Economic Development Commission

Special Meeting
September 30, 2026 – 5:30 P.M.
Main Meeting Room, Simsbury Town Hall
933 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, Connecticut 06070

MINUTES

Members Present: Charmaine Seavy, Chair; Matt Arthur, Vice-Chair; Jeremy Pearlman; Michael Zemel; Leland Holcomb; Gary Schless; Michael Scursso

Others in Attendance: Marc Nelson, Town Manager (Ex-Officio); Ray Lagan, Granby-Simsbury Chamber of Commerce Executive Director/Chamber of Commerce Liaison; Mike Paine, Selectman/Board of Selectmen Liaison; Dagny Griswold, Zoning Commission Liaison; Cyn Thomas, Business Development Coordinator/Tourism & Library Liaison

Chair Seavy called the meeting to order at 5:32 P.M. and the Commission said the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approve the August 19, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Schless moved to approve the minutes as presented. Commissioner Holcomb seconded. The motions passed unanimously.

Elect Chair and Vice-Chair for October 2026 – October 2027

Commissioner Arthur nominated Commissioner Zemel for EDC Chair. Commissioner Scursso seconded. Nominations were closed without objection. Vote was unanimous with Commissioner Zemel abstaining.

Commissioner Zemel nominated Commissioner Pearlman for EDC Vice-Chair. Commissioner Schless seconded. Nominations were closed and Commissioner Pearlman was approved as Vice-Chair without objection.

Liaison Updates & Reports

Chamber of Commerce - Director Lagan provided an update regarding the upcoming community *Spooktacular* event. Key points included: Admission was reduced from $15 to $10

through a microgrant from the Town; the event will include trick-or-treating, candy, live music, food trucks, and other activities; approximately 65 vendor spaces have been identified, with 8 food trucks expected. Director Lagan also reported on upcoming planning activities and the February Business Leaders Breakfast.

Board of Selectmen - Selectman Paine that the Board discussed Flock cameras and heard concerns and questions from residents as well as a presentation from Police Chief Boulter. Members were encouraged to contact the Police Chief and view the system firsthand. The presentation and updated FAQs are expected to be posted on the Town website following review and implementation of new state legislation. The Town is pursuing grants relating to improvments of the Teen Space at the Library, Eno Farm, and The Apple Barn. The Board is also considering the potential for a multigenerational community center serving both seniors and youth.

Selectman Paine also reported on proposed property tax credits for veterans. The proposal would provide a credit to qualifying and also expands benefits for surviving spouses. The Board considered the fiscal impact on the Town and taxpayers.

The Commission discussed the need for the Board of Selectmen to provide direction regarding economic development priorities. The issue has been raised previously in 2024 and 2025. It is expected to be raised again at an upcoming Board of Selectmen meeting.

Town Manager - Town Manager Nelson provided an extensive update on economic development, budgeting, Town operations, and capital projects.

The Town Manager's Office is developing a comprehensive database of businesses operating in Simsbury. Information is being consolidated from multiple Town departments. The goal is to create a centralized resource that will allow the Town to communicate more proactively with local businesses and better understand their needs. The database is expected to be substantially completed by the end of the calendar year, although additional work may extend into early 2027. The Economic Development Commission will have access to the database.

Town Manager Nelson reported on the completed Tariffville Neighborhood Plan and community engagement process. The Plan identified issues and opportunities relating to parking, signage, wayfinding, and other aspects of the neighborhood. His office will target some recommendations and identify relatively low-cost actions that can be implemented within existing resources.

The Town's budget process has begun, and the Town Manager intends to include potential funding for EDC initiatives in the proposed municipal budget. The Commission was encouraged to identify specific concepts and priorities early enough for them to be considered during the budget process. Potential EDC initiatives could include marketing, print materials, or other economic development activities. Town Manager Nelson encouraged EDC to develop specific concepts that could be incorporated into the budget proposal.

The Town Manager reported that the library has launched a new website and continues to provide community programming and outreach. The Town is also pursuing significant capital grants mentioned previously by Selectman Paine.

Town Manager Nelson discussed the increasing challenge of vacant commercial and office space, particularly in connection with the upcoming property revaluation. The Town is exploring potential incentives for businesses and tenants occupying vacant commercial properties. One concept under consideration would involve state enabling legislation allowing tax abatements or similar incentives for qualifying mixed-use developments. The Town Manager expressed the view that incentives should be considered alongside, rather than replaced by, potential penalties or increased assessments for prolonged commercial vacancies.

The Commission discussed the economic incentives that may contribute to vacant office space and the relationship between property valuations, rents, and investor expectations.

Sustainability Committee – No liaison was present. The Commission encouraged members to attend the Sustainability Committee meeting scheduled for the following evening at approximately 6:30 p.m. The Commission expressed support for greater collaboration between EDC and the Sustainability Committee.

Library & Tourism –Coordinator Thomas reported on current programs and activities at the Library which included the launch of the library's new website (developed with a local web developer); Canva for Business programming offered twice monthly; Second Annual Aging-in-Place Expo in partnership with the Aging and Disability Commission, continued programming partnerships with Simsbury Yarns and Gather on Hopmeadow. The Meet the Merchant display featured The Lucky Gut in September and will feature local farms and farm stands in Simsbury for the months of October and November.

The Commission discussed the relationship between tourism and economic development. Members noted that tourism historically operated as an important component of the community's economic development efforts but has become less active in recent years. Potential opportunities discussed included: reincorporating tourism into EDC's economic-development strategy; developing tourism information on the Town website; incorporating tourism information into the proposed community website/app; updating information regarding restaurants, event venues, farms, and other visitor resources; exploring the availability of historic and Town-owned photographs for tourism and marketing purposes; and reexamining the possibility of a farmers' market. The Commission noted that Simsbury has significant wedding and event tourism assets, including local venues and the Flower Bridge.

Zoning Commission – Liaison Griswold provided an update on several land-use matters. The Hartford property remains in litigation. The proposed car wash at Dorset Crossing remains under review. The site plan has been reviewed, and the proposal includes water recycling and connection to the public sewer system. An intervenor has raised environmental concerns related to the aquifer and potential impacts from runoff. The Commission discussed the applicable

aquifer-protection regulations and the distinction between public sewer connections and properties served by private wells. One additional meeting is expected before the Zoning Commission makes its decision.

The McLean Property, a previously approved proposal for approximately 20 duplexes, totaling 40 units, is subject to intervention concerning potential environmental impacts, including impacts on Hop Brook. The Commission discussed the role of intervenors and the additional review and litigation that can result from intervention.

Planning Commission – Planning Commission Chair Leavitt-Smith was not in attendance.

Main Street Partnership (MSP) – MSP Executive Director Nielsen submitted her report electronically:

1. Thanks to the Town Manager's Office for coordinating the Greyfield Grant for 82 Hopmeadow Street, which MSP helped facilitate.

2. Working with the new owners of 507 Hopmeadow Street - did the ribbon cutting for their new business and there are more to follow.

3. Planning is underway for Simsbury Celebrates on Saturday, November 28th this year.

4. Office Space Vacancy Committee is continuing to research and have speakers in order to make recommendations to BOS through Town Manager's Office. Thanks to Commissioner Schless for representing EDC.

Commissioner Schless reported on the Office Space Vacancy Committee. The committee has established three primary goals:

1. Identify vacant office properties that may be suitable for redevelopment or alternative uses.
2. Identify programs and incentives that could attract new businesses and developers to Simsbury.
3. Review and improve the Town's permitting process for prospective developers and businesses.

The committee has identified and toured several properties, including 175 Powder Forest Drive; 125 Powder Forest Drive; 86 Hopmeadow Street; and 10 Mill Pond Road. They have begun discussions with property owners and are considering the development of a Town marketing brochure describing available incentives and resources for prospective businesses.

The committee is also considering development of a permitting process flowchart to help businesses and developers understand the required steps.

Members discussed earlier EDC work (2015) that streamlines the permit process and agreed that prior materials should be located and reviewed so that current efforts can build upon existing work rather than starting from scratch.

Discuss the 2026 EDC Annual Report

The Commission discussed preparation of the annual EDC report, due at the end of October. The Commission discussed preparing a summary of the year's activities and accomplishments. The 2025 Report was included in the meeting materials as a reference. The Chair and Vice Chair will coordinate preparation of the report.

Chair Report

Chair Seavy provided an update regarding the condition of portions of the Greenway trail system. Concerns were raised regarding deteriorated trail surfaces and the need for repairs. The matter may be addressed through the Town's capital planning process.

Chair Seavy discussed a recent economic-development television/streaming advertisement produced by another Connecticut municipality as a possible example of economic development marketing. Members discussed the potential value of targeted digital advertising and other marketing approaches for promoting Simsbury as a place to do business.

New Businesses

The Commission received an update regarding the Town’s website and the development of the EDC and business sections of the site. Work is underway to improve the EDC's online presence and provide more useful information to businesses. The goal is to complete the work by the end of the year, subject to the development schedule. Members discussed incorporating permitting information, economic-development resources, tourism information, and other useful business resources into the website.

Coordinator Thomas mentioned that new Commissioner orientation materials are being developed. The materials are expected to include information regarding Robert's Rules of Order and other procedures applicable to Commissioners. Information concerning Freedom of Information requirements may also be incorporated.

The Commission discussed an upcoming economic development luncheon hosted by East Granby’s First Selectman Jason Hayes and encouraged members who are available to attend. The event is intended to foster regional economic development collaboration and identify opportunities for Connecticut communities, including Simsbury.

Newly elected Chair Zemel proposed conducting a structured brainstorming exercise at a future meeting. Commissioners would identify potential economic development projects and initiatives,

group similar ideas, and prioritize them through a voting exercise. The Commission expressed support for the approach.

The entire Commission expressed its appreciation to outgoing Chair Seavy for her service and leadership. Chair Seavy thanked the Commission members for their participation and expressed confidence in the Commission's ability to continue making progress on economic development initiatives.

Adjourn

Chair Seavy adjourned the meeting without objection at 6:59 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cyn Thomas
Business Development Coordinator