

New Haven Comprehensive Plan 2027

Business Stakeholder Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: October 15, 2026, 5pm-6:30pm

Purpose: Gather input from local business stakeholders regarding New Haven's economic development, community growth, business environment, and priorities for the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Executive Summary

The Business Stakeholder Meeting provided valuable insight into New Haven's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for future economic growth. Participants expressed strong support for the community's small-town character, historic downtown, public safety, and potential for continued development.

A central theme throughout the discussion was the need for balanced, intentional growth that strengthens existing businesses, attracts new investment, expands housing opportunities, and preserves New Haven's unique identity.

Stakeholders identified several interconnected challenges, particularly the shortage of available housing, limited workforce availability, insufficient development-ready land, and competition from neighboring communities such as Washington.

Participants also emphasized the importance of increasing New Haven's visibility, improving access to business information, expanding tourism, and creating a more proactive approach to economic development.

1. Community Strengths and Assets

Stakeholders identified several characteristics that make New Haven an attractive place to establish and operate a business.

- Strong community support: New Haven offers a supportive business environment and a sense of community that distinguishes it from larger municipalities.
- Historic downtown: The downtown's architecture, history, and character provide opportunities for unique businesses, tourism, and continued revitalization.
- Public safety: Police, fire, and emergency medical services contribute to the community's desirability.
- Business investment: Entrepreneurs recognize New Haven's potential and have invested in commercial properties.
- Growth opportunities: Participants expressed optimism regarding the Comprehensive Plan process and the City's local use tax.
- Small-town identity: Stakeholders value New Haven's character and support moderate population growth that does not overwhelm existing community resources.

2. Challenges to Economic Growth

Several barriers to economic development were identified.

Housing and workforce availability

A shortage of housing limits the community's ability to attract and retain employees. At the same time, limited workforce availability makes business expansion more difficult. Stakeholders recognized this as an interconnected challenge requiring a coordinated strategy.

Competition with neighboring communities

Washington was frequently identified as a competing commercial destination. Residents and commuters often travel outside New Haven for restaurants, groceries, coffee, shopping, and other services.

Limited development opportunities

The availability of suitable commercial and industrial property remains a concern. Much of the surrounding land is held by long-established farming families, potentially limiting opportunities for expansion. Additionally, some property within city limits lacks utility infrastructure necessary to support development.

Business retention and awareness

Participants discussed recent business closures, limited awareness of existing local businesses, and the need for additional dining and retail options. Some business owners also experienced initial resistance to change or outside investment.

3. Economic Development and Growth Opportunities

Stakeholders identified several opportunities that could strengthen New Haven's economic future.

Highway 100 commercial development

Highway 100 was identified as a critical corridor for commercial growth. Participants emphasized the importance of infill development, improved signage, and greater visibility to encourage travelers and commuters to stop in New Haven.

A potential strategy emerged to position Highway 100 as a weekday commercial destination and downtown New Haven as a weekend destination for shopping, dining, recreation, and tourism.

Downtown revitalization

Participants expressed interest in increasing downtown activity through additional residential development, expanded business opportunities, and improved visitor amenities.

Ideas included short-term commercial spaces or trailers for startup businesses, increased downtown housing, and attracting an Amtrak stop.

Industrial and employment growth

Stakeholders encouraged the City to prioritize quality employment opportunities, particularly skilled manufacturing positions offering competitive wages.

Potential initiatives included partnering with the Franklin County Industrial Development Authority, identifying opportunities within the region's machinery and manufacturing industries, and working directly with major employers to understand their expansion needs.

Riverfront and tourism development

Participants recognized New Haven's riverfront as an underutilized economic asset.

Suggested opportunities included a river dock, visitor center, expanded community events, and activities that capitalize on existing recreational river traffic.

Tourism was viewed as a means of increasing regional awareness, supporting downtown businesses, and attracting future investment.

4. Opportunities for City Support

Stakeholders discussed ways the City could play a more active role in supporting business growth and investment.

Priority	Stakeholder suggestions
Business resources	Develop a new-business information packet explaining City processes, available properties, and development opportunities.
Economic development incentives	Explore TIF, CID, and other incentives while educating residents about their purpose and benefits.
Infrastructure	Continue maintaining existing infrastructure and expand utilities to support development-ready properties.
Business assistance	Consider a business development center, mentorship opportunities, and small-business grant programs.
Marketing	Improve the City's online information, promotional materials, and regional visibility.
Transportation	Explore quiet-zone railroad crossings downtown and opportunities for future Amtrak service.
Partnerships	Strengthen relationships with Franklin County economic development organizations and major employers.

Participants also identified the City's new use tax as a positive tool for supporting future community investments.

5. Housing, Education, and Long-Term Sustainability

Stakeholders recognized that economic growth requires more than simply attracting businesses.

The community must also provide housing, employment opportunities, and amenities that encourage families and young professionals to remain in New Haven.

Participants raised concerns about retaining students after graduation and the potential implications of the division between the New Haven and R-2 school districts.

These discussions reinforced the importance of coordinating housing, workforce development, education, and economic development strategies within the Comprehensive Plan.

6. Recommended Comprehensive Plan Priorities

Based on the stakeholder discussion, the following priorities should be considered during development of the Comprehensive Plan.

1. Encourage housing development

Identify opportunities for residential infill and infrastructure expansion to address workforce housing needs.

2. Strengthen existing businesses and attract new investment

Develop business assistance resources, evaluate economic development incentives, and establish strategies for business retention and recruitment.

3. Prioritize Highway 100 development

Encourage commercial infill, improve signage, and identify development-ready sites that capture passing traffic.

4. Revitalize downtown and expand tourism

Support mixed-use development, riverfront amenities, community events, and opportunities that increase downtown visitation.

5. Expand quality employment opportunities

Pursue partnerships to attract skilled manufacturing, support existing employers, and retain younger generations.

6. Improve community marketing and communication

Create a centralized source of information for businesses, residents, developers, and visitors while promoting New Haven's unique assets.

Conclusion

The Business Stakeholder Meeting demonstrated that New Haven has significant opportunities for continued economic development while maintaining the qualities that make it a desirable place to live, work, and invest.

Stakeholders expressed a desire for thoughtful growth that builds upon the City's historic downtown, riverfront, existing businesses, and strong community identity.

The discussion highlighted that housing, workforce development, infrastructure, business recruitment, and tourism are interconnected priorities that should be addressed through a coordinated long-term strategy.

The feedback gathered during this meeting will help inform the goals, policies, and implementation strategies of New Haven's Comprehensive Plan.

This summary reflects the themes and suggestions recorded in the October 15, 2026 meeting notes. The recommended priorities are synthesized from stakeholder input and do not represent formally adopted City policies or decisions.