

CEDAS TESTIMONY
TORRINGTON 1/21/10

Hello my name is Dale Kroop and I am the President of the CT. Economic Development Association (CEDAS).

I would first like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding this important plan for CT. CEDAS is a statewide non-profit membership organization that is comprised of 200 economic development professionals and commissioners, institutional and private sector partners. Our comments and recommendations reflect the input of many economic development professionals as well as results from a survey that was conducted among our members concerning the nearly 70 goals listed in the plan. We are also mindful of the input made by CEDAS in January 2007, when the DECD conducted their input sessions throughout the State of CT. Copies of those comments are attached. We are in part responding to the plan's components are they relate to our original recommendations.

An incredible amount of information was included in the plan and we are grateful for this extensive review and analysis of the economic climate in CT. We realize that the process of developing a sustainable plan never ends, it is a dynamic process, always changing.

CEDAS' Survey on Proposed Goals: Our membership responded to the goals listed in the plan and offered the following general response.

A majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with 95% of the goals. Also a majority of respondents strongly agreed with 14% of all of the goals. Workforce and Technology related goals generally received the strongest response. Finally on only 3 of the goals, a significant number of respondents either strongly disagreed, disagreed or were neutral. These goals were The Adoption of a Statewide Green Building Code (Goal #42), Forming a (new) Statewide Responsible Growth Cabinet (Goal #45) and Allowing Community Referendums Regarding Zoning Regulations/Referendums (Goal #68).

Although we can conclude that our membership supported most of the goals, this support does not provide for a complete picture of their views. The plan does not include short, medium or long term horizons, funding sources or detailed benchmarks. We hope that these will be addressed as part of a future phase of the plan. In response to 70% of the goals, there were a significant number of respondents that were neutral, that is neither in favor (or not) of a given goal. This implies there was not enough information (i.e. detail of funding or implementation plan) to answer the question regarding the particular goal.

Specific CEDAS Comments:

1. Workforce: Sustainable and good paying jobs are critical. The inclusion of a number of workforce goals was commendable and addressed the technology needs for tomorrow's jobs. We would like to see more commitment to vocational training for those not interested in or are unable to attend college. Vocations such as electricians, plumbers, green vocational type jobs, etc. cannot be exported. These kinds of jobs are needed in every community and training needs to be encouraged and available for young people and other workers that require retraining.

2. Transportation and Infrastructure: Larger projects such as the proposed commuter rail project from New Haven to Springfield could have a significantly positive impact in many areas of the state. However given budget realities and political attrition we believe other, smaller investments in public transportation would also have a significant impact for our urban and larger communities state-wide. This would address the workforce challenges of the entire state. One example could be to add additional bus routes in larger communities at a fraction of the cost. We support the conversion of buses to alternative energy sources.

3. Structural and Efficiency Issues Across State Agencies: This is a critical part of building economic development partnerships statewide and creating a true team effort. The many proposed new or revamped commissions and boards related to policy and government efficiency are welcome. Some may be redundant as several of the proposed groups currently exist. DOT, DECD and DEP, and OPM must work together to make CT a competitive place to do business. The plan does pay attention to this need. We would recommend that economic development practitioners at the local and regional level participate in all of these strategy groups because we offer a unique vantage point and can offer years of *on-the-ground* experience. Finally the plan includes goals that consolidate Brownfield programs. This is a good idea but the plan should clearly show economic development practitioners how the application process will be significantly improved.

4. Marketing and Web-site: CEDAS strongly agrees that marketing Connecticut should be a top priority. It is necessary to be competitive in the marketplace and to attract and retain businesses and jobs. Over 93% of survey respondents believe it is critical to invest in a *world class* web-site to compete with other States across the country. Many of our members have expressed strong concerns that there is no clear strategy that specifies how marketing funds would be allocated for these efforts and how the recent elimination of funding for tourism would be reinstated. Tourism is one of CT's greatest assets and should be featured in any marketing campaign.

5. Cost of Doing Business in CT: The goal to develop a Blue Ribbon Commission on Taxation (Goal #25) is important particularly as it relates to Responsible Growth and Regionalism goals. We all agree on those priorities.

In our 2007 testimony we focused on the cost of conducting business in CT. Although issues such as workmen compensation insurance, health care, energy costs, etc may not be tackled in this plan we believe that these are the underlying and most critical factors immediately impacting small businesses across the Connecticut. These are the root causes of why CT ranks low nationally in categories related to these critical components of business operations. We believe that that the plan is more focused on community development issues rather than these core economic development problems experienced statewide. Affordable housing, zoning and responsible growth are all issues that are important but we are concerned that the plan focuses too strongly on these issues and that commitment required for these goals will take away needed resources from these other critical areas that negatively impact CT small businesses on a daily basis.

Summary

CEDAS is an organization whose dedicated members can bring unique insight and extensive economic development experience to the strategic planning process. We stand willing and able to help DECD move this plan to its next level. This next phase must focus on setting priorities, and implementation. A management plan must outline short, medium and long term strategies. We also believe that various elements of the plan need updating because underlying data is nearly three years old and reflect a different economic climate.

We recommend that the DECD develop an Administration or Implementation Plan similar to that required from our member communities that seek State or Federal funds.

We look forward to working with the DECD in this effort in 2010.

Thank you for your time and attention