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Group unveils plan for business growth in Marlborough

Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff
The MetroWest Daily News

After months of work, the Marlborough Economic Development Corp. has debuted its plan to chart the future of the city's business development.

The 378-page plan, along with a 90-page executive summary and 12-page introduction, examines conditions within the city and maps out steps that can be taken to spur growth. George Ciccione, the agency's executive director, said the final product will be a valuable tool. Ciccione said the process began last November when the agency hired the consulting firm **FXM Associates** of Mattapoisett, which worked with three sub-consultants - The Cecil Group, AECOM and the Economic Development Research Group, all based in Boston. The consultants toured the city and compiled demographic and financial data. They also hosted meetings with stakeholders and a public forum.

The final product offers a number of possible opportunities that can be explored in four sectors as defined in the group's report - industrial, commercial, retail and residential. One of the initiatives that Ciccione said is most important is an expanded outreach program, which encourages the agency and city leaders to engage in the business community at a greater level.

"We need to get out and talk to them to let them know that we should be their point of contact," he said.

Ciccione also said a business owner that runs into a problem should contact the economic development group for help.

Most local business owners don't consider the permitting process to be problematic, but Ciccione said one issue Marlborough faces is what to do with large, vacant office buildings. The plan does not account for any new construction projects until 2013, as there is already 2 million square feet of vacant office space and another 3.6 million square feet that's been permitted but not built.

Ciccione said the vacant office buildings typically attract interest from companies looking to only rent a portion of the space, which can be difficult to section off and retrofit.

One solution could be making the process for permitting and designing those retrofits easier and quicker, he said. As the vacancies are filled, the city could possibly lower its commercial tax rate, which is significantly higher than many neighboring communities that use a single tax rate.

The corporation's plan includes many suggestions for spurring economic development, including marketing downtown as a cultural hub, eliminating negative and undeserved perceptions surrounding the public school system, and supporting local sports.

"This is the beginning," Ciccione said. "There is still a lot of work ahead."

Residents or business owners can obtain a copy of the plan by contacting the Marlborough Economic Development Corp., 91 Main St., Suite 204, at 508-229-2010 or info@marlboroughedc.com.

Ciccione said he hopes to have the report posted on the agency's website. (Kendall Hatch can be reached at 508-490-7453 or khatch@wickedlocal.com.) marlboroughedc.com

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