



TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT

Economic Development Commission Minutes

Hamden Government
Center
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Regular Meeting

5:30 PM, September 8, 2026

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Commissioner K. Good at 5:31 PM.

2. ATTENDANCE

The roll was called by the Clerk, and the following members were present:

Present

Commissioner Ken Good, Chair
Commissioner Petra Gardella
Commissioner Tammy Robinson
Commissioner Anthony J. DelGrego
Commissioner Howard K. Hill
Commissioner Maggie Murolo
Commissioner Romeo Ibanez

Also in attendance were Steve Fontana, Economic Development Director; Eugene Livshits, Town Planner; Briana J. Belton-Robinson, Boards and Commissions Clerk; and one member of the public, who attended virtually.

Roll Call Summary: Present, Voting: 8; Present, Not Voting: 0; Absent: 0; Excused: 0.

3. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

1. Meeting Minutes for Tuesday, July 14th, 2026

Chairman K. Good requested a motion to adopt the minutes from Tuesday, July 14th, 2026.

Commissioner M. Maggie made the motion, and Commissioner T. Robinson seconded it.

Present

Commissioner K. Good, Chair
Commissioner T. Robinson
Commissioner A.J. DelGrego
Commissioner H.K. Hill
Commissioner M. Murolo

Commissioner R. Ibanez

Abstentions

Commissioner P. Gardella

The previous meeting minutes with corrections.

The motion passed.

- **Roll Call Vote Summary:** Yes 6, No 0, Abstentions 1, Absent 0.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

You will have 3 minutes to speak and will be notified when you have 30 seconds remaining to avoid being muted at the completion of 3 minutes.

No members of the public offered comment.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

There will be a brief summary of the correspondence submitted between the last correspondence update and this one. This includes but is not limited to any correspondence with council members that members wish to submit for the record. It can also include written communication to the council from the administration, community members, etc.

Clerk B. Belton-Robinson reported that she reviewed the Commission's email and had not received any new correspondence. Chairman K. Good stated that he had also reviewed his email and had not received any additional correspondence.

6. EXECUTIVE SESSION

(if recommended by the town attorney)

No executive session was held.

7. CHAIRMAN'S REPORTS

1. Business Community Update

Chairman K. Good reported that approximately 74 new businesses registered in Hamden in July and 69 registered in August. Registrations included cleaning and building services, wholesalers, residential landlords, hospitality and food businesses, and a Jamaican mobile food business.

Chairman K. Good stated that the continued registration of new businesses was encouraging and reflected ongoing small-business activity in Hamden.

Chairman K. Good also noted that Walmart had begun its build-out/expansion in Hamden Plaza.

Chairman K. Good discussed the announced closure of Leed Himmel Industries, a longstanding aluminum extrusion and fabrication manufacturer on Leeder Hill Drive whose history dates back to the early 1900s. He said that, based on information he reviewed, the closure was attributed to rising operating expenses, including employee

health insurance, workers' compensation, electricity, property taxes, and higher raw-material costs tied to federal tariffs. Chairman K. Good noted the significance of losing a longtime Hamden manufacturer and stated that Director S. Fontana could provide additional information during his report.

2. Hamden Small Business Academy

Chairman K. Good reported that the final cohort of the Hamden Small Business Academy, which had been funded through ARPA, concluded in August.

The program was available to Hamden businesses and residents and provided training on starting and operating a small business. Chairman K. Good attended the final cohort's pitch competition and participated in evaluating business ideas and providing feedback.

Chairman K. Good stated that the program had been valuable and noted that Director S. Fontana had previously discussed identifying opportunities to continue or replace this type of small-business programming.

3. EDC Alliances

Chairman K. Good reported on developing relationships with local universities.

Chairman K. Good and Commissioner R. Ibanez recently met with representatives from the University of New Haven, along with Commissioner Thomas Fortuna of the Finance Commission. The discussion focused on potential partnerships that could mutually benefit Hamden and the University.

Potential areas of collaboration include:

- Economic development analytics, research, and analysis to support planning and investment decisions;
- Redevelopment analysis, including market research, benchmarking comparable communities, and evaluating potential uses for strategic properties;
- Small-business and entrepreneurship initiatives to strengthen Hamden's entrepreneurial ecosystem and connect businesses with resources; and
- Talent retention and workforce strategies connecting local employers with university students and graduates.

Chairman Good stated that Commissioner T. Fortuna initiated the conversation through his relationship with the University and that discussions would continue.

Commissioner R. Ibanez said similar discussions were underway with Quinnipiac University. He emphasized identifying areas where the universities' institutional priorities naturally intersect with Hamden's economic development priorities and moving those relationships from dialogue to coordination and action.

Chairman K. Good also discussed the difficulty municipalities have experienced recruiting employees with specialized municipal finance and accounting experience.

He stated that Commissioner T. Fortuna had discussed with the University of New Haven the possibility of educational programming designed to prepare accounting professionals specifically for municipal government.

Commissioner T. Robinson stated that she has worked with the University of New Haven through youth initiatives and noted that the University offers valuable technical assistance to nonprofit organizations, including grant-reporting support and newer programming related to the use of artificial intelligence. She suggested that similar resources could potentially benefit Hamden businesses.

Commissioner R. Ibanez suggested developing a centralized way to identify and publicize the various educational, technical-assistance, and business-development resources available to Hamden businesses and residents.

4. 2027 Economic Development Meeting Calendar

Chairman K. Good discussed the Commission's 2027 meeting schedule and asked whether members wished to continue meeting at 5:30 P.M.

No one objected to keeping the 5:30 P.M. meeting time.

Chairman K. Good stated that he would finalize the 2027 meeting calendar and submit it to the Town Clerk's Office before the applicable deadline.

Chairman K. Good also suggested that the Commission consider holding at least one in-person meeting before the end of 2026, possibly during the holiday season.

8. GUEST SPEAKER

1. Eugene Livshits, Hamden Town Planner

- Town Center Master Plan

Chairman K. Good introduced Eugene Livshits, Hamden Town Planner, to provide an update on the Town Center Master Plan.

Chairman K. Good clarified for the record that the agenda incorrectly listed the High Meadows Project under the guest speaker section. High Meadows would instead be addressed by Director S. Fontana during the Director's Report.

Mr. Livshits explained that the Town Center Master Plan originated as a collaborative initiative involving Planning and Zoning, Economic Development, Capital Projects and Grants, and Engineering. The Town successfully received planning funding through the Community Investment Fund (CIF) and is working with consultants SLR and Public Works Partners.

The purpose of the project is to establish a long-term vision and roadmap for the growth and evolution of Hamden's Town Center.

The study area centers primarily on the Whitney Avenue/Dixwell Avenue intersection

and includes commercial, residential, recreational, and civic areas surrounding Town Center Park, Miller Memorial Library, Hamden Government Center, the Police and Fire Departments, and nearby businesses.

Mr. Livshits stated that the plan is intended to create a stronger sense of place and a more cohesive downtown environment. The plan will evaluate strategies to:

- Support smart development and economic vitality;
- Strengthen local businesses;
- Improve public spaces;
- Improve pedestrian, bicycle, roadway, and transit connectivity;
- Create a more walkable and pedestrian-friendly environment;
- Identify redevelopment and infill opportunities; and
- Review zoning regulations for potential barriers involving uses, building height, density, and other development standards.

A market analysis has been completed. Mr. Livshits stated that the analysis identified opportunities in dining, apparel, entertainment, and recreation, while personal-service businesses were an existing strength.

Mr. Livshits demonstrated the project's online StoryMap and stated that the community survey remained open, with approximately 250 responses received at that time. The team previously held an in-person public workshop on July 22 at Thornton Wilder Hall, and a virtual workshop was also available.

Additional engagement will include interviews and focus groups involving businesses, property owners, youth, seniors, and other stakeholders.

Commissioner R. Ibanez asked about coordination with Quinnipiac University and potential alignment between the Town Center planning process, transit planning, and Quinnipiac's transportation system. Mr. Livshits stated that the consultant team had reached out to Quinnipiac and that the University had previously expressed interest in participating. He agreed that coordination would be valuable.

Mr. Livshits also discussed the relationship between the Town Center Master Plan and the planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) investment along Dixwell Avenue. The planning process is intended to leverage that transportation investment and examine potential connections to the Town Center area.

Chairman Good asked how recommendations from the Master Plan would ultimately be implemented and funded.

Mr. Livshits reported that the Town received approximately \$250,000 in CIF planning funds. If future CIF funding remains available, the completed plan could position Hamden to seek implementation funding.

The Master Plan will also help inform Hamden's next Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), which expires in 2029, and could lead to regulatory changes considered by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Future grant applications may

require Legislative Council approval.

Chairman K. Good expressed interest in having the Economic Development Commission participate in the upcoming POCD process. Mr. Livshits stated that Economic Development Commission participation would be important because economic development is a major component of the comprehensive planning process.

Discussion followed regarding the damaged clock structure and fountain in the Town Center area.

Director S. Fontana stated that the Chamber of Commerce originally installed the clock structure about 30 years ago. The Town and Chamber have discussed removing the damaged structure and replacing it with a simpler structure that could continue to advertise Town and Chamber events.

Mr. Livshits stated that Engineering had previously studied options regarding the fountain and that relevant findings could be incorporated into the Master Plan.

Commissioner P. Gardella asked whether housing would be actively considered as part of the Town Center Master Plan and cited several underutilized sites that could potentially accommodate housing.

Mr. Livshits confirmed that housing will be part of the Town Center Master Plan and that opportunities for additional housing and redevelopment of underutilized properties will be examined. He noted, however, that development of privately owned property ultimately depends on the property owner.

Commissioner T. Robinson suggested exploring whether the Graustein Memorial Fund, which has a presence in the Town Center area, might be interested in supporting smaller projects within the area. Mr. Livshits welcomed additional connections and stakeholder participation.

2. High Meadows Project

- Town Center Master Plan
- Economic Development Department Update

9. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director S. Fontana thanked the Commission for its support of the Liuzzi tax incentive. He reported that the company had signed the necessary paperwork, begun its expansion/addition, and may pursue further expansion in the future.

Leed Himmel Property

Director S. Fontana reported that a growing Connecticut industrial/commercial company is expected to acquire the approximately 116,000-square-foot Leed Himmel building within the next several months.

The prospective company plans to renovate the facility and expand its operations. Director S. Fontana estimated that the relocation could initially involve several dozen jobs, potentially approximately 40–50 positions, with opportunities for additional growth over the next five to ten years.

He stated that the company utilizes technologically advanced manufacturing processes and that additional information may become available in the November–December timeframe.

1935 State Street

Director S. Fontana reported that a small housing development is moving forward at 1935 State Street, at State Street and Ridge Road near the DMV.

The project has received Planning and Zoning approvals and is working on a tax-incentive application. Director S. Fontana stated that approximately 20% of the units are expected to be affordable at or below 80% of Area Median Income, with the remaining units market rate.

Construction could begin in spring 2027.

Cooper House Square

Director S. Fontana reported that he and Town Planner Livshits met with the developers of Cooper House Square.

The developers are close to signing a lease for the historic small red building at the front of the property for a retail use.

Director S. Fontana also discussed the broader challenges affecting housing and mixed-use development, including higher interest rates, tariffs affecting construction materials, uncertainty in material costs, and Hamden's tax burden. He said these factors have made some projects that were previously feasible harder to finance.

Retail and Business Activity

Director S. Fontana reported that retail activity continues to move forward.

A grand opening was held for Wonder in Hamden Plaza.

A vintage/thrift store called The Mason Jar opened on Whitney Avenue in Mount Carmel.

Director S. Fontana also reported that Ross Dress for Less was scheduled to open on October 10, 2026.

Small Business and Entrepreneurship Programming

Director S. Fontana reported that he met with Virginia Spell of the Urban League of Southern Connecticut regarding opportunities to continue entrepreneurial programming following the conclusion of the Hamden Small Business Academy.

The Urban League operates DNA of an Entrepreneur, a semiannual small-business academy. Director S. Fontana encouraged commissioners to refer interested Hamden residents and businesses to the program and stated that he hoped to establish an ongoing collaborative relationship with the Urban League.

Director S. Fontana also discussed potential university partnerships.

He stated that the University of New Haven has resources that could potentially connect faculty, students, and businesses to solve industrial and commercial business problems, including issues involving manufacturing processes, product development, packaging, and technology.

He also identified opportunities to partner with Quinnipiac University on entrepreneurship programming, pitch competitions, technical assistance, mentorship, and other support for Hamden businesses.

Commissioner R. Ibanez stated that Quinnipiac's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship is already pursuing similar work. He noted that Dr. David Tomczyk's small and family business entrepreneurship course pairs students with local businesses to solve real-world business problems and that the University is interested in increasing the number of Hamden businesses participating.

Commissioner T. Robinson emphasized that business-development resources should also support established businesses seeking to grow, not solely startups.

Director S. Fontana agreed and noted that the Urban League also offers accelerator programming for established businesses.

Workforce Development

Director S. Fontana reported that he and the Mayor attended the 80th anniversary celebration of Porter and Chester Institute. He highlighted the institution's Dixwell Avenue facility and workforce-training programs, including automotive, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and nursing programs.

Walmart Expansion

Director S. Fontana stated that Walmart's Hamden expansion appeared primarily intended to strengthen its ability to compete with supermarkets and larger retailers such as Aldi, Stop & Shop, and ShopRite rather than specifically targeting small independent retailers.

Hamden 2040

Director S. Fontana reported that he, Town Planner Livshits, Stephen White, and Councilor Abdul Osmanu were developing an initiative tentatively called "Hamden 2040: Building Toward Hamden's Future."

The initiative is intended to create an ongoing conversation among residents, businesses, and Town officials regarding Hamden's long-term direction.

An in-person community event was being considered for the fall, potentially in October. The format would emphasize short introductory remarks followed by informal conversations and interactive opportunities for residents to provide ideas and feedback.

Industrial Expansion Assistance Program

Director S. Fontana reported that he was developing a proposed Industrial Expansion Assistance Program.

The pilot program would provide small grants to growing businesses seeking to relocate to or expand in Hamden. Eligible expenses could include infrastructure and development costs such as water and sewer connections, architects, engineers, and similar site-development expenses.

Director S. Fontana stated that he was considering repurposing approximately \$45,000–\$60,000 from an existing departmental budget line to fund the pilot.

Assistance would be capped at a fixed amount or approximately 50% of eligible project costs, whichever is less, and awards would be tied to commitments to create permanent full-time jobs.

Director S. Fontana stated that a final proposal would be shared with the Commission after additional review.

Town Financial Audits

Chairman K. Good asked whether Hamden's outstanding financial audits affect businesses' willingness to invest in the Town.

Director S. Fontana stated that they may affect perceptions of Hamden and also have a more direct financial impact. He reported that the Town remained unable to access the bond market for capital borrowing until the outstanding audits were completed.

He stated that financial stability, predictable taxes, and the ability to borrow for capital projects would be important to Hamden's economic development efforts.

1. High Meadows Project

Director S. Fontana reported that he and Town Planner Livshits recently participated in a productive meeting with the High Meadows developer and the Connecticut Department of Housing.

The developer remains committed to Hamden and the project but continues working to assemble the financing necessary to complete the development.

Director S. Fontana explained that because the approximately 150-unit project is planned as 100% affordable housing, it requires substantial public subsidy and does not have market-rate units available to cross-subsidize affordable units.

The Town continues to assist the developer by providing information, connecting the

developer with resources and decision-makers, and supporting efforts to assemble the financing package.

The anticipated timeline discussed included completion of the current financial planning work during fall 2026, due diligence and movement toward community engagement and land-use approvals in 2027, and financing efforts in 2028.

Director S. Fontana stated that he remained optimistic about the project while acknowledging that the process would take time because of the complexity of the financing.

2. Town Center Master Plan

3. Economic Development Department Update

Director S. Fontana provided an additional update regarding economic development opportunities along the Dixwell Avenue corridor.

He stated that the Town is pursuing several long-term initiatives in southern Hamden, including Dixwell Connections, a proposed bicycle and pedestrian connection to the Farmington Canal Trail for which the Town intends to seek CIF funding.

Director S. Fontana identified the former Kramer Iron site on Morse Street, near the trail, as a potential redevelopment opportunity. The site consists of approximately seven parcels totaling roughly two acres.

Because the property owes significant taxes to the Town, Director S. Fontana stated that the Town is permitted to conduct an environmental assessment. He contracted with BL Companies to perform a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment at an estimated cost of approximately \$3,000.

The assessment will help determine whether environmental conditions make acquisition through tax foreclosure feasible.

If the site is suitable, Director S. Fontana stated that the Town could potentially acquire it, seek state and federal funding for demolition and remediation, and prepare it for future mixed-use redevelopment.

He expected to have additional information by the October or November Commission meeting.

10. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

11. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business.

Chairman Good announced several upcoming Chamber of Commerce events, including a Business After Hours event at Quinnipiac University, the Chamber's Cars and Commerce event at Town Center Park, and an upcoming Business Before Hours event involving

candidates representing legislative districts that include Hamden.

Chairman Good stated that he would forward the event information to commissioners. The Clerk stated that the materials could also be included with the agenda packet.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Petra Gardella made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Romeo Ibanez seconded the motion.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:25 P.M.

https://hamden.zoom.us/rec/play/l277AdiudcKcpFNm0VMsVIQ3TvBfms9O00JtiKgTDYMNYFrGR2H96mk38vH6mu3DPLm2y-TmFcScaWO-.mUNXAoHXGRZq6RLi?accessLevel=meeting&canPlayFromShare=true&from=share_recording_detail&startTime=1788902226000&oldStyle=true&componentName=rec-play&originRequestUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fhamden.zoom.us%2Frec%2Fshare%2F6bQL39xYeBLTtUNnsysu2iX00bfEK0wpASp1OVM_P6n-ozawd6tD06PqXJFgigjp.9kOuYVyoLdhNBOMN%3FstartTime%3D1788902226000