

Milford Outreach Meeting Minutes
Milford Economic Development Commission
October 24, 2012

Attendance: Mark Bender (Milford Planning and Zoning Board-Chair), John O'Neil (Milford EDC), Bob Gregory (Milford Director of Economic Development), Cyrus Settineri (Milford EDC-Chair), Joseph Agro (Milford Board of Finance), Bob Stanton (Milford EDC), Rick Scinto (New Haven Register), Susan Patrick (Milford EDC), Ginny Kozlowski (REX), Will Warren (REX)

Meeting was called to order at 8:19 a.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Introductions were given from the group. *Ginny Kozlowski* thanked the group for allowing REX to attend the meeting, and then introduced *Will Warren* (REX). She continued by explaining the purpose and background of the CEDS process and that REX was there to gather input from the committee.

2. Overview and Purpose of Meeting

G. Kozlowski prefaced the meeting by stating that the most important part was to hear from Milford representation and to get input in regards to economic strengths and challenges in the region. She continued by providing a brief overview of the CEDS, its background and why REX is doing outreach to all 15 municipalities in the region.

3. REX Background

G. Kozlowski explained that REX Development was created in 1996 by the South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG) as the economic development arm of the SCRCOG and for the region. She described REX as a regional collaborator and driver of economic strategy with the purpose of improving the economic vitality for the entire region. She explained the region was the same footprint as the SCRCOG, made up of 15 municipalities in the region, and used a map to show the region and its robust transportation network.

4. Synopsis of Prior CEDS

G. Kozlowski explained that the previous/current CEDS (from 2008) had 6 goals and 16 objectives and she briefly discussed the 6 goals. She also mentioned the executive summary booklet of the 2008 CEDS that had been distributed to the group.

5. Key Achievements/Success Stories

G. Kozlowski explained that over the past five years (through the CEDS) the region has been recognized as a State Regional Economic Development District (REDD) and a federal Economic Development District (EDD). She explained that as a result of the designations, all 15 municipalities are now eligible for federal EDA funding, where previously it was just the distressed municipalities in

the region (currently Meriden, New Haven and West Haven). She explained that there was currently \$1.5 million in EDA funding pending. She continued by describing four success stories over the past couple of years: West Haven-West River Crossing project; New Haven-River Street Redevelopment/Bulkhead project; Hamden-Goodrich/Daisy project; and Branford-Atlantic Wire project, all of which received federal funding and leveraged millions in private investment in the region.

6. Presentation of Key Findings/Data

G. Kozlowski gave a brief demographic/economic overview of Milford and the region. She explained how Milford compared to the region demographically, and how Milford was effected regionally in terms of workforce, employment and revenue. She also explained the sector breakdown in employment in the region and the relative strengths of the regional sectors compared to the State and Nation.

7. Discussion and Input

G. Kozlowski finished the presentation by asking questions of the group.

Question 1: *G. Kozlowski* asked the group what their vision was for Milford and the region in regard to economic development and if they were compatible.

- It was discussed that the maturity of Milford stifles further development;
- Milford is thought to be highly developed, with a typical indicator being housing, no housing left to develop (last housing boom was in the 90's);
- There are several corridors of big box retail in Milford;
- Construction and renovations have been down in Milford since the recessionary period, however, commercial rental has been decent;
- Downtown has been a major focus for the vision of Milford, however, there still needs to be a push to improve;
- Real Estate is a key industry in Milford, 400 houses for sale with a spill-over effect being jobs;
- There seems to be apparent distressed housing;
- There needs to be a focus on commercial development, both existing and construction; Developers have shown interest; There seems to be a lot of underutilized property, which needs to be a focus;
- There was a discussion around Stamford versus Milford and the younger interest in working in Stamford; There was a discussion that the younger population working in Stamford should/could choose to live in Milford, however, there still was a desire to attract commercial development in Milford as Stamford has done;
- It was discussed that Milford's major industries were spread throughout the town and that downtown was not the HUB;
- It was also discussed that in the plan for conservation and development, Milford wanted to preserve the small town atmosphere;

- There was a desire and vision for corporate office space, with potential for a corporate campus style environment;
- There was a discussion around open space and redevelopment, specifically a commitment to open space;
- There was also discussion around an increased rental property base with an addition of 500 apartments, with a target for downtown.

Question 2: *G. Kozlowski* asked about the strengths, weaknesses and obstacles in regard to economic development in Milford and the region.

- Strengths identified were location and a strong rail, highway, parks and water system (including proximity to the coast);
- Mixed use development was considered a strength;
- Rental prices, although fairly expensive for adjacent locations (between \$1600 and \$1800) it is still well below that of Boston and New York City; Renters and household income was also higher and thought to be a strength;
- Lower price for commercial space;
- Metro-North rail was a major strength, as well as transportation in general; also, there is a considerably strong auto retail hub in Milford;
- The downtown area of Milford was thought to be an extreme positive and strength, as well as accessible beaches;
- Some weaknesses identified were workforce issues, including lack of qualified employees in the manufacturing industry, both regional and state wide;
- There was an identified need for workforce training.
- Some stated opportunities were the expansion of manufacturing;
- Strong defense and automobile industries;
- The expansion and marketing of Metro-North was seen as a key asset and opportunity;
- Developing the west side of the green in downtown for mixed use development (as identified in the plan for conservation and development);
- The expansion of Yale into West Haven was seen as a potential opportunity for Milford;
- TWEED was seen as a highly underutilized asset that could be seen as an opportunity;
- Milford Hospital was seen as an opportunity for growth.
- Some threats identified were the size of the buildings in the downtown area, most of which are under 3,000 square feet;
- The location of the courthouse being downtown was thought to be somewhat of an obstacle, considering the space could be used for mixed use development;
- Parking for commuters was seen as a slight obstacle;
- Little land left for the growth of existing industries;
- Although also considered a strength for commuters, the proximity of Stamford was seen as a threat in attracting commercial activity in Milford.

Question 3: *G. Kozlowski* asked what roles the group saw for the public and private sectors in promoting economic development.

- Leveraged investment was seen as a role for the private sector, making a majority of the investment from private sector;
- Working together in key growth partnerships, such as the expansion of Yale Hospital and the development of TWEED.

Question 4: *G. Kozlowski* asked what measurements are true indicators of economic growth or decline.

- Employment (economic health of business);
- Housing;
- Jobs;
- Although the grand list was often thought of as an indicator, it can be misleading;
- Age of housing;
- Age of automobiles.

Questions 5: *G. Kozlowski* asked how we all can work together to make the region more competitive.

- A major key identified in working together regionally was through marketing of the region;
- It was stated that Milford is tied into the success of Fairfield County;
- Some felt that Milford didn't need collaboration and didn't feel much was needed in the regard to regionalization; It was thought that Milford was very distinct and unique;
- It was stated, however, that Milford needed regional support in regards to retail and being a travel destination;
- The hospitals were thought to be regional, but Milford needed a more vibrant medical facility;
- There wasn't a real vital urban area in the region, no destination location; New Haven was seen as the urban area, but too crime laden and unsafe; Funds should be focused on developing a more vibrant urban area.

8. Future Action and Ideas

It was discussed for future comment that the members could go to the REX website, or wait until the first CEDS draft and provide comment then.

The meeting concluded at 9:41 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert B. Gregory