



**Ridgefield  
Economic &  
Community  
Development  
Commission**

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John Devine  
Paul Levine  
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Rudy Marconi,  
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## **Meeting Agenda**

### **Economic & Community Development Commission March 6th, 2017, 6:30 pm, Small Conference Room**

**Policy:** Economic & Community Development Commission's (ECDC) meetings will be conducted under Roberts Rules of Order with comment invited only on agenda items that are action items not subject to formal public hearing. Individuals will be recognized for three minutes after ECDC discussion but before ECDC vote.

#### **Announcements**

1. Next RECDC Meeting April 3rd, 2017, Small Conference Room
2. Approval of February minutes
3. Chair report Rudy meeting (Arnold)
4. Discuss 2/22 P&Z first floor retail meeting, ECDC follow-up

#### **General Discussion**

Letter to State Finance & Bonding Committee to Improve Danbury Line Service.  
See Letter attached. (Arnold)

1. Website update (Bob)
2. Chamber Inaugural 3/10
3. Chamber Business Expo 3/16

#### **New Business:**

1. Interview Karen Sulinsky

# LETTER TO STATE FINANCE & BONDING COMMITTEE

Testimony in Support of HB 6553: Reallocation of Authorized Bonds to Improve Danbury Line Service

To the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

February 24, 2017

We, the Town of Wilton Economic Development Commission and the Ridgefield Economic and Community Development Commission seek your attention and funding of a Danbury Line service improvement bill proposed by our State Representative Gail Lavielle, along with 11 other area House members representing both sides of the political aisle. Given the cost and complexity of implementing full electrification of the Danbury Line, we are interested in improvements that could be made in a shorter timeframe and at substantially less cost. One possibility that we have heard may be feasible is adding to the Danbury Line a shuttle train service which would run from the line's southern terminus at South Norwalk station and up through the lower Norwalk River Valley.

As residents and commuters from the Town of Wilton, we advocate that the provision of this added service be carried at least through our two stations, but there are reasons to consider several of the stations on the line as the northern terminus of the shuttle: Wilton, Cannondale, Branchville. Wilton adds a substantial downtown area with offices for national corporations, Cannondale is convenient to both Wilton and Weston, and Branchville adds Ridgefield and Redding as convenient commuting possibilities. All three stations offer free or lower cost parking options, encouraging a stable base of commuter demand.

We believe this added service would be an important interim step towards the long-term goal of full Danbury Line electrification, and this testimony argues for the investment as a cost-effective stimulant to the regional economy along the Route 7 Business Corridor where all of the Danbury Line stations are situated.

The primary issue to consider is the relative dearth of trains serving the communities along the Route 7 Corridor. Presently, only 14 diesel trains operate in each direction per weekday on the Danbury Line, feeding in to 47 per day between South Norwalk and Grand Central Terminal. By comparison, the New Canaan Line, which serves fewer stations and townships and does not support a recognized business corridor, is serviced by 20 daily electric trains in each direction, feeding into 97 trains between Stamford and Grand Central each weekday.

Our town's Economic Development Commission recently undertook a significant study to determine, via quantitative and qualitative means, the net drivers of residential population and business activity into and out of Wilton. Among other sources of data, we conducted a number of interviews with commercial real estate brokers and developers in the area. Several important trends emerged:

1. The total amount of office space leased by national businesses along the Route 7 Corridor is declining, resulting in increased vacancy rates along the Corridor. Further, there is an identifiable trend of movement towards the southern end of the Corridor.
2. There are many reasons why businesses move into and out of the Corridor, but our interviews yielded one of the common motives for departure or consolidation at time of lease renewal is that the Corridor is not as commutable as neighboring semi-urban centers of population and business activity.
3. These businesses, like any other, compete for talent and do so in part by offering convenient live/work/play environments as are available in the lower section of the Corridor in South Norwalk and importantly, in the quickly growing Merritt 7 complex.
4. There is an opportunity to establish Norwalk Merritt 7, and the satellite office buildings running north along Route 7 through Wilton, as an additional business hub along the New York-Boston continuum by making it an attractive commuting destination. Planned improvements to the Merritt 7 station suggest that state government is aware of the need to support growth in this area.
5. In our interviews, there was strong belief among business owners, commercial developers and brokers that availability of a highly educated and diverse employee base, coupled with the relative value and quality of life advantages available in Fairfield County will attract additional businesses to locate in the Corridor from out of state in the future.
6. Employees for this center are drawn from towns to the north along the Route 7 Corridor and from other locations in Fairfield County and through to New York City. As an example, Norwalk is the number one commuting destination for Wilton residents, and Wilton is among Norwalk's top five commuting destinations for Wilton residents, according to 2016 CERC data.

Based on the development of these economic, commutation and office leasing trends, we believe strengthening the reliability and convenience of Danbury Line transportation options will advance economic progress in the region. This progress will deliver the return on investment necessary for improvements to the branch line. A greater frequency of peak, and off-peak service, as provided via a supplemental shuttle train over existing rail-stock is proposed as an affordable and incremental step towards this goal.

Wilton Economic Development Commission

Ridgefield Economic & Community Development Commission