

Courier News Commends Hillsborough's Economic Plan

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A few small steps toward an economically healthier state

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Hillsborough officials have been talking a lot in recent years about their efforts to make the township more business friendly.

But it hasn't just been talk. Their actions have caught the attention of the Somerset County Business Partnership, which now plans to use the township's economic plan as a "best practices" model in its economic development tool kit.

The partnership's goal with the tool kit is to assist county municipalities in developing their own economic initiatives by creating a one-stop shopping base of information collected from a variety of sources. Among the lessons to be learned from Hillsborough is that business friendliness doesn't have to mean simply bowing to developers and letting farms get plowed under for strip malls. It can mean removing unnecessary and costly obstacles that make it more difficult to start and maintain a business in the township.

While Hillsborough's leaders already had taken some strides in that direction, the tanking economy prompted the beginning of a more aggressive approach. In January, Mayor Frank DeCore launched an economic action plan in response to the deepening recession. That plan included the creation of a Regulatory Oversight Working Group made up of several municipal department heads. Their job was to examine the township's business regulations, and out of those efforts have come 16 changes so far designed to improve Hillsborough's business climate.

The streamlining of permitting processes, reduction of fees and other steps may sound rather dull and bureaucratic to the average resident. But individually and collectively they can make a real difference to a business owner, enough so that they could sway a decision on whether to set up shop in Hillsborough.

Making New Jersey friendlier to business is a key component of making the state more affordable and will greatly influence New Jersey's future. Failure truly can't be an option, and as much as we urge other communities in Somerset County and

beyond to heed some of Hillsborough's ideas, what's more important is to learn from the township's ambition to actively try to solve some of the problems.