are requiring increasing amounts of order fulfillment space, scattered in a variety of locations. Many of these facilities do not need high bay space for racking systems – rather, they need large footprint space with sophisticated conveyor, sorting and shipping systems. Many older, low ceiling manufacturing or retail buildings are ideal for conversion into this type of use. E-commerce fulfillment facilities also frequently employ more workers than

traditional distribution warehouses. The current state of e-commerce is one of rapid change, and perhaps turmoil.

## **The Global Job Market is Changing the Need for Space**

The emergence of strong employment areas in other countries will have an impact on the amount of space U.S. companies need. While no one can project with certainty how many jobs will be moved offshore, "guesstimates put the exodus at anywhere from 300,000 to 600,000 jobs annually." (*Newsweek*, March 1, 2004) However, the rate of increase in offshoring is rapidly rising. "In 2002, Forrester Research predicted 3.3 million U.S. tech jobs might migrate overseas by 2015. When economists at the University of California, Berkeley, rechecked the numbers last fall [2003], they concluded that a staggering 14 million positions could be at risk." (*Newsweek*, March 1, 2004) It is not just technical jobs that are leaving the U.S. A.T. Kearney projects 500,000 jobs in the financial services sector will relocate overseas in the next 5 years. Forrester Research estimates that 4,000 engineering, programming and accounting jobs will leave the U.S. each week. "If we look at the loss of jobs estimated by A.T. Kearney and Forrester Research, they equate to approximately 54,000,000 square feet of corporate office space that will either be vacated or unneeded per year." (*Area Development Magazine*, February 2004) All these factors are currently being exacerbated by the weak US economy. Escalating fuel prices caused a short-term rethinking about offshoring, but this diminished considerably when crude oil prices came back down.

## **Other Trends Impacting Space Needs and Facility Locations**

However, there are counter-trends as well.

- The weakness of the dollar has encouraged "in-sourcing" – the attraction of foreign investment for facilities (and employment) in the United States.
- Customer service dissatisfaction with overseas call centers and similar operations has caused firms like Dell Computers to rethink the cost-benefit relationship of moving these operations overseas resulting in "back-shoring".
- Higher fuel prices are changing the perceived ideal proximity among suppliers, producers, distributors, customers and labor supply.

## **Non-Metro Areas Are Losing Ground to Metro Areas**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (*Rural America at a Glance* 2006 and 2008 Editions), while some non-metro areas are experiencing population growth, it is slower than

metro areas and skewed toward older age groups. The majority of all non-metro counties declined in population between 2000 and 2006 and the total non-metro area population in the U.S grew at an annual rate of 0.4% in that period compared to a 1.1% annual growth rate in metro areas. While the Hispanic population continues to grow in non-metro areas, the rate of growth has dropped considerably since the 1990s.

The 2006 USDA report notes that “The nonmetro economy continues to lag behind the metro economy, in part because the nonmetro economy is more dependent on manufacturing.” It further notes “The current trend suggests a return to the longstanding pattern of limited job growth in manufacturing amid robust growth in the rest of the economy. Given this historical pattern, it is unlikely that non-metro employment will return to pre-2000 levels.” This trend has been curtailed by the current recession, but is expected to return in time.

## **Education is Needed to Overcome Community Concerns**

Modern business facilities are vastly different from their predecessors. Architectural design, building code requirements and performance standards all aim at making business buildings and operations more attractive and better neighbors. Frequently, community hesitation to committing to more economic development is a reflection of a deserved dissatisfaction with the negative consequences of older projects. Community education is often a necessity to demonstrate that these kinds of negatives are no longer likely under the community’s current regulations, policies and procedures.

## **Think—and Behave—Entrepreneurially**

Economic development is one of the few areas of community expenditure where a return-on-investment can – and should – be expected. Across the country, communities are increasingly thinking and behaving entrepreneurially. They are willing to make strategic investments in projects or the community infrastructure necessary to obtain and support company expansions and locations, with the calculated expectation that this investment will reap the jobs, tax base and quality of life improvements the community desires. Increasingly, communities are investing in projects located outside their boundaries and being compensated like private developers. Often these projects are joint ventures by multiple governmental units.

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## **Community Preparation is Paramount**

In the world of economic development, communities (or regions) are commodities. Companies select locations based on how well the location meets the company's needs – not based on how aggressive and sophisticated the area's marketing program is. While a thrust of the Ridgefield's economic development program may be to position the community for an aggressive marketing effort, community leadership and residents must recognize that the community is a product in a highly competitive marketplace, and you must constantly strive to make necessary product improvements. Some of these improvements will be physical in nature; some will be procedural; and some will require additional planning.

## **Community Image and Attitude Can Make or Break You**

Every resident of Ridgefield is a member of the community's marketing team – but business executives rely on other sources of information in forming their opinions of an area's business climate. A 2008 survey by Development Counsellors International (DCI – New York, NY) reported that corporate executives use dialogue with industry peers (61%), articles in newspapers and magazines (53%) and business travel (42%) as the leading sources of information influencing their perception of a state's and region's business climate. (These same factors have consistently ranked as the top 3, in varying order in earlier DCI surveys in 2005, 2002, 1999 and 1996.) A positive image and attitude can be an important marketing tool – a negative image and attitude can be a huge obstacle. Understanding how businesspeople in Ridgefield feel about it as a location for business must be an essential – and ongoing – element of your economic development preparation and marketing efforts.