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Region's Economic Plan Nears Completion

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New London — A steering committee that developed a regional economic blueprint for southeastern Connecticut gave its final blessing Monday to the document and is now awaiting federal approval.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, was submitted in July to federal officials, who required minor supplementary materials, such as minutes from meetings. Those documents, along with the official thumb's up from the CEDS steering committee, were forwarded Monday to the federal Economic Development Administration.

Once approved, the regional economic development plan would be in the running for some of the \$400 million available for economic improvement projects from the federal agency, which is part of the U.S. Commerce Department.

The steering committee headed by Tony Sheridan, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, has been working steadily over the past few months to ensure that the CEDS document sent to the federal government wins final approval. On Monday, steering committee members voted to formally adopt the document as the annual economic development strategy for southeastern Connecticut. The CEDS report would serve as the official blueprint for future growth and development in the region.

After receiving the final draft this summer, federal EDA officials praised the steering committee's work and said all of the parties that worked on the massive CEDS document, including regional planning officials, municipal officials, business leaders and economic development experts from across southeastern Connecticut, deserved praise.

The CEDS process, which began in 2002, is required by the EDA before it can consider dispensing federal funds for economic development projects. The sweeping plan covers the towns and cities in New London County. Within its 200-plus pages, it offers a variety of "action plans" to stimulate economic activity locally.

The economic development strategy advocates a broadening and diversifying of the

regional economy, a stronger infrastructure that would support future economic growth, better career opportunities and enhancing the quality of life in the region's urban, suburban and rural communities. The strategy report was a joint undertaking of the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region, or SeCTer, and the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments. The two groups worked cooperatively with Mt. Auburn Associates, a Massachusetts-based consulting firm, to develop the regional economic strategy.

John Markowicz, executive director of the New London-based SeCTer, said once the plan gains approval, an implementation committee will be formed to begin to evaluate and rank the numerous projects cited in the CEDS document for possible federal funding.

“This (adoption Monday by the committee) sets into motion the mechanism” for eventual funding from the federal government, Markowicz said. ■

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