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Hal Kurfehs: Steps toward prosperity for Western Connecticut

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Society is fractured and there are a myriad of demands on our time which makes it difficult for us to focus. This can be harmful to personal and community achievement if our goals become diffuse and our mind strays from the target.

Why is this point being made? As residents of an under-performing state economy with future indicators that become muddied by political spin, how should we navigate to improve our lives?

Granted, our Housatonic (aka Western Connecticut) region is stronger economically than the rest of the state. We have generally made good choices, as has most of Fairfield County. Yet it could always be better, and it takes constant vigilance to avoid slipping back into slower growth.

A roadmap called a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) has been prepared for our region. It was prepared by the Western CT Economic Development Alliance (WCEDA). It is a hefty study crammed with data, charts, graphs, observations, recommendations, and other helpful information.

Alas, most of us do not have the background or the patience to study this document all the way through -- which is unfortunate since there are hundreds of stories within its pages that could benefit us to live a better and more productive life.

So how do we bring these pages alive and make them work for us? Simple -- it takes an organization to make it happen. Thanks to the CEDS we now know how to improve the economic climate in our region so the key becomes implementation of the plan.

At a bare minimum, a website has to be developed which will help our digitally aware residents to understand the options that are available to us. It will assist businesses in the region and attract new business from outside.

Other initiatives that can be taken are: a regional marketing program, business retention and expansion program, regional infrastructure Improvements, Future Skills Need Task Force, Sector and Cluster Advisory Councils, Regional Cultural Center and Regional Main Street Program.

These are proactive initiatives and the common denominator to make them happen is funding. WCEDA can do as much or as little as our funding will carry us. To compete with other regions, counties, and states we need an organization that is capable of reaching out with the proper tools to make Western Connecticut a better place to live and work.

In October, the regional planning agency for Western Connecticut will be merging with Southwestern Connecticut to make a Super Region. WCEDA is starting to lay the groundwork for regional funding supplemented by private business donation.

Wish us luck--it's your future.

Hal Kurfehs, a Brookfield resident, is chairman of the Western CT Economic Development Alliance, chairman of the Brookfield Economic Development Commission and vice president of Coldwell Banker Commercial.