

Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Economic Development Steering Committee Meeting
Town Plan Economic Development Chapter Update
Draft Minutes
September 30, 2024

Planner Matt Osborn called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

Attendance: The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 2 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Monday, September 30, 2024. The meeting was also available remotely and several people joined that way.

Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee:

John Reid	Planning Commission, term expires 2/5/27
Bruce Riddle	Planning Commission, term expires 2/7/25
John Heath	Planning Commission, term expires 3/11/27
Toby Dayman	Planning Commission, term expires 6/24/27
Colin Butler	Planning Commission, term expires 6/24/27
Havah Armstrong Walther	Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce
Jesse Pollard	Energy Commission
Meghan Asbury	Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission

Staff:

Lori Hirshfield	Director, Department of Planning and Development
Matt Osborn	Town Planner, Department of Planning and Development
Dana Clawson	Sustainability Coordinator

Consultants:

Jason Godfrey	Better City
Serra Güllü	Better City

Others Present:

David Briggs
Peggy Adams

Public Comments: John Reid asked if there are any public comments. There were none.

Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Minutes of 5/10/24 & 6/10/24 and the Community Forum Minutes of 7/16/24: John Reid asked if there are any corrections to the minutes. Being none, Colin Butler made a motion to approve the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Minutes of 5/10/24 & 6/10/24 and the Community Forum Minutes of 7/16/24. The motion was seconded by Jesse Pollard and approved unanimously.

Review of the Draft Economic Development Chapter: Matt noted that the meeting will focus on the review of the Draft Economic Development Chapter of the Town Plan (Strategic Plan) prepared by consultants, Better City. He noted that this is the first time the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee have seen the draft. Matt highlighted the collaborative effort on the project. Staff has been working with Better City on the Draft chapter the last few weeks. Matt introduced consultant Jason Godfrey.

Jason said he would go through the draft chapter section by section. Jason noted that an economic development strategy can't be all things to all people. Since most people will access the Town Plan online, to make the document easier to read, staff agreed to transition from portrait to a landscape layout.

Section 1 Introduction: Jason noted that the introduction focuses on the process of updating the Economic Development chapter and includes the review of past plans, data collection and analysis and community engagement. He discussed the importance of community feedback in shaping the recommendations and emphasized the need for prioritization. He noted that the community feedback for the project was exceptional.

Section 2 Economic Profile: Jason highlighted that the data included in this chapter establishes important economic trends that are the basis for the proposed economic development goals further on in the chapter. He also noted other economic data which is included in the appendix.

Matt shared an email from Kim Souza with her comments on the draft given she most likely would not be back in time for the meeting. Kim did not agree with the concept that people choose to live in Hartford for the quality of life and accept lower wages. She noted that there is a large demographic that struggles to make ends meet and don't have a choice about leaving the area for higher wages. Jason responded that they would revise the language.

Bruce Riddle stated that the poverty rate is more complex. He believes Hartford's poverty rate is higher, noting the high number of school age children eligible for free school lunches and the strain people experience with the high cost of housing. Jason agreed and will reflect this in to the document.

Under Figure 8, Colin noted that real growth may be less due to inflation. Jason responded that they will add an inflation factor.

John Reid suggested that the doubling of jobs in Hartford since 2002 deserves some explanation. Lori stated that the data isn't clear about where those jobs are. Jason agreed. Lori noted that social assistance is grouped with health care. Havah Armstrong Walther noted there are a large number of non-profit organizations in Hartford which provide social services and also could account for this number being high. Jason responded that they will add a note regarding this.

Colin noted some editing corrections.

Section 3 Strategic Plan:

Under Nature Economy, Matt shared Kim's email expressing concern about encouraging development near rivers due to the flood potential. Others agreed. There was discussion about encouraging use of the rivers could be done that minimize disrupting sensitive areas such as using food trucks instead of permanent structures. Jason responded that they will add language to that effect.

Lori noted the importance of adding to the trail network for tourism. Jason agreed noting that there are opportunities to improve on trail connectivity in Hartford.

Under Creative Economy, Lori noted the recommendation to create an economic development committee.

Under Innovative Economy, John Reid suggested including the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center (HAC&TC) adult programs. There was discussion about the popularity and important role that the HAC&TC has in workforce development and filling a growing demand for people to fill positions in. Havah noted that that HAC&TC offer certificate workshops for the adult population as well. Lori stated that there is a direct correlation between trades and the need for more housing, which is needed to support business coming to or expanding in Hartford. Jesse noted recent training programs for women in the trades in Hartford.

Jason asked what the role of the Town should be. There was discussion about expanding the tools for creating diversified employment opportunities for a diversified population. John Reid suggested that the Town develop the physical space for trainings. Jason noted that maker space is covered in the section. He suggested adding a statement that workforce development is vital and the Town can serve as a collaborator/facilitator. It was agreed that this was the approach to take for the Town Plan from which more specific recommendations could be identified and vetted in the future.

Toby suggested changing the title of Figure 15. Jason agreed.

Section 4 Metrics: Matt read Kim's comment that although there is a discussion of the need for economic strategies which support higher wages and job diversification, there isn't an objective or strategy for that. Jason responded that they will address this in the chapter.

Next Steps: Jason noted that they will prepare a revised draft using track changes to highlight the changes from this draft. Matt noted that the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee will review the next revised draft and the consensus of the group was another meeting was preferable. Colin stated that it is important to get Selectboard input. Matt noted that once the final draft is completed, it will be presented to the Selectboard. Lori noted that following the Selectboard meeting, the next step would be to begin the formal adoption process which also will include the Housing Chapter.

Lori thanked Jason and Serra for their commitment to the project.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.