

Town of West Hartford

50 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDS TOWN COUNCIL TERMINATE PURCHASE & SALE AGREEMENT FOR FORMER UCONN WEST HARTFORD CAMPUS

WEST HARTFORD, CONN. (December 7, 2017) – The Town of West Hartford’s new Ad hoc Subcommittee on Economic Development announced today that it is recommending that the Town Council vote to terminate the purchase and sale agreement with the University of Connecticut (“UCONN”) for the purchase of the former UCONN West Hartford campus property and to immediately commence a community engagement effort to seek public input regarding potential re-uses of the property.

Dallas Dodge, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Economic Development, explains: “Given the uncertain and potentially significant cost of remediating the UConn property, stepping away from the current purchase agreement is the right decision. West Hartford should continue to work cooperatively with UCONN, and I look forward to leading an open and constructive community engagement process to determine the best use of the property.”

In July 2016, the Town executed a purchase and sale agreement to acquire the 58-acre parcel for \$5 million from UCONN, and authorized payment of a \$250,000 nonrefundable deposit towards the acquisition of the property. Since the execution of the purchase and sale agreement, the parties have agreed to several extensions to provide the Town with an opportunity to complete its due diligence concerning environmental and other inspections on the site. The University recently notified the Town that it did not intend to grant an additional due diligence extension beyond the current extension expiring on December 15, 2017.

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The members of the Economic Development Subcommittee considered a number of factors in reaching their consensus recommendation. Chief among them is the fact that environmental testing of the property is not yet complete, and will not be prior to the December 15th expiration of the current and final extension period. Both the Town and the University have confirmed the presence of PCBs at the site of former UCONN West Hartford campus, particularly in areas adjacent to the campus buildings. PCBs are not an unusual contaminant for institutional buildings of this age and type, and can be successfully remediated. Until environmental testing is complete, however, the Town is not in a position to ascertain the full extent and cost of the remediation that will be required by federal and state regulatory authorities.

Chris Barnes, Minority Leader and Subcommittee member, added: "Town staff and the Town Council have spent a significant amount of time on the purchase of this parcel, but the financial costs, environmental concerns, and potential for liability are simply too significant to go forward with the purchase. We need to be cautious and act in the Town's best interest."

Although the consensus opinion of the Economic Development Subcommittee is that the Town should terminate the existing purchase and sale agreement with UCONN, the subcommittee members do believe that the future use of the former West Hartford campus remains an important issue for the Town. Consequently, the subcommittee members will also propose that the Town Council authorize the subcommittee to immediately initiate a community engagement effort to seek public input regarding potential uses and redevelopment scenarios for the campus property. Based upon the results of this community engagement effort, the Town would be in a better position to recruit a development partner to place a bid for the purchase of the property from the University.

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In making this recommendation to the Town Council, the Economic Development Subcommittee remains optimistic that the Town can maintain its collaborative relationship with UCONN to find a buyer for the property that can redevelop the site in a manner consistent with West Hartford's character and needs.

West Hartford Deputy Mayor Beth Kerrigan says, "Decisions of this magnitude that effect the future of our town demand considerable time and diligence. I am pleased to say that we have given this decision the attention that it deserves. I would like to thank UCONN for its patience during an extensive due diligence period. I am encouraged and excited to be moving forward and hearing from the community about its vision for the future of this property."

Matt Hart, West Hartford Town Manager, also explains that: "Due to its location and potential, the UCONN West Hartford campus is a very important parcel for both the Town and the Capitol region. Because the Town Council has the zoning authority regarding the allowable land uses at the campus, it's all the more important that the Town and the University continue to collaborate to find a buyer that will be suitable to both parties. Given our constructive working relationship with the University, I'm confident that we can achieve this goal."

The members of the Ad hoc Subcommittee on Economic Development plan to present their consensus recommendation to the West Hartford Town Council at the Council's regular meeting scheduled for December 12, 2017.

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