

Appendix B: Public Participation

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Focus Group Summaries

Real Estate Focus Group Synopsis

2/15/2017

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd., Wilton, Connecticut

Participants

Name	Affiliation
Moderator: Hal Kurfehs	VP Coldwell Banker
George Walker	Advantage Realty
Greg Steiner	Berkshire Corporate Park
Jeff Ryer	Ryer Commercial Real Estate
Kathy Castagnetta	Town Planner
Kevin Bielmeier	Town of New Milford
Winthrop (Win) Baum	CEO WEB Realty Co./WEB Construction Team
John Hannigan	Choyce Peterson, Inc.
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Bryan Atherton	Atherton & Associates
Steve Obsitnik	Imagine CT
Beth Chappel	CBRE
Elizabeth Esposito	WestCOG
Will Kenny	WestCOG

The Region Since 2008

- Development has stalled in the State but there has been some regional improvement
- People are leaving CT
- Fairfield County is on “life-support.” It is only surviving because of spill-over from New York City.

State Taxes, Spending, & Policy

- **Taxes are too high.**
- Spending is not productive.
- “Tax policy guides investment policy,” and CT’s is focusing on the wrong things.
- State offices do not work in the best interest of WestCOG municipalities.
- Disconnect between Fairfield County and Hartford
- One party rule has led to stagnant ideas

Permitting

- Ease of permitting process affects commercial investment.
- State permitting is slower than local in most cases.
- Local permitting process is often not predictable. Companies like predictability.

Changing Market

- Many companies now want smaller and/or shared office spaces, demand has fallen, vacancy rate has increased.
- Young People and Retirees want to live in walkable communities.
- Employers want employees to use transit.

Population Retention

- Increase downtown density, create focus on transit-oriented development.
- Create workforce and incentive housing zones
- Create entry level jobs with opportunities for growth
- Stamford is a leader in keeping young talent
- Student loan burdens, high cost of living, and poor job market has resulted in a high number of talented CT educated “Millennials” to either stay out of state after college, or leave the state.
- Older residents are leaving for states with lower cost of living; specially states with lower income tax burdens.

Transportation

- CT ranked longest commute time compared to other states.
- Danbury and Stamford need to be better connected
 - Super 7, electrify Danbury Branch
- Connection to NYC is vital
- Traffic and slow/infrequent rail service impede growth
 - Improve the I-95/New Haven line corridor

High Cost of Living

- Cost of electrical utilities too high
- Housing cost is too high

Negative Narrative

- Self-perpetuated negative image of the state as unfriendly to business
- Success stories are buried while failures are over exaggerated

Regional Strengths

- Fairfield County is the only county in the State with population growth.
- Educated workforce at a good value
- People speak without accents, compared to immediate neighbors and international competition, which is attractive to call centers and customer service providers.
- Quality of life.
- There are success stories, notably in aerospace and manufacturing
- High quality aquifers
- Weather is mild. 4-seasons and few severe storms
- Some attractive housing for young professionals and retirees is being built.

Small Business I Focus Group Synopsis
2/22/2017
Held at Sacred Heart Branch Campus
3 Landmark Square, Stamford, Connecticut

Participants

Name	Affiliation
Moderator: Tom Long	The WorkPlace
Gary Alfano	CT Procurement Technical Assistance Program
Edie Monroy	Strategy Leaders
Jacqueline Wetenhall	Stamford Downtown
Greg Lindquist	Stamford Downtown
Nora Taylor	Taylor Design
Jeff Coombs	Supporting Strategies - Stamford
Kathy DeCruze	Martin DeCruze & Company CPA Firm
Richard McKnight	The McKnight Group
Jonathan Ochsner	New York Life
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Elizabeth Esposito	WestCOG
Will Kenny	WestCOG

Transportation and Traffic

- Resynchronize stoplights
- Traffic is a bad impression for incoming clients, as well as businesses looking to come to the area
- Generational shift away from long commutes and towards "walkable" commutes and better public transportation

Recruiting and Retaining Employees

- Longer and engaging interview periods
- Using personality tests as part of application/interview process
- Selecting applications that have a good attitude and ability to learn
- High cost of living, rent, and student loan burdens make it difficult for many young professionals to choose jobs in the region
- Employers like to hire interns on full time, internships are an opportunity to educate and evaluate employees.

Support for Small Businesses

- Small business owners are looking for guidance on issues ranging from human resources, payroll, legal, and bureaucratic processes

- Parking vouchers for small business employees. Train vouchers to encourage public transportation over driving
- Networking and skill sharing events
- Training to help businesses grow, i.e. How to be competitive in contract bidding process

Barriers of Entry for New Small Businesses

- Permitting process timeline is often unpredictable. Businesses cannot afford to sit unopened for months, some businesses don't survive
- Rent is high for office space and store fronts. Real estate costs are too high to purchase, despite high vacancy rates as businesses shift to needing less office space per employee
- Banks are hesitant to lend without real estate collateral
- There is a need for the Small Business Administration to lend more with low or no interest
- Exempt new businesses from paying business entity tax for first year or two

Business Incentive for Community Action

- Tax credits for updating and maintaining facades and open spaces
- Tax credits for businesses who host STEM training for high school students
- Support businesses who hire interns and apprentices

Advanced Manufacturing Focus Group Synopsis

2/27/2017

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd., Wilton, Connecticut

Participants

Name	Affiliation
Moderator: Elizabeth Stocker	Director of Economic Development, City of Norwalk
Kevin Bielmeier	Town of New Milford, Economic Development Director
Martha Yaney	Vista Group International, Inc.
Tony D'Andrea	Select Plastics LLC
Eddie Monroy	Strategy Leaders
Peter Riffel	ASML
Don Balducci	CT Center for Advanced Technology
Karen Wosczyzna-Birch	CT College of Technology/ Regional Center for Next Generation Manufacturing
Wendy Robicheau	CT College of Technology/ Regional Center for Next Generation Manufacturing
Elizabeth Esposito	WestCOG
Will Kenny	WestCOG

Labor & Employees

- Employees, especially those with niche skills, are becoming harder to find
- The “silver tsunami” is already here; large portion of manufacturing employees are retiring and there are few younger employees to replace them
- Younger generations have not been exposed to manufacturing or trade skill at an early age and are unable make informed choices on that career path
- Many businesses are only now learning to market themselves and recruit talent, especially digitally
- Employers value the region’s diversity and commitment to education
- Manufacturers can benefit from rebranding and marketing manufacturing differently; including key components like entrepreneurship, technology, coding, and advancements in industrial hygiene

Business Support

- There is a need for industry and location-based peer groups in CT with manufacturers can network and strengthen their supply chain.
- There is a need for a digital directory of buyers and sellers, goods and services.
- CT manufacturers need to aggregate their expertise.

- Business owners want the opportunity to meet and network with other manufacturers in the area to learn what imports can be sourced regionally, share experiences and best practices, and to build stronger sense of community.

Transportation

- Highway congestion inhibits the flow of goods and raises costs for the manufacturer and the distributor, making the product more expensive overall.
- Transit to and from job centers is critical to attract and retain employees.

High Cost of Living

- The cost of utilities is too high.
- Housing costs are very high, making it difficult to recruit and retain talent from out of region

Negative Narratives

- Negative image of manufacturing as dirty, “lesser” work
- False perception that manufacturing is dead and never coming back
- Industry is being “zoned out” of towns
- Narrative that the state is unfriendly to business

Regional Strengths

- Funding and grants are available for employers to take on interns and apprentices
- CT Colleges are offering training in skills needed for manufacturers, especially valuable are 1 year certificates and associate degree programs through community colleges
- Region has communities people want to live in and maintain
- Currently skilled and educated workforce
- Employers value the region’s diversity and commitment to education

Small Business II Focus Group Synopsis
3/7/2017
Held at the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce
39 West Street, Danbury, Connecticut

Participants

Name	Affiliation
Moderator: Hal Kurfehs	VP Coldwell Banker
Moderator: Lisa Scails	Executive Director, Cultural Alliance of Western CT
Bruce Treidel	Bethel Music Center
Michael Sauvageau	Noteworthy Chocolates
Meagan Cann	Workspace Collective
Sarah Roy	Danbury High School
Ardonyx Day	UpDesign Media
Mary E. Larew	Danbury Music Centre
Dawn Kaam	William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty
Chuck Woerner	Fairfield County Bank
Virginia DeCristoforo	Innovation Center
Stephen Bull	President, Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce
Elizabeth Esposito	WestCOG
Will Kenny	WestCOG

High Cost of Doing Business

- Healthcare
- Rent
- Workers' Comp.
- Liability and Other Insurance
- CT used to benefit from being cheaper than NY and MA but the difference has shrunk

Public Policy

- Many governments and institutions in CT do not have “buy local” preference in their purchasing policies like in other states.
- Inconsistency in government policy – projects are wanted one day but not the next.
- Town to town the permitting process is different.
- Chief elected official of the town sets the tone about businesses friendliness

For Startups

- The initial access to capital is a major constraint
- Banks do not want to finance a new business – it is too risky
- Where is the support between kickstarter and bankability?
- Knowledge of funding opportunities and of prospective employee resources is limited
- There is a need for a “clearinghouse” of funding resources

Other Barriers to Growth

- Lack of awareness of business support
- Time is limited for businesses with few employees and sole proprietors
- Educating consumers and marketing
- Engaging with consumers across language and cultural barriers
- Competition from companies in other states and much larger companies.
- CT has a bad reputation

Professional Development

- The day to day of running a business (accounting, taxes, payroll) takes away from the core competency
- Workshop and classes are needed in business accounting and financing i.e. QuickBooks and taxes
- Classes on marketing and new technologies

Regional Strengths

- Beautiful
- Diverse
- Large wealthy population with disposable income creating a demand for specialty goods
- Accessible to NYC by rail
- Low cost for tech businesses
- Strong avenues for business networking and community engagement
- Population is highly educated and creative
- Local youth provide cheap labor with needed skills

Creative Economy Focus Group Synopsis
3/23/2017
Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd., Wilton, Connecticut

Participants

Name	Affiliation
Moderator: Jackie Lightfield	Stamford Partnership, Norwalk 2.0
Moderator: Lisa Scails	Executive Director, Cultural Alliance of Western CT
Kevin Bielmeier	Economic Development Director, Town of New Milford
Dan Taylor	Taylor Design
Elizabeth Esposito	WestCOG
Will Kenny	WestCOG

High Cost of Doing Business/Living

- Rent
- Utilities
- Housing

Public Policy

- State and local zoning inhibits live music, “boutique manufacturing,” and hybrid businesses like brewpubs.
- Disconnect between Hartford and Fairfield County
- Required teaching certificates prevent industry professionals from giving instruction in public schools
- State is not openly endorsing the creative economy

Markets

- Density of businesses to be clients for professional services art (i.e. branding and digital marketing) because of NYC and Boston location
- Global competition with the internet to provide services
- Internet platforms like Etsy enable a hybrid model of a brick and mortar and online business
- Hybrid business models and cohabitation are catching on

Other Barriers to Growth

- In NYC’s shadow when attracting young talent
- Region lacks a business network identity compared to NYC and Hartford
- Aging and family oriented population that wants a certain lifestyle
- Transportation congestion
- Lack of visual communication and signage
- Lack of historic markers
- Arts are not currently being used to stimulate tourism and vibrancy

Regional Strengths

- Quality of life/livability
- Proximity to NYC and rail access
- Great business support ecosystem
- Stamford and Norwalk have lifestyle young professionals want
- Video/ Visual industry with NBC, WWE, and UConn digital media program
 - UConn program turns out good value interns and graduates
- Makerspaces provided needed service to startups

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Tech Focus Group Synopsis
3/24/2017
Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, Connecticut

Participants

Name	Affiliation
Moderator: Valeria Bisceglia	CT Small Business Development Center
Moderator: Thomas Madden	Director of Economic Development, City of Stamford
Jim McKenna	CertaScan Technologies
Jennifer Hawthorne	CertaScan Technologies
Gary Alfano	CT Procurement Technical Assistance Program
Patty Meaghan	CT Small Business Development Center
Gordon Baird	Baird Partners
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Brenda Lewis	Transactions Marketing Inc.
David Campbell	TaxCloud
Elizabeth Esposito	WestCOG
Will Kenny	WestCOG

High Cost of Doing Business

- Rent
 - Landlords do not want to break up large spaces
 - Leases are too long for the rate of “young” Tech company growth
- High Cost of Living and Housing
 - More creative housing solutions need to be allowed to thrive.
- Transportation (time and money)

Public Policy

- **There is a lack of coordination between all levels of government and the private sector**
- There is a disconnect between Fairfield County and Hartford
- Sales Tax code is confusing and revenue opportunities are being missed
- Programs for funding are not marketed well
- Completing applications for funding is onerous
 - A “common app” would help alleviate.
- CT is no longer supporting seed-stage businesses
- Regulations although necessary are cumbersome and confusing

Business Support Resources

- Marketing and promotion needed for state and federal opportunities
- Difficult to communicate with businesses; municipalities and other resources cannot access a master list of active businesses held by DRS

- Need to educate businesses on what the regulations are, why they are necessary, and how they can improve a business
- There is a need for a common calendar of industry events
- Local colleges and universities should develop programs of study which prepare students for employment opportunities specific to the region as well as retraining

Workforce

- Colleges in the Region are not preparing workers with skills needed for many niche tech firms
- High cost of living in the Region is a barrier for recruiting young talent
- Many bankers do not have the skills for the changing banking market
- Retraining programs are no longer available
- NYC and Boston are much more appealing locations for employers and employees
- Opportunity to utilize interns as a benefit to the business and an opportunity to train the new workforce
- Recruiting talent takes too much time and opportunities are not advertised

Infrastructure

- Trains are too slow, run too infrequently
- Traffic and congestion are major weaknesses
- There is a need for FINRA and HIPPA compliant broadband
- Cost of utilities is too high considering the electrical needs to servers for tech firms

Strengths

- Connection to NYC
- Selection of multiple international airports with low fares
 - Direct Amtrak service from Stamford to Newark Airport
- Innovate Stamford and the Innovation Districts
- Coast is attractive to recent graduates and has a critical mass of businesses
- Lifestyle
- Easy access to beautiful and varied landscapes
- Tech ecosystem is thin in the region but unsustainable anywhere else in the state

Business Survey

Western CT Economic Strengths and Weaknesses

The Western Connecticut Region has begun the process of preparing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that will guide our region's economic development efforts over the next five years. Input from the region's business community and other interested stakeholders is an essential part of creating the plan.

This questionnaire will help the team gain a clearer understanding of the major strengths and weaknesses of the Western Connecticut Region as a place to start and operate a business, as well as what you see as the primary opportunities for economic growth.

The survey form is intended to streamline our process of information gathering by providing a simple format through which you can provide your thoughts. Do not feel that you have to fill out every question—this form is intended as a tool to make it easy for you to make notes on those areas on which you want to comment.

This survey will ask you to:

- Provide some basic information about your business.
- Evaluate various aspects of the Western Connecticut Region.
- Add additional comments.

Make sure you hit the "Submit" button on the final page!

Thank you for your time and insights!

There are 76 questions in this survey

Introduction

Information about your business

In which of these Western Connecticut communities does your business have facilities? *

Please choose all that apply:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Norwalk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bethel | <input type="checkbox"/> Redding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridgewater | <input type="checkbox"/> Ridgefield |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Danbury | <input type="checkbox"/> Sherman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Darien | <input type="checkbox"/> Stamford |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greenwich | <input type="checkbox"/> Weston |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Canaan | <input type="checkbox"/> Westport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Fairfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Wilton |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Milford | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newtown | |

What sector is your business in? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Administrative and Waste Services
- ☐ Accommodation and Food Services
- ☐ Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting
- ☐ Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Educational Services
- ☐ Finance and Insurance
- ☐ Information Services
- ☐ Management of Companies and Enterprises
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Mining
- ☐ Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- ☐ Real Estate and Rental and Leasing
- ☐ Retail Trade
- ☐ Transportation and Warehousing
- ☐ Utilities
- ☐ Wholesale Trade
- ☐ Other

How long have you had one or more facilities in any of the 18 Western CT communities?

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3 - 9 years
- ☐ 10 or more years

What is your current employee count in the 18 Western CT communities?

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Zero (self-employed)
- ☐ Less than 5
- ☐ 5 - 9
- ☐ 10 - 24
- ☐ 25 - 49
- ☐ 50 - 99
- ☐ 100 - 999
- ☐ 1,000 +

What best describes your market?

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Local
- ☐ Regional
- ☐ National
- ☐ International

Business Performance

How well would you say your business is doing?

1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

In the last 5 years, what has been your average annual percent growth?

Please write your answer here:

In the next year, by what percent is your business projected to grow?

Please write your answer here:

Business Infrastructure and Assistance Programs Business Infrastructure and Assistance Programs Evaluation (Local)

Please rate the following business infrastructure factors for the Western CT Region. 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. You may skip those that do not apply.

How do you rate the business climate in your community? 1 being poor and 5 being excellent

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

How do you rate your community's local regulations and license requirements for your business? 1 being poor and 5 being excellent

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Your community's information about local regulations or license requirements

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

How do you rate your community's (staff) assistance in complying with local regulations and license requirements? 1 being poor and 5 being excellent

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

How can you community make regulation and license compliance less of a burden for business owners like you?

Please write your answer here:

What other things can your community do to help your business?

Please write your answer here:

Do you need any of the following assistance?

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ One-on-one counselling
- ☐ Assistance in applying for loans
- ☐ In-person management training workshop
- ☐ Peer interaction (w/other business owners)
- ☐ Tax payment plan
- ☐ Regulatory compliance assistance
- ☐ Other:

Business Infrastructure and Assistance Programs Evaluation (Labor and Education)

Please rate the following business infrastructure factors for the Western CT Region. 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. You may skip those that do not apply.

Availability of skilled labor

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Cost of skilled labor compared to the value provided by that labor

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Availability of semi-skilled labor

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Cost of semi-skilled labor compared to the value provided by that labor

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Availability of unskilled labor

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Cost of unskilled labor compared to the value provided by that labor

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Quality of K-12 Educational System

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Cost of K-12 Educational System compared to the skills of the students being produced

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Quality of Post-High School Educational System

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Cost of Post-High School Educational System compared to the skills of the students being produced

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Quality of Vocational Training Programs

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Cost of Vocational Training Programs compared to the skills of the students being produced

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Quality of economic development services provided by the community or communities in which you are location in Western CT.

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Do you find it hard to find employees with the skills you need for your business? If so, what skills are missing in the local workforce?

Please write your answer here:

Other factors and comments

Please write your answer here:

Business Infrastructure and Assistance Programs Evaluation (Occupancy)

Please rate the following business infrastructure factors for the Western CT Region. 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. You may skip those that do not apply.

Available sites for business construction

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Costs sites for business construction

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Available space for business occupancy

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Costs of space for business occupancy

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Costs of improving or constructing space for business

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Ease of the local permit and approval process for construction or business operations

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Ease of the state permit and approval process for construction or business operations

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Availability of financing for construction or business operations

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Availability of business assistance and incentives

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Business Infrastructure and Assistance Programs Evaluation (Facilities)

Please rate the following business infrastructure factors for the Western CT Region. 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. You may skip those that do not apply.

Electric power cost

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Quality of advanced telecommunications services (voice and data)

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Speed of advanced telecommunication services (voice and data)

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Costs of advanced telecommunications services (voice and data)

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

Strengths and Weaknesses

The remaining questions are designed to allow you to comment on strengths and weaknesses in the Region. Please comment where applicable.

What are the top three positive things about your location in Western CT?

Please write your answer here:

What are the top three negative things about your location in Western CT?

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's strengths in regards to Access to Markets?

(How easy is it to provide products or services to customers or potential customers from a Western CT Region locations?)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to Access to Markets?
(How difficult is it to provide products or services to customers or potential customers from a Western CT Region locations?)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's strengths in regards to Transportation?
(Road, rail, airport, waterborne)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to Transportation?
(Road, rail, airport, waterborne)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's strengths in regards to Labor Force?

(Supply, skills, costs, labor relations)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to Labor Force?

(Supply, skills, costs, labor relations)

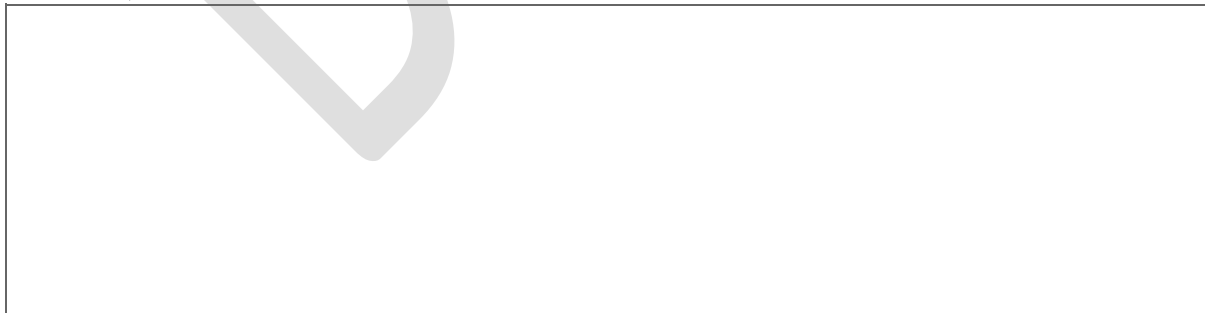
Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's strengths in regards to Utilities & Telecommunications?

(Electric power, public water and sewer, natural gas, telecommunications)

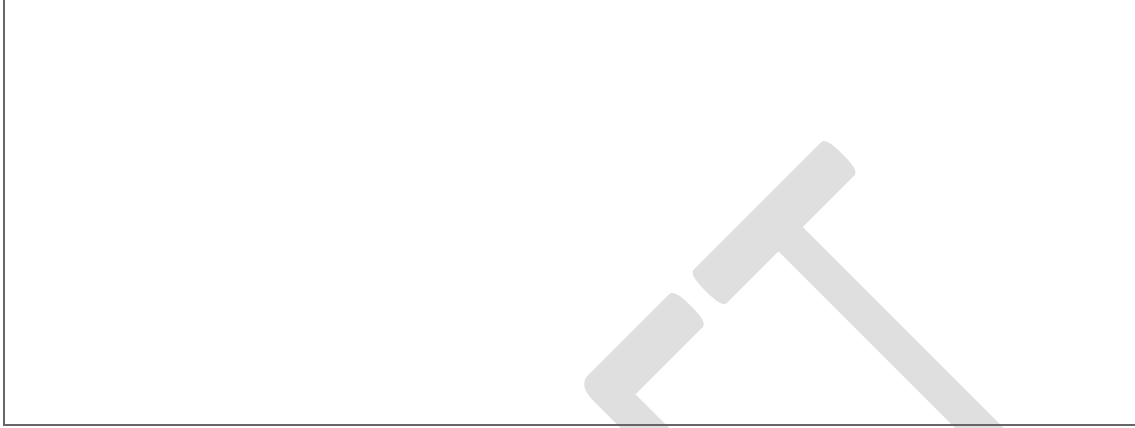
Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weakness in regards to Utilities & Telecommunications?

(Electric power, public water and sewer, natural gas, telecommunications)

Please write your answer here:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their answer. A large, light gray 'DRAFT' watermark is visible diagonally across the page, passing through this box.

Strengths and Weaknesses (2)

The remaining questions are designed to allow you to comment on strengths and weaknesses in the Region. Please comment where applicable.

What are the Region's strengths in regards to Available Sites and Buildings? (including construction and occupancy costs)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to Available Sites and Buildings? (including construction and occupancy costs)


Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's strengths in regards to the Business Climate? (Regulations and procedure, costs or other requirements imposed by the government)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to the Business Climate? (Regulations and procedure, costs or other requirements imposed by the government)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's strengths in regards to taxes? (Local and state)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to taxes? (Local and state)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's strengths in regards to the availability of supplies, support services, and sub-contractors?


(What supplies and support services - accounting, legal, marketing, banking, etc. are easy to obtain in the region?)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to the availability of supplies, support services, and sub-contractors?

(What supplies and support services - accounting, legal, marketing, banking, etc. are difficult to obtain in the region?) Please write your answer here:



DRAFT

Strengths and Weaknesses (3)

The remaining questions are designed to allow you to comment on strengths and weaknesses in the Region. Please comment where applicable.

What are the Region's strengths in regards to capital availability, incentives and business assistance programs?

(Availability of business loans, incentives or other support programs from government or economic development offices)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to capital availability, incentives and business assistance programs?

(Availability of business loans, incentives or other support programs from government or economic development offices)

Please write your answer here:

What are the Region's strengths in regards to public services and facilities?
(Police, fire, solid waste, recreation and other services provided by local government)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to public services and facilities?
(Police, fire, solid waste, recreation and other services provided by local government)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's strengths in regards to education?
(Quality of K-12, higher education, and vocational training programs)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to education?

(Quality of K-12, higher education, and vocational training programs)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's strengths in regards to quality of life factors?

(Crime, housing availability and cost, recreational and cultural opportunities, shopping, climate, etc.)

Please write your answer here:



What are the Region's weaknesses in regards to quality of life factors?

(Crime, housing availability and cost, recreational and cultural opportunities, shopping, climate, etc.)

Please write your answer here:



Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses in regards to other topics

Please write your answer here:

Optional comments and contact information

Your response will be treated in confidence and analyzed as part of the overall responses we receive. However in the event we may want to contact you for further information, please let us know who completed this form.

Name

Please write your answer here:

Organization

Please write your answer here:

City/Town

Please write your answer here:

Email Address

Please write your answer here:

Phone Number

Please write your answer here:

Other comments you would like to make

Please write your answer here:

Thank you for your time and insights!

A copy of the results will be made available on request

Project Solicitation Guidelines

As part of the preparation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the WestCOG Region, the Advisory Group is soliciting ideas for projects, programs, or other initiatives that should be included in the CEDS and that can become an important part of our Region's economic development efforts over the next five years. Being listed in a CEDS may give a project an edge when applying for grant funding. In completing the attached form, please keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Any type of project related to economic development is permissible. Please categorize them on the enclosed form as either Capital Projects or Other Type.
Examples of Capital Projects are: infrastructure improvements (sewer, water, etc.); commercial, industrial and institutional building upgrades or redevelopment projects; transportation improvements; town center revitalization; brownfield revitalization, etc.
Examples of Other Type projects are: economic development marketing programs; creation or updating of the economic development portion of your website; other smaller expense items that would not qualify as a capital expense.
2. Please keep your submitted projects to a reasonable number, reflecting those you think are most important to the economic development of your community or the Region, and those that are most ready to be implemented. Please use a new form for each project/program/initiative submitted.
3. Preferred projects are those that can be completed within five years, but this is not a requirement.
4. Projects can be submitted by municipalities or regional organizations. Please feel free to distribute this form within your community to boards, commissions, agencies, and organizations you think appropriate for this effort.
5. Projects submitted by a private or non-profit organization that are specific to one community should be submitted by the affected municipality. Projects submitted by a private or non-profit organization that are regional in nature should be submitted by that organization.
6. In order to meet the requirements of the US Economic Development Administration, to whom the CEDS will be submitted for approval, the CEDS document must contain a list of all suggested projects, and a smaller list of "Vital" (EDA term) or highest priority projects. To select those Vital projects, a set of evaluation criteria and point scoring system has been developed by the CEDS Advisory Group, as shown on the Project Solicitation Form that accompanies this memo.

7. The scoring criteria shown on the form are for your information only, to help you understand how submissions will be scored and ranked. Projects will be scored by the CEDS Committee using the Evaluation Categories and Points shown on the form. Please do not complete those columns of the form.
8. Projects aligned with the Goals and Objectives outlined by the Advisory Group in the attached draft Strategic Action Plan will receive more points in the narrative section than those that do not. Please reference the number of the goal or objective in your narrative.
9. The CEDS Project Solicitation Form is electronically fillable – that is you can type your information directly into the form and save it with the name of the project. Completed forms should be emailed to the project lead, Elizabeth Esposito, at eesposito@westcog.org no later than July 11, 2017 at 11:59pm.
10. The CEDS is a living document. The project list and priorities will be updated annually, therefore another solicitation process is expected in 2018.
11. For any questions, you may have on completing this form or the CEDS process in general, please contact Elizabeth Esposito.

Thank you for your participation in this regional economic development planning process.

CEDS Project Solicitation Form

Name of Person Completing this Form			
Municipality or Organization Submitting this Form			
Contact Information of Person Completing this Form	Phone:	E-mail:	Fax:
Of all projects, programs or initiatives submitted by your community or organization, this one ranks	Insert Rank #	of	Insert Total # Projects Submitted
Is the project/program/initiative a:	<input type="checkbox"/> Capital project		<input type="checkbox"/> Other Type of project

Project Name:	
---------------	--

Project Location:	
-------------------	--

Narrative: Please describe the project/program/initiative and indicate if the project is a new project or part of one that has been previously initiated. Identify what aspects of the action agenda (numbered goals and objectives) this project meets. Provide adequate detail to demonstrate the vision and scope of the project/program/initiative and any other essential factors. **(Can result in up to 25 points for a very clear vision, scope and details; fewer points for a somewhat clear or vague description.)**

Project/ Program/ Initiative Information	For information only – to be completed by CEDS Committee	
	For Capital Projects	For Other Projects
	Maximum Points	Maximum Points
1. Is the project/program/initiative ready-to-go now or in the planning stage?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Ready-to-go – planning or design done, all regulatory approvals in place, all required legal agreements in place, key financial commitments in place, etc.	10	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Planning stage – no or partial planning design work done, partners identified but not fully committed, financing not in place, etc.	5	5

CEDS Project Solicitation Form

Project/ Program/ Initiative Information	For information only – to be completed by CEDS Committee	
	For Capital Projects	For Other Projects
	Maximum Points	Maximum Points
<p>2. How feasible is the project/ program/ initiative within market, budgetary, regulatory or other measures? Please attach a brief narrative addressing this question in terms of the items listed below or others you believe are appropriate.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Very Feasible– professionally prepared supporting planning or design done, assumptions are reasonable, significant financing committed, regulatory hurdles minimal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Feasible– some key project elements missing, some assumptions questionable, financial hurdles underestimated, etc.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Marginally Feasible – key project elements missing, assumptions questionable, financial and regulatory hurdles considerable</p>	<p>10</p> <p>5</p> <p>1</p>	<p>10</p> <p>5</p> <p>1</p>
<p>3. What is the project/program/initiative budget? \$ _____</p> <p>Is the project budget:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Detailed and firm – good supporting documentation based on detailed plans</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Estimated – estimates based assumptions and/or questionable data</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unknown at this time</p> <p>Please provide appropriate information substantiating your assessment of the project/program/initiative budget.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>3</p> <p>0</p>	<p>5</p> <p>3</p> <p>0</p>
<p>4. How much non-EDA funding has been identified? See the Budget Information Worksheet on page 5.</p> <p>\$ _____ which is _____% of total project cost and it is:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Already committed (Please provide documentation)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Expected to be committed by _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not committed at this time</p> <p>List the sources of the non-EDA funding and the amounts:</p> <p>\$ _____ from _____</p> <p>\$ _____ from _____</p> <p>\$ _____ from _____</p> <p>\$ _____ from _____</p>	<p>10</p> <p>5</p> <p>2</p>	<p>10</p> <p>5</p> <p>2</p>
<p>5. Is the amount of non-EDA funding considered</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Significant – more than 80% of project cost</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate – between 30% and 80% of project cost</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Small or none – less than 30% of project cost</p>	<p>10</p> <p>5</p> <p>2</p>	<p>10</p> <p>5</p> <p>2</p>

Please use additional sheets as necessary to help us understand your proposed project/ program/ initiative.

CEDS Project Solicitation Form

Project/ Program/ Initiative Information	For information only – to be completed by CEDS Committee	
	For Capital Projects	For Other Projects
	Maximum Points	Maximum Points
6. Necessary environmental reviews and assessments are: <input type="checkbox"/> Completed (Please provide documentation) <input type="checkbox"/> In process (Please provide documentation) <input type="checkbox"/> Planned <input type="checkbox"/> Have not been considered yet <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	5 3 1 0 3	NOT APPLICABLE
7. Does the municipality or developer have control of all or most of the project area? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – all of the project area (Please provide documentation) <input type="checkbox"/> Some – ____% of the project area (Please provide documentation) <input type="checkbox"/> None of the project area <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable	5 3 0 3	NOT APPLICABLE
8. Does the project/program/initiative have a realistic schedule for obtaining land use approvals? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (Please provide documentation) <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable Please describe the land use approvals needed: _____	5 0 3	NOT APPLICABLE
9. Does the project have regional economic significance? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Please attach a brief narrative describing what that regional significance is <input type="checkbox"/> No	10 5	10 5
10. What employment is expected to be generated or saved by this project/program/initiative? _____ Construction Jobs _____ Full time or full time equivalent Jobs _____ Part time Jobs	10	10
11. What percentage of the jobs to be created or saved will be available to unemployed, underemployed or low-income residents? _____% (Please provide a brief narrative discussing how this will be accomplished)	5	5
12. Points based on community or organization's ranking of this project among submitted projects This will be awarded based on your ranking shown on the page 1.	5	5
MAXIMUM TOTAL POINTS	115	100

Please use additional sheets as necessary to help us understand your proposed project/ program/ initiative.

CEDS Project Solicitation Form

Project/ Program/ Initiative Information		For information only – to be completed by CEDS Committee	
		For Capital Projects	For Other Projects
		Maximum Points	Maximum Points
Project Readiness Worksheet			
1. Engineering	Has preliminary engineering been completed to confirm project feasibility and costs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Name of Engineer:
2. Property Acquisition	If property is required by this project, has it been secured by a binding property interest (title or option to purchase)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If no, describe status:
3. Consistency with Local, Regional, & State Land Use Policies & Plans (maps)	Is the project within a designated State POCD Development Area and shown on the appropriate maps?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If no, how are you planning to proceed to prepare and submit application for changes?
4. Zoning	Is the project location now appropriately zoned or is it identified in a plan for a zone change?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Explain
5. Environmental Issues	Describe any mitigation plan in place or planned to address environmental issues identified or anticipated:		
6. Permits	Describe any local approvals including special permits, inland wetlands, and site plan which will be required by the project and your plans for obtaining:		
7. Capacity of Applicant to Implement Project	Describe how you plan to manage the proposed project with staff and/or consultants if funded:		

Please use additional sheets as necessary to help us understand your proposed project/ program/ initiative.

CEDS Project Solicitation Form

Project Budget and Employment Worksheet					
Project Name:					
Total Cost	\$			Project Start Date	
		Percent of Total		Project Finish Date	
Local Share	\$	%			
State Share	\$	%		# of Construction Jobs _____	
EDA Share	\$	%			
Other Federal Share(s)	\$	%		# of Permanent Jobs _____	
Private Funding	\$	%		Full-time or FTE _____	
			Part-time Not FTE _____		
			Total Project Cost Per Permanent Job Calculate based on Total Project Cost ÷ (Full-time and FTE jobs + 50% of Part-time Not FTE jobs) \$ _____		

Private Investment Supported

In addition to private funding to be used in meeting project costs, describe what can be expected as additional private investments resulting from the project. For example, _____ SF of building space constructed at a projected cost of \$_____.	
\$ Value	Description of Private Investment
\$	
\$	
\$	
\$	
Estimated Total Increase in Local Tax Base (Assessed Value) \$	

Please use additional sheets as necessary to help us understand your proposed project/ program/ initiative.

DRAFT

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

**July 21, 2016 – 12:15 p.m.
WestCOG Stamford Office**

888 Washington Blvd. 3rd Floor Stamford, CT 06901

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. FEATURED SPEAKER: Elizabeth Esposito and Soumya Sudhakar – WestCOG
3. DISCUSSION:
 - Introduction to the CEDS process
 - What other data needs to be shown to establish current conditions?
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Next Meeting

7/21/2016 MINUTES

**WESTERN CT ECONOMIC
ADVISORY GROUP**

Held at the WestCOG Stamford Office
888 Washington Blvd. 3rd Floor Stamford, CT 06901

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	VP Coldwell Banker Commercial, Brookfield Economic Development Commission
Janice Chrzescijanek*	Bethel Economic Development Commission
Jackie Lightfield	Stamford Partnership, Greater Norwalk Arts Council
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Valeria Bisceglia	Business Advisor, CT Small Business Development Center
Joe Ercolano	Associate Director, CT Small Business Development Center
Stephen Bull*	Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce
Paul Steinmetz*	Director of Community Relations & Public Affairs, Western CT State University
Thomas Madden	Director of Economic Development, City of Stamford
Lisa Scails*	Executive Director, Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut
Jayne Stevenson	First Selectman Darien
Jim Marpe*	First Selectman Westport
Eugene Schreiner	First County Bank

ALSO ATTENDING

First Selectman Julia Pemberton of Redding*, First Selectman Peter Tesei of Greenwich*, First Selectman Nina Daniel of Weston, Roxane Fromson of CTDOT*, WestCOG Director Francis Pickering and staff members Jon Chew, Elizabeth Esposito, and Soumya Sudhakar.

**Attended by phone*

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM by Associate Planner Elizabeth Esposito.

Ms. Esposito reviewed the purpose of the Western CT Economic Advisory Group, which is to guide and provide feedback to WestCOG to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

PRESENTATIONS

Western CT CEDS – Introduction and Summary Background: A presentation on this topic was made by Elizabeth Esposito and Soumya Sudhakar, Summer Intern for WestCOG. Ms. Esposito explained with a PowerPoint the CEDS process and why it is important to complete. Ms. Sudhakar continued the presentation with highlights from the data analysis of regional demographic and economic conditions

which she has been doing over the course of her internship. The presentation was made available to all attendees following the meeting at was posted on the WestCOG website.

DISCUSSION

Attendees discussed the presented data and ways to improve it. They also engaged in discussion concerning the next steps for the group.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Next Meeting: They next meeting will be held in mid to late September. The meeting will focus on industry segmentation. Advisory Group members will be polled for their availability.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Thursday, September 29, 2016 – 12:30 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. FEATURED SPEAKER: Joe Ercolano – Small Business Development Council
3. DISCUSSION:
 - Review of Draft Regional Analysis
 - Next Steps: SWOT Analysis
 - i. What has changed for the Danbury Area from 2013?
 - ii. How will it be conducted?
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Next Meeting

9/29/2016 MINUTES

**WESTERN CT ECONOMIC
ADVISORY GROUP**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	VP Coldwell Banker Commercial, Brookfield Economic Development Commission
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Valeria Bisceglia	Business Advisor, CT Small Business Development Center
Joe Ercolano	Associate Director, CT Small Business Development Center
Thomas Madden	Director of Economic Development, City of Stamford
Lisa Scails	Executive Director, Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut
Eugene Schreiner	First County Bank

ALSO ATTENDING

Tom Long, Workplace Inc.; Betsy Paynter, Newton Economic Development; WestCOG staff members Elizabeth Esposito and James Dawson.

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM by Associate Planner Elizabeth Esposito.

Ms. Esposito reviewed the purpose of the Western CT Economic Advisory Group, which is to guide and provide feedback to WestCOG to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

PRESENTATIONS

Small Business Development Council – CEDS Data Summary: A presentation on this topic was made by Joe Ercolano. Mr. Ercolano summarized, with a PowerPoint, the CEDS data for CT.

1. Economic Performance
 - a. CT job recover is 50% national average
 - b. CT recovered 80% of jobs since the recession of 2008
 - i. MA and NY have recovered 2.5 of what it lost
 - c. Fairfield County
 - i. -0.24% growth rate in employment between 1998-2015
 - ii. 0.39% growth on annual wages between 2010-2014
 1. 2.69% national annual wages growth
 - d. Conclusions:
 - i. Fairfield County had weaker GDP and employment growth than Connecticut
 - ii. Slow growth since 2010 has had a significant impact on annual wages.

2. Fairfield County's Business Base
 - a. Fairfield County had 27,022 non-government establishments employing 409,000 people in 2012
 - b. 86% of all Fairfield County industries have less than 20 employees
 - i. 29.7% of Fairfield County employment is at worksites with less than 20 employees
 1. 26.9% for New Haven County
 2. 21.9% for Hartford County
 - c. Business Ownership
 - i. one in five white-owned firms have paid employees at a rate $6\frac{2}{3}$ times greater than for African American-owned firms
 1. nearly 3 times greater than Hispanic-owned firms
 - ii. A greater percentage of Asian-American firms have paid employees than white-owned firms
 - iii. Only 10% of Female-owned firms have paid employees
3. Industry Clusters
 - a. Fairfield County's top industry clusters, with national rank () and *employment* (2014) and percent of County total employment (408,854)
 - i. Financial Services (8), 28,113 [6.9%]
 - ii. Aerospace Vehicles and Defense (10), 9,320 [2.3%]
 - iii. Education and Knowledge Creation (44), 15,102 [3.7%]
 - iv. Aerospace Vehicles and Defense (10), 9,320 [2.3%]
 - v. Video Production and Distribution (15), 924 [.2%]
 - vi. Marketing Design and Publishing (18), 12,050 [3%]
 - vii. Performing Arts (33), 2,350 [.6%]
 - viii. Medical Devices (49), 1,138 [.3%]
 - b. Conclusions:
 - i. strongest cluster continues to be Financial Services
 - ii. Education and Knowledge Creation and Marketing, Design, and Publishing are also strong clusters with relative large employment
 - iii. loss of over 12,000 corporate headquarters jobs, an industry category that generated \$2.3 billion in annual payroll in 2012, which was 7% of total County payroll
4. New Business Creation
 - a. CT decreased 3,864 establishments
 - i. business starts have increased since the Great Recession, but the rate of starts is still below pre-recession levels
 - b. the number of new establishments in 2013 at 2,321 was roughly 15% higher than the low of 2,041 in 2009, it was still 18% lower (506 fewer new establishments) than the peak reached in 2005 in Fairfield County
 - c. the number of incorporated businesses in the Western COG towns declined by 16% from 2011 to 2015
 - d. Millennials are creating businesses at a slower rate than other generations
 - e. 27% of new businesses are created by immigrants
5. Business Attraction
 - a. Manhattan Clusters to Recruit:
 - i. Business Services
 - ii. Financial Services
 - iii. Marketing, Design, and Publishing

- iv. Education and Knowledge Creation
 - v. Distribution and Electronic Commerce
- b. Manhattan Clusters to Sell To:
 - i. Food Processing and Manufacturing
 - ii. Construction Products and Services
 - iii. Furniture
 - iv. Biopharmaceuticals
 - v. Aerospace Vehicles and Defense
- 6. Occupational Data
 - a. the Bridgeport-Stamford- Norwalk area has a greater presence of management, arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media, and business and financial operations occupations
 - b. The region may want to consider strategies to attract and grow more Computer and Mathematical Occupations, especially in the Danbury region, to meet the demand for these occupations.

The presentation was made available to all attendees following the meeting at was posted on the WestCOG website.

DISCUSSION

Attendees discussed the presented data and ways to improve it. They also engaged in discussion concerning the next steps for the group.

Regional Analysis – Baseline Conclusions for the CEDS

- 1. WestCOG's Strategic Industries
 - a. Add digital media and remove retail trade
 - b. Add employment by business services
 - c. Split urban/suburban/rural with population data
- 2. Demographic Analysis
 - a. Minority owned = less opportunity
 - b. High regulation
 - c. Correlate data from industries to education
 - d. Trained professionals are lacking in Danbury
 - i. Basic skill deficiency
 - e. Immigrant population has no way of transfer skills learned outside of the U.S.
- 3. Economic Analysis
 - a. More contract/part-time work than full-time with benefits
 - b. Construction is weak
 - c. Add a section comparing other sectors to Fairfield
 - d. Combine Danbury, Stamford & Norwalk to create a region rather than individually
 - i. Find commonalities
- 4. Industry Cluster
 - a. Change policy
- 5. Transportation Infrastructure
 - a. Intra-state vs inter-state commute analysis
- 6. SWOT Analysis
 - a. List of Housatonic Valley Survey Questions

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Next Meeting: They next meeting will be held in mid to late January, 2017. Advisory Group members will be polled for their availability.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Thursday, November 3, 2016 – 12:30 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. DISCUSSION:
 - Review of Business Survey and Distribution Procedures
 - Selection of Focus Groups
 - Review of Draft Regional Analysis
3. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Next Meeting

11/03/2016 MINUTES

**WESTERN CT ECONOMIC
ADVISORY GROUP**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	VP Coldwell Banker Commercial, Brookfield Economic Development Commission
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Joe Ercolano	Associate Director, CT Small Business Development Center
Eugene Schreiner	First County Bank

ALSO ATTENDING

Tom Long, Workplace Inc.; Betsy Paynter, Brookfield Economic Development; WestCOG staff members Elizabeth Esposito and Jon Chew.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM by Associate Planner Elizabeth Esposito.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

DISCUSSION

Attendees discussed the presented data and ways to improve it. They also engaged in discussion concerning the next steps for the group.

- Review of Business Survey and Distribution Procedures
 - The group suggested improvements to the survey. General comments focused on providing an emphasis on business performance, and on factors the CEDS could influence. Suggestions also included a Spanish translation, and a more defined preamble.
- Selection of Focus Groups
 - After a discussion the group elected to hold a variety of Focus Groups over the coming months.
 - Real Estate
 - Health Services
 - Finance & Insurance
 - Workforce
 - Small Business & Entrepreneurs

- Education
- Business Support Organizations

Members are requested to send Ms. Esposito suggestions for whom they think would be a good fit to moderate the focus groups each of these topics. Suggestions for talking points for each group discussion are also welcomed.

- Review of Draft Regional Analysis
 - Members made specific critiques of various sections of the Regional Analysis and mentioned possible additions for the Analysis or a future Appendix.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Survey Roll Out: Taking into consideration the feedback on the survey, staff will prepare a revision and send it out for online review. All feedback must be received by 11/10/2016. The survey will go public 11/14/2016.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held in early December. The meeting will be an update on survey progress and focus group. Advisory Group members will be polled for their availability.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Wednesday, January 11, 2017 – 2:30 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. PRESENTATION: Review of Business Survey Results.
3. DISCUSSION:
 - Inclusion of Partial Responses
 - New Deadline for Survey
 - How to Improve Survey Response
 - Focus Groups
 - i. Format and Attendees
 - ii. Talking Points for Real Estate, Small Business, and Workforce
 - iii. Moderators for Education, Finance & Insurance, Healthcare, and Business Support Organizations.
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Real Estate Focus Group – 1/25, 2pm, Comstock Community Center
 - Small Business Focus Group – 1/31, 2pm, Comstock Community Center
 - Workforce Focus Group – 2/8, 2pm, Comstock Community Center

1/11/2017 MINUTES

**WESTERN CT ECONOMIC
ADVISORY GROUP**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Janice Chrzescijanek	Bethel Economic Development Commission
Joe Ercolano	Small Business Development Center
Hal Kurfeks	VP Coldwell Banker Commercial, Brookfield Economic Development Commission

ALSO ATTENDING

Tom Long, Workplace Inc.; Ed Musante, Norwalk Chamber of Commerce; Betsy Paynter, Brookfield Economic Development; Liz Stocker, Norwalk Economic Development; WestCOG staff members Elizabeth Esposito and Will Kenny.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:30 PM by Associate Planner Elizabeth Esposito.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

DISCUSSION

Staff presented the results of the Survey. There were 86 responses at the time of the survey, although more have been received. All towns in the region had at least one respondent. The majority of responses can from the region's 3 cities and the town of Bethel. The presentation highlighted responses that identified the regions strengths and weaknesses. The presentation will be available online and the full results will be made available to members.

Attendees discussed next steps with the survey. The group reached consensus that the survey will remain open while the Focus Groups are being held. A larger effort would be put forth to send our press releases about the survey to local papers, the Business Journal, and the Society for Human Resources.

Attendees discussed the format, topics, moderators, and attendees of the Focus Groups. The group reached consensus that more time is needed to prepare for the Focus Groups, the scheduled ones will be postponed until further notice.

After further consideration and in light of survey responses, the topics of the Focus Groups were changed. The list of Focus Groups now stands as:

- Real Estate
- Small Business, Entrepreneurs, and Workforce (2 meetings)
- Health Technology
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Finance Technology (Fin. Tech.)

Moderators were identified for Real Estate and the 2 Small Business Groups. Suggestions for moderators of the other Focus Groups should be sent to Liz Esposito. One meeting and a central location were decided upon for all Focus Groups except Small Business. Small Business will have 2 meetings, one in Danbury and one in Stamford.

To improve attendance at the Focus Groups, the group chose to invite participants and also keep the meeting open to the public. Instructions will follow via email.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Moderators: Suggestions for Moderators should be sent to Liz Esposito by January 27th. The moderator and Ms. Esposito will then schedule the Focus Group.

Next Meeting: They next meeting will be held after the first focus group.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Tuesday, March 28, 2017 – 2 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. PRESENTATION: Review of Business Survey and Focus Group Results.
3. DISCUSSION:
 - The region's biggest strengths and weaknesses
 - Other strengths and weaknesses not identified by focus groups
 - Goals and Objectives
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Next Meeting

3/28/2017 MINUTES

**WESTERN CT ECONOMIC
ADVISORY GROUP**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Eugene Schreiner	Fairfield County Bank
Valeria Bisceglia	Small Business Development Center
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County

ALSO ATTENDING

Bob Rau, Amy Dent, and Christal Preszler, Newtown Economic Development Commission; Ed Musante, Norwalk Chamber of Commerce; Betsy Paynter, Brookfield Economic Development; Liz Stocker, Norwalk Economic Development; Virginia DiCristoforo, Danbury Innovation Center; WestCOG staff Elizabeth Esposito and Will Kenny.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM by Associate Planner, Elizabeth Esposito.

DISCUSSION

Staff presented the results of the Survey. There were 99 responses at the time of the presentation. All towns in the region had at least one respondent. The majority of responses came from the region's 3 cities. The results of the focus groups were also discussed. 42 people total participated in all seven sessions. The results of the survey and the six focus groups were put into a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. A draft of the SWOT was reviewed and changes were discussed. The presentation will be available online and the full results will be made available to members on request.

Additional changes to the SWOT Analysis must be submitted to Elizabeth by April 7th.

Attendees discussed next steps in creating goals and opportunities for the region.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Next Meeting: April 19th at 2pm in Wilton. More details will be posted on the WestCOG website.

OTHER BUSINESS

Lisa Mercurio announced the 2017 Legislative Leadership Breakfast. April 5, 7:45-9:30 am at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Stamford

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Wednesday, April 19, 2017 – 2 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. PRESENTATION: Introduction to Goals and Objectives
3. DISCUSSION:
 - Final thoughts on the SWOT
 - Goals and Objectives
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Next Meeting

4/19/2017 MINUTES

**WESTERN CT ECONOMIC
ADVISORY GROUP**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Eugene Schreiner	Fairfield County Bank
Valeria Bisceglia	Small Business Development Center
Joe Ercolano	Small Business Development Center
Hal Kurfeks	Coldwell Banker Commercial
Virginia DeCristoforo	Innovation Center

ALSO ATTENDING

Paul Settlemeyer, Greenwich Economic Advancement Committee; WestCOG staff Elizabeth Esposito and Will Kenny.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM by Associate Planner, Elizabeth Esposito.

DISCUSSION

The data collection phase of the CEDS is now complete. The group will now focus on creating the Strategic Action Plan for the Region. The group spent the first hour discussing what the broad goals for the Region should be based on the data collected. In the second hour, they focused on objectives and actions the Region could take to complete those goals. An outline of their work was created and is attached. Members not in attendance can give their input to Elizabeth.

Feedback to the first Draft must be submitted to Elizabeth by April 28th.

This outline will continue to be refined in the coming meetings.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Next Meeting: Will be decided with a Doodle Poll. More details will be posted on the WestCOG website.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Wednesday, May 3, 2017 – 2 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. PRESENTATION: Introduction to Objectives & Projects
3. DISCUSSION:
 - Review Goals
 - Brainstorming Objectives and projects
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Next Meeting

5/3/2017
Western CT Economic Development
Strategy Committee
Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	Coldwell Banker Commercial
Joe Ercolano	CT Small Business Development Center
Lisa Scails	Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut
Eugene Schreiner	Fairfield County Bank
Tom Long	The Workplace
Liz Stocker	Norwalk Economic Development
Christal Preszler	Newtown EDC
Virginia DeCristoforo	Innovation Center

ALSO ATTENDING

WestCOG staff Elizabeth Esposito and Nicole Sullivan.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM by Associate Planner, Elizabeth Esposito.

DISCUSSION

The group was briefed on background of and examples for Strategic Action Planning, which included conversation of funding, grants, and feasibility.

The group then reviewed the first draft from the previous meeting. Changes to the outline were explored. A second draft is attached.

Members not in attendance may give their input to Elizabeth by May 12.

This Strategic Action Plan will continue to be refined in the coming meetings.

INFORMATION ITEMS

Next Meeting: May 22, 2017 at 2pm at the Comstock Community Center.

ADJOURMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Monday, May 22, 2017 – 2 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. PRESENTATION: Introduction to Strategic Action Plan and Project Prioritization
3. DISCUSSION:
 - Review of Full Strategic Action Plan
 - Project Prioritization Rubric
4. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Review Deadline May 26th
 - Next Meeting June 6th?

5/22/2017

**Western CT Economic Development
Strategy Committee**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	Coldwell Banker Commercial
Joe Ercolano	CT Small Business Development Center
Thomas Madden	City of Stamford, Economic Development
Eugene Schreiner	Danbury Savings Bank
Jackie Lightfield	Stamford Partnership
Liz Stocker	City of Norwalk, Economic Development
Ed Musante	Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce
Robert Rau	Newtown EDC
Betsy Paynter	Town of Brookfield, Economic Development

ALSO ATTENDING

Diane Cece, Coalition of Norwalk Neighborhoods; Debora Goldstein, Norwalk Third Taxing District; WestCOG staff Elizabeth Esposito and Will Kenny.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM by Associate Planner, Elizabeth Esposito.

DISCUSSION

The group was briefed the purpose of the Strategic Action Plan and the project solicitation process, as well as the timeline going forward.

The group then reviewed the draft of the full strategic action plan. Changes to it were explored. A second draft is attached. Members not in attendance may give their input to Elizabeth by May 26.

The project solicitation form was reviewed. No changes were suggested. The form is attached. Members not in attendance may give their input to Elizabeth by May 26.

INFORMATION ITEMS

Next Meeting: Will be in early June, determined by doodle poll.

Project Solicitation: Staff aims to send out the project solicitation form and begin receiving proposals on May 30, with a deadline of July 11.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

**Tuesday June 6, 2017 – 2 p.m.
Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. DISCUSSION:
 - Project Solicitation Update
 - Evaluation Framework
3. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Review Deadline June 15th
 - Next Meeting July 19th?

6/6/2017

**Western CT Economic Development
Strategy Committee**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	Coldwell Banker Commercial
Joe Ercolano	CT Small Business Development Center
Christal Preszler	Newtown, Planning Department Economic and Community Development
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Lisa Scails	Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut
Ed Musante	Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce
Betsy Paynter	Town of Brookfield, Economic Development

ALSO ATTENDING

WestCOG staff Elizabeth Esposito and Nicole Sullivan.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 PM by Associate Planner, Elizabeth Esposito.

DISCUSSION

The group reviewed the project solicitation process and the project solicitation form.

Elizabeth gave an overview of the purpose of the evaluation framework as being for the Region and the plan itself, not for the project proposals.

The group then reviewed an initial draft of the evaluation framework. Changes to it were explored. A second draft is attached. Members not in attendance may give their input to Elizabeth by June 15.

INFORMATION ITEMS

Next Meeting: Will be July 19, at 2pm.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 PM.

**Meeting of the
Western Connecticut Economic Advisory Group**

Wednesday July 19, 2017 – 1:30 p.m.

**Comstock Community Center
180 School Road, Wilton, CT 06897**

Agenda

1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS
2. DISCUSSION:
 - Project Prioritization Review
 - Comments on initial draft
3. INFORMATION ITEMS:
 - Review Deadline July 25th

7/19/2017

**Western CT Economic Development
Strategy Committee**

Held at the Comstock Community Center
180 School Rd, Wilton, CT 06897

MEMBERS

Hal Kurfels	Coldwell Banker Commercial
Joe Ercolano	CT Small Business Development Center
George Benson (for Christal Preszler)	Newtown, Planning Department Economic and Community Development
Lisa Mercurio	Business Council of Fairfield County
Jackie Lightfield	Stamford Partnership
Elizbaeth Stocker	City of Norwalk, Economic Development
Betsy Paynter	Town of Brookfield, Economic Development
Thomas Madden*	City of Stamford, Economic Development

* Attended by phone

ALSO ATTENDING

Amy Dent, Newtown Economic Development Commission; Paul Steinmetz, Western Connecticut State University; Paul Settelmeyer, Greenwich Economic Advisory Committee; WestCOG staff Elizabeth Esposito and Nicole Sullivan.

WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 1:35 PM by Associate Planner, Elizabeth Esposito.

DISCUSSION

The group reviewed each of the 23 projects submitted during the solicitation period and the initial project scoring completed by the WestCOG staff. Projects were then divided into two categories, vital and suggested, based on their ability to address the Region's needs. Once in the two categories, the projects were prioritized by how well they addressed the goals and objectives of the Region and their regional impact.

The floor was then opened for comments and questions on the initial draft of the CEDS. No comments were made. The group agreed that the draft was ready to be released for a public comment period.

INFORMATION ITEMS

Members not in attendance may give their input about the project prioritization and the initial draft of the CEDS to Elizabeth Esposito by July 28.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.