

Timothy M. Herbst
Address to the Trumbull Chamber of Commerce
March 31, 2010

Good morning:

Let me begin by thanking the Trumbull Chamber of Commerce and the Bridgeport Regional Business Council for hosting this event this morning. In the few months on the job as First Selectman, I have encountered many “firsts.” Today I have been given an opportunity to deliver my first major policy address in advance of my State of the Town address on April 8th.

These last 115 days have been met with tremendous challenge. When I first came into office, our administration was faced with an anticipated \$3 million dollar revenue shortfall, with a \$1.7 million dollar revenue shortfall this year alone.

As First Selectman, I have quickly learned that local government is where the buck stops. Local leaders are at ground zero in dealing with the constraints of a severe economic recession. Everyday while we are on the front lines, those at the federal and state level make our job even harder. We are getting no help from Washington and we certainly are getting no help from Hartford.

Connecticut is the most property tax dependent state in the nation. The per capita property tax burden in Connecticut is \$2,312; almost twice the national average and highest in the nation. Our state is more dependent on property taxes to fund local government than any other state in the nation.

Specifically, property taxes are the biggest tax on businesses. In fiscal year 08-09, Connecticut businesses paid over \$600 million in corporate income taxes – but over \$900 million in property taxes.

We have continued to see a decrease in municipal aid while Hartford continues to saddle towns like Trumbull with oppressive mandates that go unfunded. The Washington and Hartford bureaucrats make these decisions without recognition of the consequence of

their actions. Our state government has fostered an anti-business environment. In fact, Sunday's Connecticut Post reported that Sikorsky CEO, Jeffrey Pino, along with officials from their parent company, United Technologies, have issued complaints that the cost of doing business in Connecticut is too high. Pino also stated to Hartford Courant reporters that every other state they go to is lower in cost than Connecticut. These companies are a source of high paying jobs for generations of Connecticut families, and they are sending signals that they would rather do business elsewhere.

While we get less help from the state and federal government we must also deal with the costs of unfunded mandates, contractual obligations, inflation, bonded indebtedness and general operation and maintenance of our town. Through all of the inadequacies and poor decisions that have been levied upon us at the local level to solve, I have learned an important lesson. We can depend on no one but ourselves and we must empower ourselves to take action.

It is for these reasons that today, I wish to speak to the business community about an issue of paramount importance to the Town of Trumbull- economic development.

The only way we will meet these challenges, while maintaining a stable tax rate is through promoting and fostering an economic development policy that supports businesses while fostering competition, basic fairness and responsible Grand List growth.

Despite the challenges that we currently face, where some may see problems, I see immeasurable possibilities.

As a candidate for First Selectman, I talked about the need to revitalize Trumbull Center. As you may have noticed, revitalization of the Center has begun, with sidewalks almost completed around the perimeter of the Center, and Phase I of façade improvements about to begin. However, current vacancy rates have never been higher. Trumbull Center requires more than a cosmetic solution. The Town of Trumbull must be

committed to fostering and promoting an economic development policy that is supportive of its businesses but also leverages economic competition. We must focus on this as well as other areas of Trumbull to offer and provide our residents with the options and venues that they expect and deserve.

To provide those options and to provide that competition, we must identify key areas of our community for growth and revitalization.

The first place where we are to start is with the Trumbull Mall. Our residents want a Mall they can be proud of and use with frequency. Further, we want a mall that encourages the region to engage our commerce. I am pleased to report that the leadership of Westfield shares this vision. Working together, we are close to completing the mission that will allow Trumbull to become that regional leader. With us today are representatives of the Westfield Trumbull Shopping Park. In a depressed economy, they too see the possibilities for our Trumbull Shopping Park. Westfield is investing \$35 million dollars in an exciting comprehensive renovation of our Shopping Park. This renovation will renew residents' confidence in the Mall and get our economy here in Trumbull moving again. In the next several months, residents will be afforded restaurant and retail options that they have been clamoring for years.

The renovation of the Trumbull Shopping Park will serve as an economic linchpin for future economic growth and revitalization across our community. Upon completion, we will see unparalleled development over the next five years that will grow the Town's tax base and help to stabilize taxes. In order to provide our Mall with the resources they need to make this renovation a success, the Town of Trumbull is committed to be a willing partner to promoting public safety in our Mall.

Through the hard work of Chief Tom Kiely and our Police Department, we have stepped up our patrols and committed money in this year's for the implementation of a canine unit program. These measures will deter crime, promote safety, and assist the

Mall in creating an atmosphere conducive to consumer confidence and spur revitalization.

The future of the Trumbull Shopping Park is exciting. Let me stop here and give you a glimpse of what you can expect to see: (SHOW VIDEO).

***** I am personally very excited about this renovation. It will redefine Trumbull as a vibrant destination in the region ******

The renovation of the Trumbull Shopping Park will also be complemented by the implementation of the recently approved design district on lower Main Street. Dilapidated homes that are no longer residentially viable have now been zoned for professional business office purposes. The area immediately across from the mall on Main Street can and will be completely revitalized. We will put businesses on the tax rolls while maintaining the residential character of Main Street. This, with the mall renovation, will completely transform the gateway to our community and make it an inviting and welcoming presence for businesses who seek to locate here in Trumbull.

But we can not stop there.

The Planning & Zoning Commission and the Economic Development Commission play a key role in economic development and revitalization. We are fortunate to have very able Chairman in Gary Bean and Tom Ginis. Today, I am calling on these two boards to work collaboratively to address our immediate economic development priorities.

It is time to re-open the Trumbull Master Plan and develop a specific strategy for three of these areas.

The first area is Trumbull Center. We will reach out to the ownership interests of the center in developing a plan together. Phase I of the revitalization plan has been approved with Phase 2 a work in progress. The Planning & Zoning Commission must re-open the master plan to develop a revitalization plan that utilizes our finest natural

resource - - the Pequonnock River. The Pequonnock River runs through Trumbull Center and a plan to revitalize the Center should include the river as its focal point. We must make our downtown inviting and pedestrian friendly. Any revitalization plan must also include traffic calming measures along White Plains Road. The commission should also consider the area on White Plains Road south, between Reservoir Avenue and Route 25, for revitalization purposes in an effort to further develop a meaningful downtown.

Second, the Trumbull Planning and Zoning Commission is hard at work in developing a plan for how best to revitalize property owned by the DiMarco family, in the area of the Long Hill Green. The plans developed by the DiMarcos and presented by their Attorney John Fallon will positively enhance this area. I am very excited about this opportunity and I know the Planning & Zoning Commission is trying to find a way to make this work. As we re-open the Master Plan, the Planning and Zoning Commission must completely revitalize the Long Hill Green area. I envision a Long Hill Green District that encompasses the DiMarco property, Marisa's Restaurant, and other commercial properties in the area to create a uniform district that maintains the character of Main Street while giving our residents the options they deserve. I want to thank the Planning and Zoning Commission for their hard work on this project and urge them to continue to forge ahead in making this important project a reality.

Third, in 2006, when the Planning & Zoning Commission completed its last Master Plan update, it considered, but never acted upon a plan for the area in and around the Trumbull Town Hall. Today, I am asking the commission to renew that commitment. As we re-open the Master Plan, we should specifically develop a plan to address the area immediately surrounding Town Hall. If you look at Town's like Greenwich, New Canaan, Westport, Stratford and even Milford, the area where Town Hall is located plays an integral role in the formulation of a community's downtown. As we develop a plan going forward, we must maintain a core philosophy which holds these same principles in mind.

The Economic Development Commission's strategic plan is aligned with these goals. In addition, it comprehends other key areas for land development as well as programs to help support the business community. For example, the Trumbull Corporate Industrial Park which is located near Route 8 represents a critical area of economic opportunity. Its sophisticated infrastructure is particularly suited for high tech operations as well as research and development. Currently, this park provides facilities for companies such as Unilever, Gartner, and Genre. Nevertheless, it is in dire need of attention and revitalization. The mile long entranceway that leads into the Corporate Park sorely pales in comparison to the newer office parks in competing communities like Shelton. Our Economic Development Director, Deborah Cox, and our Economic Development Commission are proactively seeking resources to help improve the entranceway so that we can more easily compete in attracting businesses to this area. In addition, they recently established the Trumbull Corporate Park Association in order to keep our ear to the ground. Grand List growth is only measurable when new businesses come and existing businesses stay!

Across town, Reservoir Avenue and Lindeman Drive represent another vital area of opportunity. Although it hosts a conglomerate of office, industrial, and recreational uses, it is underutilized and has more than 25 acres of potential new development or redevelopment. This is an excellent area for Planning and Zoning and Economic Development Commissions to collaborate in determining the best and highest use for future development, and work toward attracting companies to the area.

Toward that end, in order to be more competitive in attracting larger businesses to town, the Economic Development Commission and its director have drafted a new tax incentive program that is designed to strategically focus on desired competitive industries, such as healthcare and high tech markets. As the EDC works with a tax assistance subcommittee the proposed incentive program will be fine-tuned and brought to Town Council for approval this year.

We have rolled out some new tools to help foster a healthy business environment. Each can be found through the town website. The first is a directory of Trumbull businesses which is organized by type of industry. The second is a special job posting section which is aimed at helping to connect Trumbull businesses to Trumbull job seekers. Third is the extensive online Proquest Entrepreneurial Database that is available through our library. This database was generously sponsored by the Trumbull Chamber of Commerce to help companies find helpful business and marketing tools.

The business community is critical to the vitality of our town. You represent 14% of our tax base. You provide jobs to 17,000 people, and approximately 3,000 are Trumbull residents. Your companies offer important services, products and choices to our community. We value your business and we want you to find value in being here. Our economic development policy is intended to foster a supportive, fair, and business-friendly climate.

The mission of my administration is to act as stewards and leaders to protect and strengthen Trumbull. My vision for Trumbull is to be a well recognized community of choice – not only for those who live here, but for those who have made the commitment to own, operate, or work in a business here in town.

While we confront these challenges together knowing full well that we are in this together, I am reminded of Trumbull's history and motto: *Pride in our past and faith in our future.*

Today, let it be said that we the leaders, the businesses, and the people of Trumbull stood up to work together to advance economic revitalization. Ten years from now, when we look back on our success in development, let us be proud of what we have achieved. And it is for these reasons that I am optimistic about the future of Trumbull – because I believe in the people of Trumbull.

Thank you.