

Memo

From: Brian J. Miller  
Date: July 20, 2007  
Re: Draft Recommendations Revised

I have revised the recommendations stated in my memorandum of June 26, 2007, based upon comments at the last meeting. I anticipate that there will be additional changes as a result of more discussion.

**1. General**

1. High speed internet communications are important to all the emerging businesses within the community. The Town should work with providers to assure that residents and all businesses of Durham have access to the most contemporary of methods of providing high speed internet use.

a. The EDC should continue this process by determining the extent of DSL and T-1 communications within the Town.

b. Wireless access should be made available all along Main Street.

2. The resultant economic development strategy should be forwarded to the Town Council and relevant Town Commissions for acceptance.

3. Continue to cooperate with the Greater Middlesex Chamber of Commerce on all economic development activities. The Town should work with the Chamber to coordinate activities with other area communities.

a. The Economic Development Commission should designate a member to act as the liaison with the Greater Middlesex Chamber of Commerce.

4. Prepare mapping and inventory for all economic development areas. This would include all vacant or underdeveloped commercial properties, as well as residentially zoned properties that may be appropriate to consider for rezoning. This inventory should include street address, map and parcel number, owner, owner address, parcel size, zoning, assessment, presence of wetlands, floodplains, other environmental limitations and extent of internet access. This may be done with the assistance of the Midstate Regional Planning Agency.

5. Continue to work with property owners and governmental agencies to obtain funds for remediation of brownfield properties. Due to the high cost of redevelopment of these properties, the Town may consider allowing some flexibility as to how these properties would redevelop.

6. There should be a more formalized system of regular communications between the Economic Development Commission and the Planning and Zoning Commission. This can be done in a number of ways:

a. Have a member of the Planning and Zoning Commission serve as a liaison to the Economic Development Commission which would include attendance at meetings of the EDC.

b. Have joint meetings of both Commissions on an annual or as-needed basis. The purpose of these meetings would be a frank discussion of specific regulatory issues as they relate to economic development.

c. Utilize a formal referral process in which EDC comment would be encouraged concerning proposed commercial / industrial development projects as well as regulatory initiatives.

7. Review and revise the zoning regulations as appropriate to ensure that they permit and encourage business activities recommended in this study.

8. Foster a business-friendly approach by municipal regulators towards existing and potential businesses within the community, with an emphasis on a problem-solving approach.

9. The town needs to devote adequate resources to its economic development efforts. There should be a Town staff member with the principal responsibility to work with the Economic Development Commission to promote economic development. A full-time economic development coordinator is not needed at this time, but the Town could hire a part-time employee or engage in the services of a consultant to implement the recommended strategies, perform necessary promotions, and conduct special studies among other activities.

10. Formalize the practice of inviting developers and companies planning on building in Durham to participate in a coordinated predevelopment meeting with Town agencies involved in regulating development, including planning, engineering, wetlands review, zoning and building inspection.

11. The web site of the Town should be upgraded to include a greater emphasis on economic development. The web site can be used to promote economic development in a number of ways:

a. The web site can be a method of providing general information concerning the Town to prospective businesses and developers. This should include demographic, economic and quality of life information.

b. The web site can be used a data source concerning available properties, utilizing SiteFinder.

c. It should include the tools that business people or developers would potentially need to conduct business, such as copies of the zoning regulations, description of regulatory procedures, copies of forms that may be needed, etc. It should be noted that the Town web site does include many of these features.

d. There should be contact information, including telephone numbers and email addresses.

e. It can be utilized to make the public aware of the economic development activities underway.

12. The progress towards economic growth of the community should be evaluated annually by the Economic Development Commission. This annual evaluation should be based upon measurable factors, such as increases in the commercial and industrial sectors of the Grand List, number of new businesses, and business expansions. It may also include less quantitative measures, such as progress towards goals or tasks identified as priorities.

## **2. Promoting Existing Business Retention and Growth**

The promotion of the health and growth of the Town's existing business needs to be the backbone of Durham's economic development program. A proactive organized effort to retain existing businesses and help them grow within the community will provide the most cost effective economic development efforts. The action recommendations for business retention

1. The Economic Development Commission should continue to invite individual business owners to their meetings. This would give the commission the opportunity to learn about the local businesses and hear of any concerns or problems.

2. There should be an ombudsman, or central point of contact for all businesses that need assistance within the Town Hall. This ombudsman can be a current Town official, designated member of the Economic Development Commission, or a newly appointed part time staff or consultant as recommended in Section 1.9. This person would be the main point of contact for existing and prospective businesses within the Town.

3. There should be an increased public awareness of economic development activities in Durham. The Economic Development Commission should work with the local media to have articles written periodically about Durham businesses. This may be accomplished by press releases or informal media contact that publicizes new businesses, expansions, accomplishments of local businesspeople etc. This may be accomplished by designating a member of the Economic Development Commission as having primary responsibility for public relations. The Town web site should be used as part of this public awareness strategy. (See Recommendation 1.11 above.)

4. The town should initiate a business visitation program. Town officials should visit businesses in town on a regular basis. These meetings should be somewhat structured, and designed to accomplish the following:

a. Improve communication between local business and municipal government.

b. Show the business that the town is not indifferent to the needs of business.

c. Provide an informal method to learn of any problems or potential problems of the businesses. If the problem is a result of municipal action or inaction, there may be an opportunity to remedy the problem to mutual satisfaction. The Town may also be able to assist if the problem is not one related to municipal action. Town official may be able to advocate for the businesses or put the Town in contact with state or nonprofit economic development organizations. Business owners should be encouraged to discuss any problems that they may be facing.

d. It is important to follow-up on the problems that have been identified.

e. It should include a detailed discussion of whether or not the business owner seeks to expand the business. If the desire to expand exists, Town officials should take the opportunity to help expansion on site, or if not feasible, locate another site within the Town. If there are regulatory issues to this expansion, the EDC should provide assistance in working with the business and town regulatory boards to address these issues.

f. The Commission can also learn more about suppliers, customers and other linkages. These linkages may represent an economic development opportunity.

5. ~~The findings~~A log of these visits should be recorded ~~in a data base of business visitation.~~

6. Since the growth of one business may impact the growth of related businesses, the EDC should ~~take responsibility for~~assist in disseminating information about expansion plans at the appropriate time based upon coordination with the business owner.

7. Consider engaging in a periodic survey of businesses to assess their opinions and attitudes towards operating in Durham. A survey will have ~~two~~important positive impacts. ~~First of all, it~~ will obtain the specific attitudes of the business owners and managers in the Town. Currently, the only time these attitudes are usually expressed is in conjunction with some specific problem. By learning of the specific concerns of the business community, the Town may be able to take proactive steps to address any current or foreseeable problem. ~~The second reason is that a business survey can signal a bona fide concern on the part of the Town for its business community. There seems to be a perception that the Town is not particularly business friendly. This perception, whether accurate or not, does inhibit economic development efforts. A business survey could signal that municipal government is serious about learning about, and addressing the concerns of businesses. Compare the results of each survey with that of prior surveys.~~

### **3. Commercial Development along Main Street**

There are two distinct commercial districts along Main Street that are separated by the Historic District. Both of these districts collectively serve as the commercial center of the community. These commercial areas have the following ~~characteristics~~challenges and opportunities:

- Lack of Sewer Service.
- ~~Shortage of~~The public water system has limited distribution.
- Two contaminated properties.
- Limited amount of land that is within the Commercial Districts.
- Access and congestion issues along Route 17.
- ~~Greater concentration of commercial activity within northern area.~~
- High traffic volumes along Route 17 with an ADT (average daily traffic) of 18,000.
- Although Durham does not have a large population, it is surrounded by rural communities, many of which lack commercial businesses that serve the consumer needs of the residents. Durham has the potential to attract more commercial development that serves the surrounding areas.

#### Potential Strategies - General

1. ~~Reconsider~~(increase of decrease)~~Reduce~~ the percentage of each parcel that ~~cannot~~ be used for building or pavement. ~~The current commercial regulations do not permit more than 60% of the site to be used if it was within the Commercial District in 2003, and 50% for newer areas.~~

Increasing the allowable coverage would result in more utilization of each of the sites, without increasing the extent of the land devoted to commercial uses.

2. The zoning regulations currently limit the size of a ~~retail-commercial~~ establishment to a maximum of 40,000 square feet. ~~This essentially prohibits the development of contemporary supermarkets which average approximately 60,000 to 70,000 square feet in floor area. A supermarket can also serve as an anchor for additional commercial development that serves the community. If the Town wishes to have a supermarket in the community, then the maximum size must be eliminated or changed. Elimination of a maximum size could lead to larger retail establishments, such as "big box" general merchandise stores or home improvement facilities. If the Town decides that it does not want any supermarkets, or similar uses, the 40,000 square foot maximum can be maintained. If it is decided that a supermarket is desirable, but larger stores would be inappropriate, the maximum size could be increased to 70,000 square feet. This should be by special exception as it would enable the Planning and Zoning Commission to review and evaluate the potential impacts in a more comprehensive manner.~~

Note: Durham held a public hearing on 9/5 to consider 'reducing' the maximum to 30,000 square feet.

3. The regulation created regarding this special exception could address the concerns of the town regarding the design or appearance of the building. Generally speaking, the planning and zoning commission should be empowered and encouraged to improve the character of the projects that are improved. If necessary, regulations expanding this power should be passed. Design should be regulated as to overall guidelines or theme, but the goal should not be the creation of a string of "colonial style" buildings. Regulations should concern things like scale, orientation, use of materials, rooflines, use of windows, etc.

~~-~~ Suggest a village district to control aesthetics.

#### Potential Strategies – North Commercial Area

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4. The northern commercial area, centered on the intersection of Main Street, (Route 17) and Middlefield Road, Route 147) is a concentrated area of commercial development, in contrast to a strip commercial pattern of development. In many ways, this area has characteristics of a community commercial center. [\(requires more discussion with Brian\)](#) These characteristics should be reinforced through a coordinated design of the area, with emphasis on landscaping and pedestrian linkages throughout the area, as well as pedestrian linkages with the historic district to the south. The enhancement of this area as a community center could be facilitated by the placement of new buildings closer to the street, with parking along the side or in the rear of the properties.

5. Properties along Main Street north of the intersection of Route 147 should be considered for rezoning to commercial purposes.

#### **Potential Strategies – South Commercial Area**

6. The southern commercial area includes several development and redevelopment opportunities. Development of this area should also become a concentrated area of commercial development, to avoid a strip commercial pattern of development. As with the northern commercial area, there should be a coordinated design theme of the area, with pedestrian linkages through the area and connections to the historic district.

7. There are areas of undeveloped land in proximity to the southern commercial strip. Therefore this area can support expanded commercial development. Any future commercial development should be supportive of the strengthening and development of the southern commercial node.

#### **4. Agricultural Business**

Unlike many of the communities within central Connecticut, Durham retains a strong agricultural base. Although agriculture is not a major source of employment, nor is it a major contributor to the tax base, it retains two important roles in the economic development of the community. It is important as a method of cost avoidance. As long as the larger farms remain [economically viable in tact](#), the chances diminish of one of them being sold to a residential real estate developer. The other important role of agriculture is its role of maintaining the character of Durham. A common theme throughout all of the meetings was that the rural character of the community was precious and that any economic development or community planning would need to be compatible with the rural character.

Agriculture is driven largely by economic forces that are beyond the control of the local municipality. Much of the potential beneficial actions of a municipality are in the form of changing or ensuring that applicable regulations do [not](#) interfere with agricultural activities. For example, there should be no limits on the amount of livestock that can be maintained on the farm. The agricultural business in Connecticut has changed over the years. Today, many agricultural operations require related activities, such as retail outlets, entertainment / tourism, and production activities. The most prominent example of this within the region is Lyman Orchards [in Middlefield](#), which includes a wide range of activities that are not directly related towards agriculture.

1. Ensure that the zoning regulations permit farm related non-agricultural activities, including a retail outlet, recreational activities, related production activities, etc. In addition, the setback requirements do not inhibit the placement of barns, and other agricultural structures. However, standards should be included within the regulations that define farm or agriculture, so that these regulations are not misused.

2. Permit the installation of off-site signs for agricultural operations. Although many of the farms are located on one of the State Highways, other farms are located on one of the less traveled Town Roads. Without signs along the major roads, it will be difficult for the farms located off of the state highways to attract visitors in a way that may enhance their businesses. The Planning and Zoning Commission should adopt a standard for the off-site signs. It should be of a higher design standard than the one used by the state, of white letters on a brown background. It would be best if the signs for all the agricultural operations utilized the same basic design, creating a visual

theme for Durham agriculture. There may be situations in which it would be necessary to locate a sign within the historic district. If so, the signs should be designed in consultation with the Historic District Commission, to be fully respectful of the historic character of the area, and the historic role of agriculture in Durham.

3. Continue to pursue the purchase of development rights for agricultural preservation.
4. Establish an agricultural advisory committee that can work with the Economic Development Commission and other Town boards and commissions to determine if any additional programs would be needed to promote the local agricultural industry.
5. Encourage the continued development of specialized agriculture, such as organic agriculture.
6. Work with farmers to offer periodic farmers markets during the harvest seasons. This can either be located on the Town Green or at the Durham Fairgrounds. It may also be worthwhile to coordinate and join these activities with farmers from neighboring communities. Local officials should work with the State Department of Agriculture to take full advantage of the marketing activities for local crops.

#### **5. Industrial Development**

Industrial development encompasses most types of non-consumer oriented businesses. The changing economy has expanded this category beyond the traditional manufacturing category. The industrial parks often house manufacturing, distribution and service industries.

The industrial activities in Durham are concentrated along Route 68 ([this paragraph overlooks some of the other industrial development in Durham..... also consider Durham Mfg](#)) on the western edge of the Town. The area has experienced a degree of recent development activity, and there are few vacant parcels left for industrial development. Indications are that there is a need and demand for sites for small scale industrial development over the long term, even if short term market conditions may not be conducive to industrial development. There are several potential approaches to address the issue of a shortage of vacant land zoned for industrial development. ([What type of businesses are we trying to attract?](#))

1. As suggested with the Commercial District, the percentage of each parcel that cannot be used for building or pavement should be reduced. The current industrial regulations do not permit more than 40% of the site. Increasing the allowable coverage would result in more utilization of each of the sites, without increasing the extent of the land devoted to industrial uses.
2. The zoning regulations should be amended to create a Planned Industrial Floating Zone. Essentially a floating zone is a zoning regulation that would only be attached to a parcel or parcels of land by application from the property owners subject to a series of specific conditions. The rezoning to this Industrial Floating Zone can also require a conceptual plan and include a series of design and locational guidelines. Possible conditions that may be included within the floating zone could be minimum parcel size, and a location along a state highway. This approach is based upon the belief that small industrial and office buildings can be suitably located along some or all of the state highways within the Town.
3. The Town and the Economic Development Commission also has the option of taking a more proactive approach to encouraging the development of an industrial park. If the Town wants to proactively encourage the development of an industrial park, there are two basic alternative courses of action:

#### **a. Municipal Industrial Park**

This course of action would require the Town to act as the developer. The Town would purchase, develop and market a parcel of property. Many communities have taken this approach. Most communities use a non-profit community development corporation to develop and market the

park. Non-profit development corporations have greater flexibility to obtain financing, develop, market and sell property than do municipalities. State funding may be available as a "Municipal Development Project." The primary advantage of this approach is that the Town or development corporation retains a high degree of control. It can adjust prices as appropriate, select business that they believe will contribute to the Town's economy, and ensure aesthetic and design standards. The pricing of the industrial lots is of particular importance as their market price may be too low to attract private investment. This approach would require a high degree of involvement on the part of the Town. The Town would have to promote the establishment of the development corporation and provide some initial funding. If the Town acts alone, it ~~may~~would need to bond for the purchase of the property and possibly some of the development expenses. If the Town were to pursue this option, the following should be done:

- Select property.
- Ensure zoning on property is consistent with industrial park development. If not, pursue proper zoning.
- Prepare municipal development plan, in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 132 CGS. Some funding may be available from the Department of Economic and Community Development.
- Establish Community Development Corporation.
- Negotiate and purchase property.
- Obtain necessary approvals (subdivision, wetlands, etc.)
- Design and construct infrastructure improvements.
- Market property.

○ **Public / Private Cooperation**

This would involve development by a private developer in cooperation with the Town. Essentially the property would be owned and marketed by a private developer, with the Town providing certain assistance and incentives. As each real estate development situation is somewhat unique, it is not possible to specify the relative roles of the Town and the private developer. The developer may agree to the development of an industrial park in conjunction with development on other parts of the property. For a stand-alone development, the Town may pay for all or part of the construction of the road to serve the industrial park. State funding for this may be available through the Small Town Economic Assistance Program, (STEAP). In return for this assistance, the Town could maintain certain levels of approval or control about the use of the property. As with the municipal industrial park alternative, the zoning must be in place to permit the desired uses, provide development standards and prohibit undesirable uses.

**6. Durham Historic District**

The preservation of the Durham Historic District is important to maintain the character of the community. However, preservation does not necessarily mean no change. There are examples of other communities throughout New England where historic areas have been successfully adapted to non-residential uses, including Essex, Stonington, Guilford, and Litchfield. Any strategy for the economic development use of the Historic District should include the following:

1. All re-use of property within the historic district should be restricted to property fronting on Main Street.
2. The emphasis of non-residential development should be for properties south of the intersection of Route 68. Much of this area has a critical mass of non-residential development and some

forms of non-residential uses may be appropriate, including professional offices, bed and breakfasts, studios and some select small scale retail uses.

3. A major impediment to any reuse of historical properties would be parking. Many of the properties are too small to accommodate parking. Perhaps more importantly, parking lots can severely detract from the historic character of the area. Parking would have to be tightly controlled ~~in the following ways:~~

- ~~• There should be no parking within the front yard.~~
- ~~• All parking should be heavily screened by hedges or other natural screening from the public right-of-way.~~
- ~~• Driveways and curb cuts to the street should be heavily restricted as to number and width.~~
- ~~• The requirements for the number of parking spaces should be determined on an individual basis, with authorization granted to the Planning and Zoning Commission to determine the appropriate amount of parking required on an individual basis, with full cognizance of the problem of parking in the historic district.~~

4. The plans for sidewalks for both sides of the street throughout the center of the Town should be implemented, with sidewalks through the entire length of the historic district, going into the surrounding commercial areas.

#### **7. Durham Fair**

The Durham Fair brings over 200,000 visitors into Durham over a three-day period, making it one of the largest 3-day, all volunteer agricultural fairs in the nation. Most of these visitors park in one of the remote parking lots, attend the fair, and go home. There may be ways in which this unique attraction can be used to enhance economic development efforts in the community.

1. Enhance the relationship between the Durham Agricultural Fair Association and the Economic Development Commission through a regular discussion of ways in which activities could lead to mutual benefit between the Town and the Association.
2. Establish a Town presence at the Fair to highlight local businesses and the Town's economic development efforts. One way in which this could be done would be in cooperation with the Durham – Middlefield chapter of the Greater Middlesex Chamber of Commerce.
3. Continue to use the fair to promote the agricultural businesses of Durham.
4. Work with the Fair Agricultural Association on coordinating marketing of the Town with promotion of the Durham Fair.

#### **8. Marketing and Promotion**

The proper marketing approach involves creating a higher profile and awareness of the Town's economic development opportunities, marketing to real estate brokers as an intermediary group, and direct solicitation of businesses and developers. This will-to attract select businesses, such as small retail and service businesses, as well as small business offices and light industrial uses. These actions should include the following:

1. Create a written marketing plan that incorporates the suggestions contained herein. The marketing plan should identify those types of businesses and development that the Town wishes to attract, and identify the methods of promotion. The program should features the qualities of Durham as a community, both as a place to live and to locate a business.

2. The Durham Fair already engages in significant promotional activities. It would be advantageous for the EDC to engage in discussions with officials from the Durham fair on how some joint marketing could occur.

3. Create and maintain a database of broker contacts.

4. Join the CERC SiteFinder. This will allow property owners to list sites in an internet property database at a relatively low cost. The EDC or appropriate town staff can utilize this as an inventory of available properties. (Brian, doesn't this occur today?)

The SiteFinder website includes properties that are currently actively being marketed. However, there may be other sites within the Town, while not actively marketed, have owners that may be receptive to an offer. An inventory of these sites should be retained as well, including information about the owner, environmental features, etc.

5. The Town Web Site needs to be ~~retooled~~modified to include more economic development content

#### **9. Economic Incentives**

Property Tax deferrals should be utilized as a component of an overall economic development strategy. Although these incentives are not effective by themselves, their use does indicate a willingness of the community to attract business and industry. They are most effective when used in conformance with an overall incentive ~~overall~~ policy, instead of consideration on a case-by-case basis. In addition to tax abatements, the incentive can include, financing assistance, infrastructure investments, fee waivers, technical assistance and property acquisition. The establishment of a tax incentive policy has several advantages. The process of establishment of a policy promotes the debate about the specific requirements of economic growth. The Board of Selectmen and Economic Development Commission may determine that certain categories of businesses or locations should have greater incentives.

The adoption of such a policy can also be used for public relations purposes, in that it can launch an increased effort to attract business. Any incentive should be fully evaluated to assure that would offer the Town an adequate return on investment in the form of increased property tax revenues. (Brian, please incorporate the town history of incentives in town)

#### **10. Age Restricted Housing**

Demographic trends within the State of Connecticut indicate a continued growth in population of residents 55 and over. This type of housing, when it is developed within the context of proper land use planning can be beneficial to the community. In addition to its fiscal benefits, residents of these developments tend to have more disposable income and increase support for the local retail base.

The Town should continue to permit small age-restricted housing developments of a size and density consistent with the need to provide on-site wastewater disposal and water supply.

Considerations should be given to ~~lifting~~raising the cap on the total number of age-restricted units permitted in the Town at the appropriate time. (Brian, please add: "The current limit is.....")

#### **11. Infrastructure**

The availability of infrastructure, including public sewer, water and highways are a major determinant of the level and degree of development that can occur on a particular site. One of the limitations of development in Durham is the ~~lack~~limited distribution of public water and lack of sewer. Widespread installation of public sewer service in Durham is very unlikely, but the opportunities for development can be increased to some extent by the expansion of public water service ~~through the center of the Town~~.

#### **12. Home Based Business**

Improvements in technology and the expansion of the information based economy have resulted in the exponential growth of people operating businesses out of their homes. This has enabled people to live in more rural locations. Durham is especially attractive to this growing segment of the economy, as it is relatively accessible to urban centers.

1. ~~The Aetna is currently involved in a program to encourage its employees to work from home. Durham is home to many Aetna employees. One way in which this may be facilitated is to have an office that offers work related amenities on a part time basis for the Aetna employees. Offer business services for the homebased workforce, including copying and printing, teleconferencing facilities and meeting rooms. The Economic Development Commission should communicate with the Aetna Human Resources Department to explore ways in which the Town could work with the company to facilitate their work at home program, and possibly establish a satellite work center in Durham. This could serve as a model for other similar corporate programs.~~

2. ~~The at home entrepreneurs may also benefit from the use of this type of facility. The Economic Development Commission should seek interested developers or property owners that may be willing to establish such a facility.~~

3. The Greater Middlesex Chamber of Commerce has a Micro Business Council. The Economic Development Commission should contact this Council to explore different methods in which assistance and support can be provided to the home based businesses of Durham.