

Economic Development Section

Plan of Conservation and Development

Draft April 6, 2009

1. Importance of Economic Development

- Businesses provide a net positive fiscal benefit to the Town, as they pay more in taxes than they consume in services.
- Local businesses provide employment opportunities. This enables Stafford residents to avoid long commutes, and increase local income.
- Local employment reduces commutation distances of residents and energy consumption.
- A greater number of retail and service businesses in Stafford would provide a greater choice for local residents, and reduce the need for them to travel out of the Town as frequently. This enhances the sustainability of the community by localizing economic activity.
- Taxes received by local businesses can allow the Town to add or enhance needed programs and services.
- Many local businesses provide community support ranging from donations to local causes, volunteer time, or other supportive activities.
- Local business provides support of many community activities, ranging from donations to local causes, volunteer time, and other supportive activities.
- Business growth prevents the spread of blight, as businesses re-use and /or renovate existing, unoccupied buildings.

2. Economic Conditions

The formulation of an economic development strategy for a community requires a certain degree of understanding of its demographic and economic trends. The information is intended to help identify Stafford's existing and potential role within the regional economy. As the plan is long term in nature, "up to the minute" economic information is not necessary, although we have strived to utilize the most recent information, based upon the availability of resources.

This component of the plan is being prepared at a time of unprecedented national economic change and upheaval. Economic conditions and data are changing rapidly. For example, the unemployment rate in Connecticut rose dramatically, from 5.2% in February, 2008 to 7.4% in February, 2009.

There is an inherent time lag between the economic analysis and the actual adoption of the plan. It is possible, that at that time, it may be helpful to update some of the information.

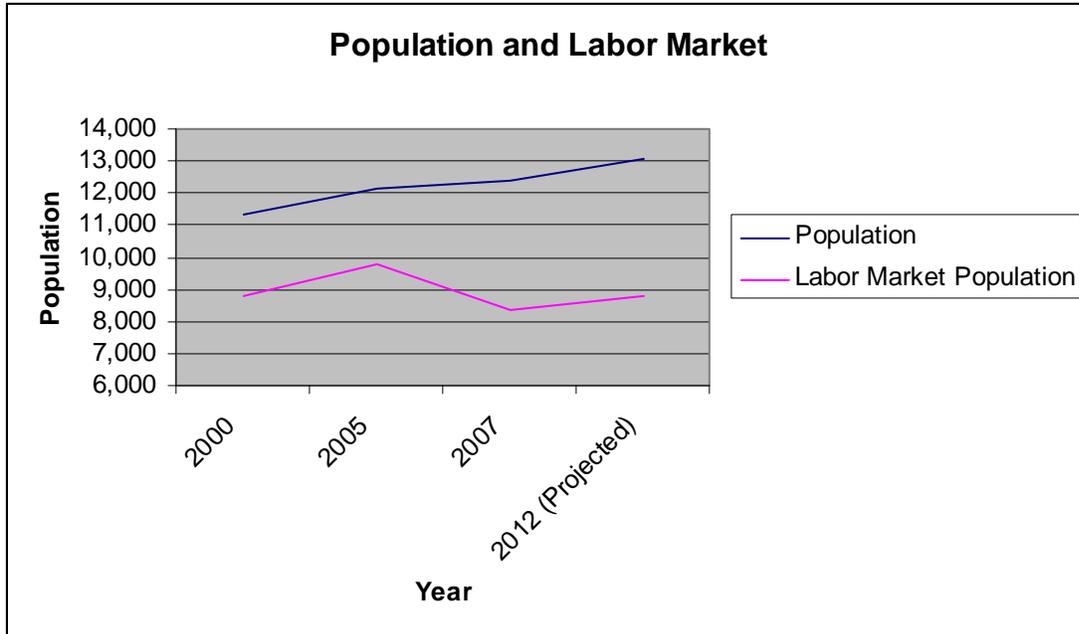
a. Population and Labor Force

The Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) provides economic development assistance to the communities within Connecticut. Much of the following information was obtained from the "Town Profiles" report, prepared by CERC for the State Department of Economic and Community Development.

Stafford Population and Labor Market Data

	2000	2005	2007	2012 (Projected)
Population	11,307	12,115	12,389	13,049
Labor Market Population	8,761	9,768	8,327	8,787

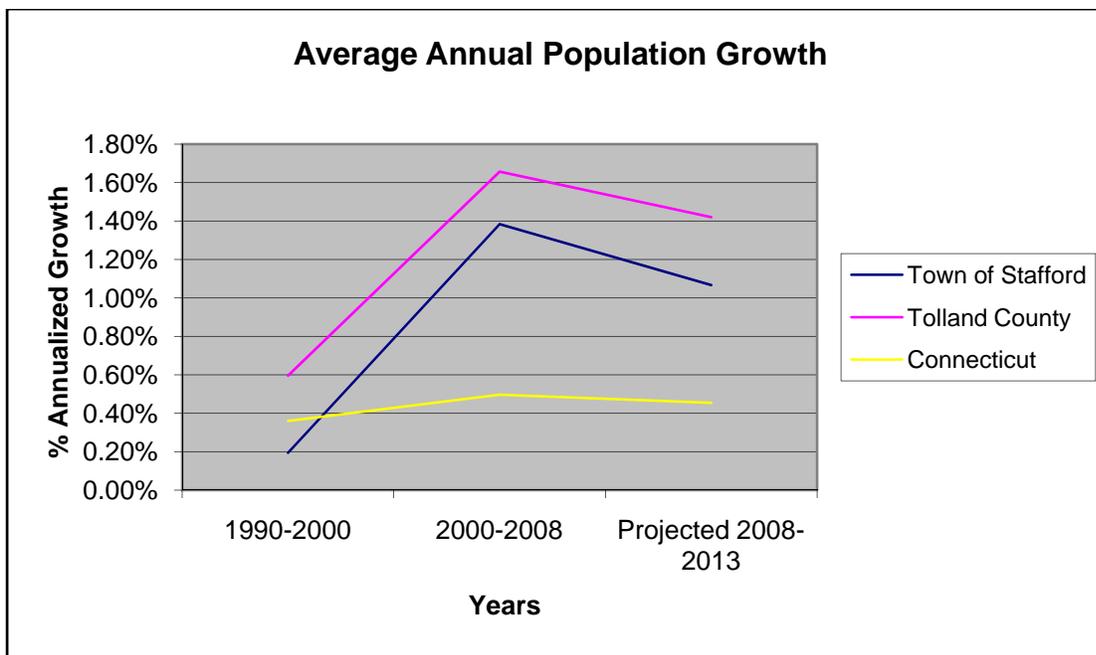
Source: CERC – EDDI 1/2008



Comparison of Population Growth Locally, Regionally and Statewide

Year	Town of Stafford	Tolland County	Connecticut
1990	11,091	128,699	3,287,116
2000	11,307	136,364	3,405,565
2008	12,559	154,438	3,540,846
2013	13,229	165,405	3,621,281
% Growth/yr 2008- 2013	1.00%	1.40%	0.50%

Source: CERC Town Profile - 2008



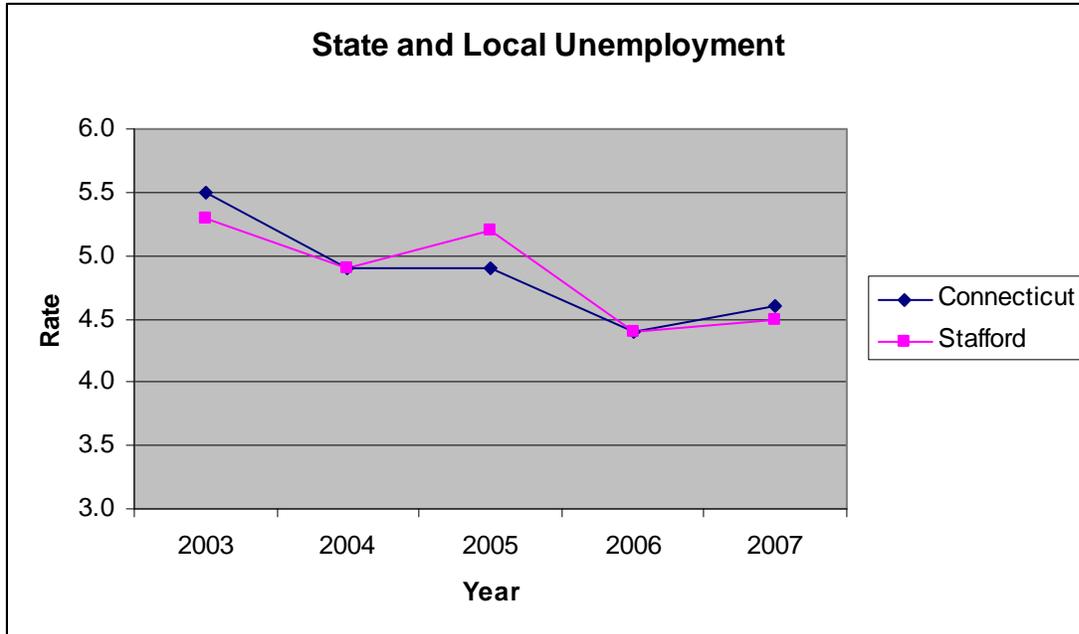
The Town

of Stafford population is anticipated to grow faster than the State population, but slower than Tolland County.

Unemployment Rate

TOWNS	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Connecticut	5.5	4.9	4.9	4.4	4.6
Stafford	5.3	4.9	5.2	4.4	4.5

Source: CT Dept. of Labor - Labor Force Data Benchmarked to 2007



The Labor Market population, which reached 9,768 in 2005 but has since declined, is anticipated to return to year 2000 levels by 2012. Growth in population is likely to be fueled by recent residential construction over the last several years. A corresponding decrease in the workforce population indicates a likelihood that working households have been replaced by retirees and that there may be a greater number of households with children.

The local unemployment rate has generally trended with the State unemployment rate. Recent data is not available, but it is reasonable to assume that the unemployment rate for Stafford has increased in conjunction with the increased State unemployment rate.

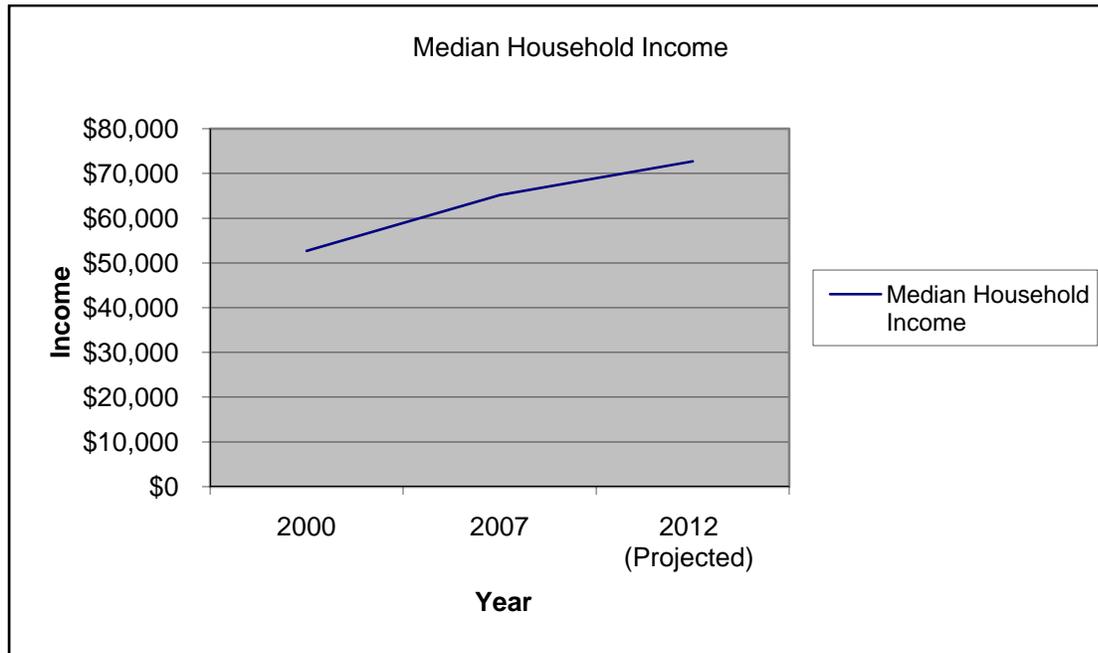
b. Household Characteristics

Household Characteristics

Households

	2000	2007	2012 (Projected)
Total Number of Households	4,353	4,576	4,710
Average Household Size	2.597	2.707	2.77
Median Household Income	\$52,699	\$65,189	\$72,714

Source: CERC – EDDI 1/2008



The total number and average size of households are anticipated to increase through 2012. The 2008 Median Household Income of \$65,710 lags the Tolland County Median of \$73,510 and the State Median of \$67,236.

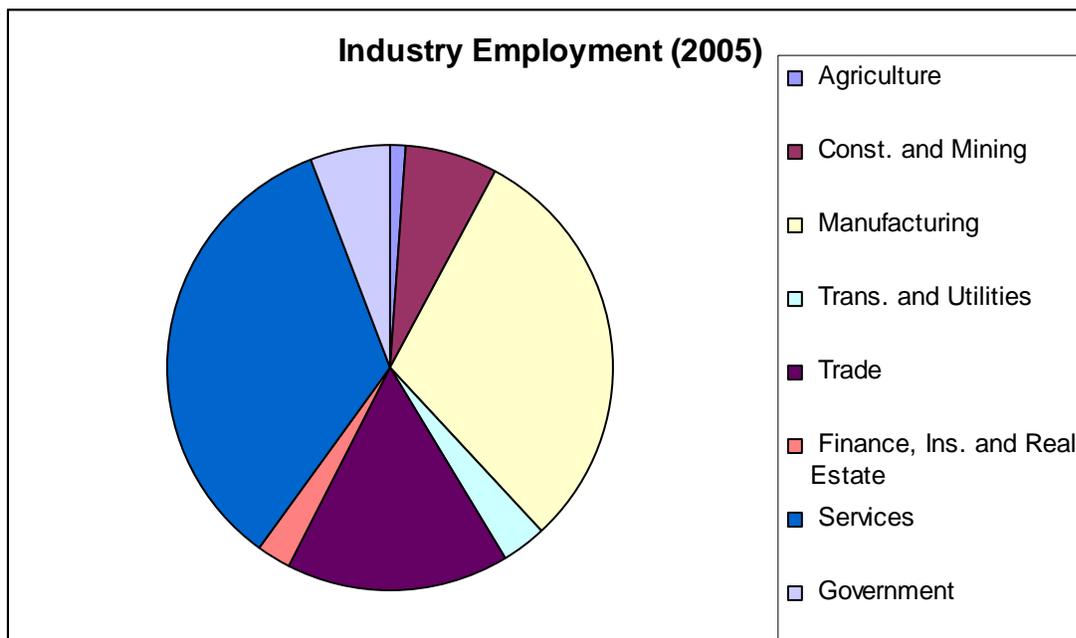
CERC further categorizes the housing market in Stafford as stable with the demand for housing continuing to exceed the supply. If housing prices continue to decline in closer-in Hartford suburbs, the development pressure for continued residential construction in Stafford may decline.

c. Employment and Industry

Business Profile (2005)

Sector	% of Total	
	Establishments	Employment
Agriculture	4.8%	1.2%
Const. and Mining	17.3%	6.7%
Manufacturing	8.5%	30.2%
Trans. and Utilities	3.7%	3.3%
Trade	21.5%	16.1%
Finance, Ins. and Real Estate	6.3%	2.4%
Services		34.3%
Government	3.5%	5.7%

Source: CERC Town Profile - 2008



The largest employment sector in Stafford is services, which is typical to the region and the State. The second largest sector is manufacturing, a unique (and often sought after) quality in Connecticut. Having a native manufacturing base often leads to opportunity for support services, and establishes a Town as a regional employer.

CERC has identified the following leading employers within Stafford in 2006:

1. Johnson Memorial Hospital - Employees: 694 - Healthcare
2. TYCO/Tyco International - Employees: 550 – Circuit Board Manufacturer
3. Stafford Board Of Education - Employees: 355 - Public Education
4. Evergreen Health Care - Employees: 245 - Nursing Home
5. CUNO - Employees: 200 - Filtration equipment
6. Warrens of Stafford - Employees: 197 - Fabric Manufacturer
7. Big Y Supermarkets - Employees: 100 - Groceries
8. Town of Stafford - Employees: 65 - Local Government
9. Hobbs Medical - Employees: 26 - Medical Equipment

Tyco's employees work in two facilities within the Town. It is clear that manufacturing and healthcare services are currently the dominant employment engines within the Town. This illustrates the importance of Johnson Memorial Hospital to the local economy, as Stafford serves as the health care center of the surrounding region of northeast Connecticut.

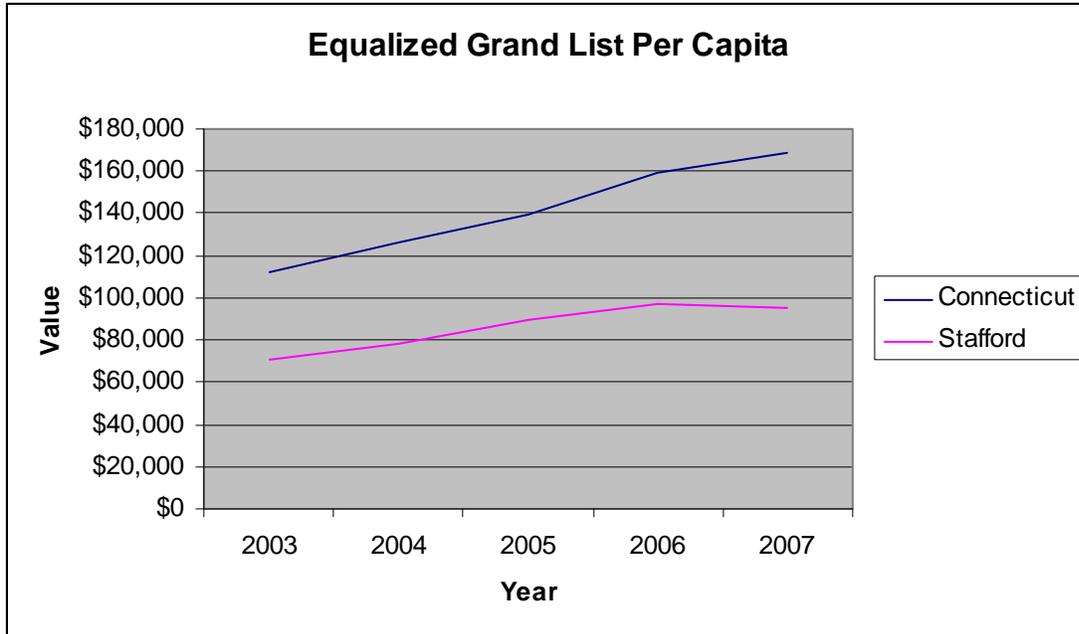
d. Fiscal Environment

Stafford has attained triple-A bond ratings from Moody's, and the per capita tax rate is 72% of the State average. Total indebtedness is 84% of the State average. The fiscal health of the Town as well as its favorable tax environment should be a draw to industry and potential employers.

Equalized Grand List per Capita

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Connecticut	\$112,597	\$126,700	\$139,667	\$159,603	\$169,150
Stafford	\$71,101	\$78,518	\$89,505	\$97,185	\$95,566

Source: CT Office of Policy and Management – Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2006-2007

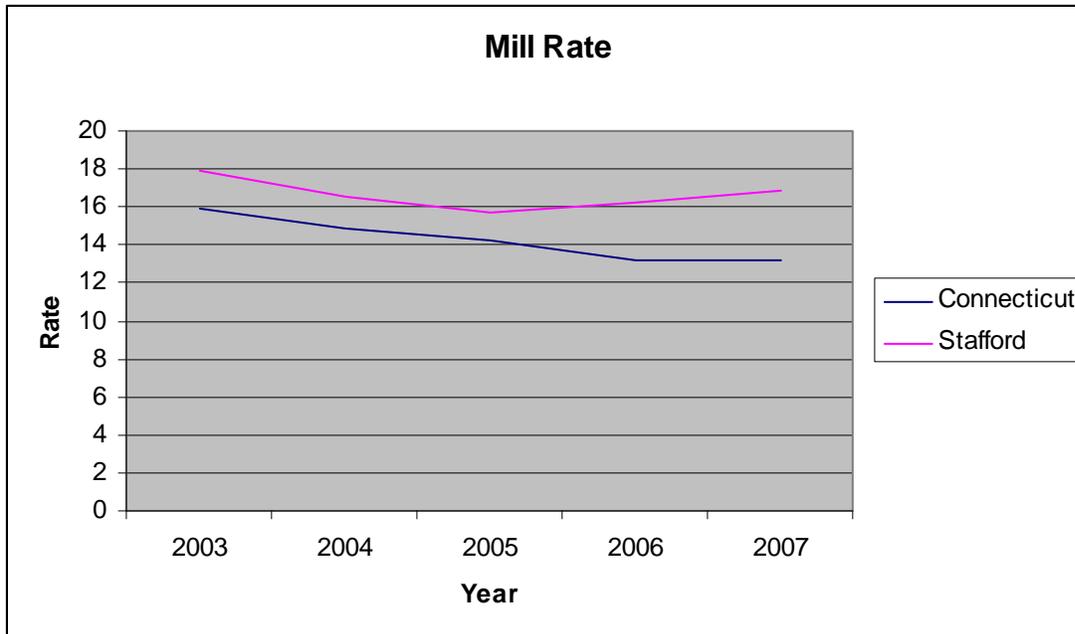


Equalized Grand List Per Capita is a measure of the total market value of real and personal property (taxable property) within a jurisdiction divided by the jurisdiction's population. It is useful as both a measure of wealth and of the tax base. Stafford has a significantly lower Grand List Per Capita than the State. Also, over the fiscal years ending 2003 through 2007, the State outpaced Stafford in terms of growth of Grand List Per Capita. In summary, the average Stafford resident owns significantly less taxable property than the average Connecticut resident, and the discrepancy has increased since 2003. One notable data point is that in the last year for which data is known (fiscal year ending in 2007) Stafford experienced a decline in Grand List Per Capita, while the state continued to grow its Grand List Per Capita, albeit at a diminished rate.

Equalized Mill Rate Per Capita

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Connecticut	15.9	14.9	14.2	13.2	13.2
Stafford	17.93	16.51	15.66	16.2	16.88

Source: CT Office of Policy and Management – Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2006-2007



The Equalized Mill Rate is the total amount of real and personal property taxes levied divided by the total market value of real and personal property within a jurisdiction. Since 2003, Stafford has seen a decline in the amount of taxes levied as compared to the value of property. This decline reached a bottom in the fiscal year ending 2005 and since then the equalized Mill rate has been increasing. This is in contrast to the Connecticut average which shows a declining (and lower) equalized Mill Rate that has bottomed between the years 2006 and 2007. With a slowing in property value appreciation Statewide, it is likely that 2008 may see an increase in the Equalized Mill Rate statewide, as has been experienced over the last few years locally.

3. Goal for Economic Development

Promote the economic growth of Stafford in a way that:

- Preserves the attractiveness of the community;
- Enhances Stafford's Quality of Life;
- Promotes the growth of employment;
- Promotes the growth of the tax base in order to provide improved public services.

This goal will be accomplished by a coordinated effort of all town boards and commissions working together for the common goal, and include the following:

- Ongoing research for opportunities to facilitate economic growth;
- Reach out and marketing to potential new businesses;

- Continuous efforts to retain the existing businesses of the community;
- Seeking and utilizing partnerships with and programs to attract businesses to Stafford;
- Promoting the attractiveness of the community to business.

4. Policies

- 1. Support and encourage the strength's of Stafford's Village centers.**
- 2. Support and encourage businesses that promote Stafford as a "destination town."**
- 3. Support and encourage the continued growth of home based business.**
- 4. Maintain standards of commercial development to avoid the creation of a "hamburger alley" of businesses along the major arterial roads in the Town.**
- 5. Support and encourage the establishment of aesthetic standard within the zoning regulation in business area, including color themes, energy conservation efforts such as the use of LED lighting, signage (size and dimensions standards) in business areas, with standards adjusted to area and zone.**
- 6. Support the expansion of light industry at Middle River Drive Industrial Park and encourage the Town to market recently rezoned property along Monson Road (Lots 47/019 and 36/128)**
- 7. Consider identification and promotion of "gateway zones" for business /industry.**
- 8. Encourage the Town to market recently rezoned property along Monson Road (Lots 47/019 and 36/128)**
- 9. Prohibit or restrict inappropriate uses in town such as those which create environmental pollution or create potential social problems in the Town.**
- 10. Establish a series of procedures which enable the Economic Development Commission to take a more active role in the business development.**

11. Enhance Main Street by continued beautification efforts, renovations, historic themed decor and the provision of off-street parking.

5. Area Recommendations

Three major commercial “regions” within the town have been identified. The uses of these areas are important for the economic vitality of the Town, and can be accomplished with the preservation of the attractiveness of the community.

a. Zone 1 Main Street /Route 190 to Route 32 North

This region encompasses the commercial properties within the Borough of Stafford Springs. There is little vacant land within this area, but there are opportunities for redevelopment or re-use of properties. This area is densely developed, and many of the commercial properties are in close proximity to residential areas. Most of the parcels are small, and can therefore support smaller uses. Therefore, commercial uses within this area should be limited to light retail, restaurants, arts/antiques, historic uses, tourism related use commercial recreation, offices, and services.

This region actually contains two sub-areas; the downtown area; and the West main Street area. Although each area has distinctive characteristics, both areas are linked and important for the economic health of the community, as well as the quality of the surrounding Borough neighborhood.

Downtown

Downtown Stafford Springs should remain the high density economic center of the community. This will require a concentrated revitalization effort that could include the following measures:

- a. Promote the continued use of the older industrial mill buildings. Many have remained in active industrial use, but the current economic situation may result in the underutilization of many of these buildings. Some of them may be appropriate for residential conversion into condominiums or artist lofts, while other may be appropriate for small business use.
- b. A downtown Stafford Springs improvement organization should be established to promote the economic growth of downtown Stafford Springs. The resulting organization should provide a mechanism that would enable downtown interests to work cooperatively to pursue common goals. The organization should be able to encourage investment, serve as

an advocate for downtown interests, coordinate marketing and act as a liaison with the local government in matters affecting the downtown.

An effective revitalization organization needs to have the tools and capability to act in a timely, effective manner. It needs to be led by committed community representatives and have a source of revenue that would enable it to implement long-term community and economic development initiatives.

- c. Adequate parking is needed to facilitate downtown revitalization. However, the issue of adequate parking is not addressed solely by the number of parking spaces. The location, layout, environment and management of the parking all are more important to the utility of parking resources within a downtown area than just the sheer number. A parking utilization plan and study should be done to assess the supply and utilization of parking, and plan for the improvements and utilization. Adequate signage should be included to direct motorists into available downtown parking areas.
- d. The zoning regulations should be amended to permit residential uses above commercial uses in the downtown area. Although parking may be a limitation, the Town could investigate the establishment of small centralized parking facilities to serve a number of properties.
- e. Downtown revitalization efforts need to include a strong preservation ethic. The primary strengths of downtown Stafford Springs are its architecture and traditional small town/downtown environment. Stafford Springs has been fortunate in that important historic structures within the downtown area have been preserved, and in many cases renovated. The preservation of these attributes should be foremost amongst all revitalization efforts.
- f. A key element in any downtown revitalization effort is to provide for a sound, efficient and attractive pedestrian circulation system. The ability and desire of people to walk around a downtown district is critical to the economic well-being of the area.
- g. A major component of a successful downtown revitalization program would be to leverage private investment for building and façade improvement. The Town should establish a special fund for downtown property owners to upgrade the facades of their properties. The funding could be a loan or grant that would be matched by an equal or greater private investment. A grant would have a more immediate impact, although loan funds can be “recycled” for other downtown projects upon

repayment. Funds should be provided for renovations that are consistent with the preservation or restoration of the historical integrity of the building and/or with overall design guidelines that have been formulated for the area.

- h. The rivers flowing through Stafford Springs can be an important amenity to the community, but are not being taken advantage of. In many areas, the rivers are to the rear of the buildings, hidden from view. The rivers should be opened up, and incorporated into a park / greenway system that weaves through the borough, providing additional focal areas.
- i. The Connecticut Main Street Program should be investigated. The Connecticut Main Street Center follows a national model called the Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization. Developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the program advances economic development within the context of historic preservation and advocates public-private partnerships to ensure lasting success. It is based upon a four-point approach to increasing the value of a community's central business area: organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring/business improvement. The program includes an introductory process. Even if the Town decides not to participate, it should use Main Street Model as a guide for revitalization.

West Main Street (west of Church Street)

- a. The retail properties should remain small scaled, oriented towards serving the surrounding community.
- b. The sidewalk networks should be completed within this area, on both sides of the street.
- c. There are many residential structures within this area, which can be used for commercial purposes.
- d. New commercial architecture should be compatible with the historic nature of the area.
- e. New commercial development should minimize the impact of parking lots, through careful placement and visual buffering.
- f. A cohesive pattern of landscaping should be installed along the road.

b. Zone 2 (Route 190 from Route 32 North to Route 319)

This zone includes the major commercial corridor of the community, containing most of the major retail businesses within Stafford. This zone can best accommodate the contemporary commercial development. Therefore this zone is planned to grow as the Town's major commercial area. The emphasis here is to encourage continued growth of retail and industrial uses, while enhancing the character of the community.

- a. Larger scale retail development should occur on the few large parcels within this region, with smaller retail uses in the frontage. The larger retail developments should be within clusters of retail uses, with a village center layout, rather than large strip centers. The village center layouts should be oriented be more pedestrian friendly, with the uses clustered together. The buildings and uses may actually face each other, across an internal street. A mixture of uses could be included. This would contrast with the traditional strip center, which contains retail buildings in a sea of parking lots. Many of the strip centers contain buildings with no functional relationship with each other; their only orientation is to the parking areas.
- b. Some light industry should be located in the rear of the larger parcels.
- c. Sidewalks should be constructed along the road.
- d. A cohesive pattern of landscaping should be installed along the road. The zoning regulations should be amended to require street trees and other plantings to create a unified theme.
- e. The Town owned parcel fronting on Monson Road, (Route 32) should be actively marketed for a mix of small retail, light industrial, office and wholesaling uses. These two adjacent properties are the largest sites in the Town that are potentially available for commercial or industrial development. The properties are bound by industrial uses and the railroad tracks to the west, with the tracks separating it from the rear of the Big Y plaza. Residential properties are to the north. Much of the eastern boundary of the property is bound by frontage on Monson Road (Route 32). On the other side of Route 32 is land of the Cemetery Association. Commercial uses are south of this property, along West Stafford Road.

Water and sewer service are available to this site, although the entire site is not within the sewer district. The site has frontage and potential access to West Stafford Road, (Route 190) and Monson Road (Route 32). The properties include a significant amount of wetland areas. Most of the wetland areas are in the southern area of the site, closest to West Stafford

Road. However, there are substantial areas of contiguous non-wetland areas throughout the site.

Careful design is needed to assure that this important property is developed in a way that maximizes the overall benefit to the Town. It should be developed in accordance with a comprehensive plan, approved by the appropriate town agencies.

c. Zone 3 West Stafford (Route 190 from Route 319 to Route 30)

This area is less developed, and is anchored by the Johnson Memorial Hospital, and the traditional village center of West Stafford. The planned use of this area is based upon the strengthening of the West Stafford village center, capitalizing upon the presence of Johnson Memorial Hospital, and preserving the rural character of this area.

- a. New uses within this area should be professional and medical offices which are drawn to the presence of the hospital.
- b. The uses should be small scaled, with limitations on building size and coverage.
- c. The design of the buildings within this area should avoid a commercial – institutional appearance, and should reflect the historic look of the area.
- d. The regulations governing design should include stringent site plan design standards, including issues such as parking location and layout, signage, lighting and access.

6. Village Centers Stafford Hollow - Staffordville – Hydeville

In addition to the three major commercial regions identified above, the Town includes these traditional rural village centers. These areas have traditionally served as the community centers for the surrounding rural areas, and have included religious, community, commercial, industrial and residential uses. Although the role of these areas has changed due to shifting economic and conditions, they have generally retained their historic character.

- a. The industrial areas of Stafford Hollow should be retained as feasible.
- b. The industrial property in Hydeville is likely to be a candidate for re-use within the foreseeable future. Potential re-use of the property would be as a restaurant, small retail, offices, light industrial or some mixed use which includes some of the above.

- c. Small commercial and professional office uses within these centers should be encouraged, preferably utilizing existing structures. The commercial uses should be respectful of the historical character of these areas.

7. General Recommendations

a. Preservation of Agricultural Uses

Agricultural uses remain important to the economy and overall land use pattern of Stafford. Farmland contributes to the rural character of the Town. If farms are to remain viable business entities, there will be less incentive for them to be sold for residential development. In particular, Stafford appears to have a concentration of horse farms. It may be possible to capitalize upon this sector and establish Stafford as an equestrian center, through a cooperative effort between the Town and the equestrian farmers.

In order to promote agricultural uses, the Town should ensure that the zoning regulations do not inhibit agricultural operations as to construction of barns, and placement of structures. Stafford's zoning regulations appear to be generally conducive to agricultural operations but the Commission may consider permitting additional agricultural related activities, such as a farm stores or food production as special permit uses in conjunction with agricultural operations.

b. Business Retention

The backbone on any municipal economic development program is an organized effort to retain existing businesses and to help them grow within the community. The Town needs to continue the lines of communication with existing businesses. Business retention activities could include meetings with business officials and having the Economic Development Commission or another town official serve as an ombudsman to assist local businesses to resolve issue with utilities government and other situations.

c. Marketing

The marketing of the town should be oriented towards creating a higher profile and awareness of the Town's development opportunities, marketing to real estate brokers as intermediary group, and direct solicitations of businesses and developers to attract certain business. Ideally it should involve the preparation and implementation of an economic development marketing program.

d. Incentives

Although financial incentives for business location are not effective economic development tools by themselves, they can assist in the overall economic development effort of the Town. The Town should establish a specific policy concerning tax abatement phase-ins pursuant to section 12-65b of the Connecticut General Statutes.

e. Gateways

One method that communities use to define themselves is to create or upgrade the entrance to the community. The highest trafficked entrance is on Route 32 from the south, followed by Route 190 from the west and east. In particular the entrance from Route 32 is particularly dramatic, as one comes up through the river valley into the heart of Stafford Springs.

Landscaped “Welcome to Stafford” signs should be installed at the major entrances to the Town. Proper maintenance of these sites is very important. They should be surrounded by a small landscaped area, or even part of a small park.

f. Regional Cooperation

Economic growth is inherently regional, as each community has strong economic ties to its neighbors. An effective economic development effort requires a joint municipal – regional effort. The economy of Stafford is very much dependant upon the economy of the Greater Hartford Region. Consideration should be given to the coordination of economic development efforts with the Metro Hartford Alliance, which offers marketing and data services through the Economic Development Data and Information system.

g. Upgrade of Older Properties

The zoning regulations should include provisions and incentives to upgrade older commercial properties. In some situations, these properties are nonconforming, which makes any improvements or redevelopment in accordance with the zoning regulations difficult. The zoning regulations should permit the Commission to waive or alter setback, parking or coverage requirements, by Special Permit, if they believe that it would result in an upgrade of the property and greater conformance with the intent of the regulations.

h. Hospitality Sector

Tourism and hospitality is a growing segment of the statewide economy. The growth of this sector should capitalize upon existing assets of the community.

The Stafford Springs Speedway attracts visitors from throughout southern New England. Automobile racing is a growing sport, and the Town may be able to benefit economic from the raceway's spin-off businesses. For example, there may be opportunities for additional restaurants near the raceway. In addition, a small hotel/motel may also be viable in the future. Downtown revitalization would also be an important component of this process.

i. High Speed Telecommunications

The availability of high speed telecommunications is important to all businesses. The Town should work with providers to assure that high speed telecommunications services are available to the businesses and residents of Stafford.

j. Home Based Businesses

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. An important benefit is that some of these businesses could expand and Stafford can be especially attractive to this growing segment of the economy, with its relatively accessible to the major markets of Southern New England.

The zoning regulations currently permit home-based businesses. This should be maintained. In addition, the Town should explore other ways in which home based businesses can be encouraged.

k. Economic Development Procedures

Establish a protocol in which the Economic Development Commission is notified and consulted whenever there is an inquiry or proposal for anew business. This could include inquiries within the First Selectman's Office, as well as zoning applications.