



Economic Development Commission, Retiring Chair, Dave Hammond

As Interviewed by Morgan Browning, Student Liason

The Economic Development Commission (EDC) is made up of 12 hardworking members who strive to grow the tax base, while preserving the residential character of the Town. The Chair of the EDC has been Dave Hammond, a generous volunteer and father. Mr. Hammond has been a committed volunteer in our town since his two boys were very young. He started to help out with his son's extracurricular activities such as sports and Cub Scouts. As Mr. Hammond became more involved in the Stonington Public School systems, he came to a further understanding of how important it was to keep the school funded.

Prior to becoming Chair, he was a strategic planner at Pfizer for 22 years, and he worked for various other companies for 15 years prior to Pfizer. Mr. Hammond participated in the EDC as an active member for nine years and was nominated to be the chair five years ago, in 2017.

When Mr. Hammond is not working; he is out visiting his two boys, who are both now college students at Bentley and Cornell. His son is also running for Cornell University and Mr. Hammond and his wife often travel to watch the races and visit their son and his team. Hammond states that even though he is retired, much of his time is spent supporting his boys through college, which he loves. Mr. Hammond will be stepping down as Chair of the EDC in

January, and all who worked with him expressed their gratitude for his leadership and wish him well in his next chapter!

Learning More About the Economic Development Commission

During our interview, I started off by asking Mr. Hammond, “What has surprised you most since taking on the role as Chair on the EDC?” Hammond replied that he did not anticipate how challenging it is to advance work in a municipality in an efficient way. The EDC consists entirely of volunteers with limited time, yet it seeks to account for diverse public opinion and input, adding an important step in an effort to gain support for ideas that benefit the Town. He says that it was very different entering into a municipality vs. a corporation, which is understandable due to his wealth of experience from Pfizer. A corporation such as Pfizer does not weigh importance on public input, while a municipality and its Commissions, such as the EDC, revolves largely around it. The EDC works to make the Town better for the people, which means they really appreciate hearing from the community members of Stonington.

Mr. Hammond feels that the EDC members are extremely aligned. I was very intrigued during this interview to learn that the EDC does a goal setting process each year to keep the Commission productive and efficient. Entailed in this process is a meeting in which 30 projects are pitched by various members. Then 10 projects are chosen based on priority of what will be most beneficial to the Town. All 12 members have a voice in this meeting.

Mr. Hammond said he hopes that the public knows that the EDC’s ideas and actions are informed by the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), the strategic plan for the Town. The POCD was written with a generous amount of public input. The EDC’s main job is to come up with recommendations and plans for the Town, but they do not have any power in the Town to regulate laws. Their main goal is to consider all 18,000 residents in the Town and keep their best interest at heart.

I asked Mr. Hammond, “Are there any big things that the EDC is working on and what effects will they have on the community?” He said that the EDC is currently working on revitalizing downtown Pawcatuck. They are currently working to attract investments to the downtown area to refurbish vacant lots and buildings. The EDC has already seen some accomplishments in Pawcatuck, including contemporizing zoning regulations and revised floodplain construction guidelines within FEMA rules to attract investment. The EDC also works with owners of blighted and under-performing properties to realize upgrades, residential development, or new commercial businesses.

They are also working on making the Town villages more vibrant, while maintaining open space in the Town. For example, some of the highway exit areas do not establish a welcoming feel to Stonington, and so they are working to brainstorm ways to make the exits 90 and 92 more inviting.

The EDC is also working on creating Cultural Districts in the Town, which would be state recognized. The Town must make an application, meet the state's criteria, and then be officially recognized. Some places that would be highlighted with a cultural district would be the Nathaniel Palmer House and the arts galleries in the Stonington Borough.

Overall the Economic Development Commission plays a large role in the ongoing development of the Town. Though they do not have the power to directly regulate laws in the Town, they work to make the most beneficial recommendations possible. Thanks to the work of Chair, Dave Hammond, and all the other generous members of the EDC, the finances and development of the town continue advancing and making yearly improvements.