

Agenda Item Summary

Date: January 14, 2020
To: Board of Selectmen
Prepared By: Joshua Steele Kelly, Administrative Officer
Subject: Branding Campaign

Background

By requiring that town's utilize property taxes as their primary source of income, the State of Connecticut is forcing its municipalities to compete for business and resident interest to keep development and property values up and tax rates low. By engaging in a branding campaign, the Town of Bolton can stand toe-to-toe with towns in our region and across the state as businesses and residents alike look for new places to lay their roots, and we can do our part to increase business revenues and lower tax burdens on our citizens.

Discussion/Analysis

Every community has a reputation, and a branding campaign is the Town taking action to shape and build that reputation in the public's eye. This will not simply be the development of a logo and an evaluation of our tagline – Bolton's branding campaign will be a holistic review of the town's values, heritage, goals, and pursuits, and the final product will be the development and implementation of a visual scheme that helps inspire would-be residents and business owners to join us. It is an investment in our future that could help us reap benefits for decades to come.

Final deliverables from the contractor will include:

- Research conducted on the town's history, values, practices, goals, and perceptions;
- A written Strategic Plan that will detail recommended branding strategy (including an evaluation of existing town physical and online media presence and suggestions on how to improve each), recommendations on elements from the town's history and character that may be well integrated into a branding scheme, and preliminary sketches of the brand deliverables; and
- Brand deliverables, which includes (but is not necessarily limited to): a developed logo (from start to finish, including logo studies, 30 concept sketches, refined sketches, 3 drafts of strongest/top concepts, and multiple versions of the final product); a custom-tailored mood board, color palette, type, fonts, spacing, design system, and secondary logo; an evaluation of our mission statement and tagline with recommendations (if desired); fully designed business cards and letterhead; photos, posters, ads, and signage that can be used around town or online; a 10-20 page branding manual (to help staff and elected officials understand how to correctly use brand elements once implemented); the development of a Bolton flag; and mock-ups of how branding can/will be implemented on the website, town uniforms, town vehicles, and town brochures.

One concern that was brought forward to the Selectmen's Office is that a branding campaign would seek to label Bolton as a town that wants big-box companies to come in and ruin our natural landscape. This is incorrect: the goal of the branding campaign will be to promote the image and message that Bolton wants others to know of it rather than a generic "bring business here" message. The contractor, the focus group appointed by the Board of Selectmen, and, ultimately, the Board itself will be responsible for helping to identify what that image and message should be, and it is quite likely that our brand will focus on the town's natural beauty and close-knit sense of

community. For example, the branding campaign may be an opportunity to attract more out-of-towners to use our trails and visit businesses, or it has an opportunity to shift focus toward another area of interest and development that brings the town pride. Overall, the Town will have full control of the process and the direction of the campaign as it moves forward.

Cost/Benefit: With an upfront cost of \$8,070 (originally quoted \$8,320 with evaluation of mission statement and tagline, which a member of the Board has suggested may not be desirable, and thus the reduction of that line item brings the cost down by \$250), the Board has to answer the question: does a branding campaign have the potential to bring in more money to the town than it will cost?

While the \$8,070 is an up-front cost and the impacts of the branding campaign will be long-term, I estimate that the town will be able to break-even on this investment in very short time. In order to break-even in property values, the branding campaign would have to help increase, or help prevent a decrease, of just 0.05% of total town-wide property value, a goal that may be easily exceeded by this campaign. A mere 1% increase in residential property values (driven by demand, which our goal will be to increase with this branding and awareness campaign), a very achievable goal, is the difference of 0.4 mills, which would ease residential taxpayer burden without cutting services or programs.

From a development perspective, the average residential property in Bolton paid \$7,424.50 in taxes in FY 2019, or \$6,100.37 more than the average vacant lot owner pays. If the branding campaign indirectly leads to the construction of as few as two houses, an additional value of \$12,200.74 would be added to the town's tax revenue, exceeding the initial \$8,070 investment. The development of just one average commercial or industrial lot could respectively lead to an increase of \$9,198.31 or \$20,068.15 in tax revenue, also exceeding our break-even point.

Finally, with an estimated timeframe of 24 weeks to complete, and given that the contractor will spend approximately 20 hrs/wk on the project, the hourly rate for the project is \$16.82: an efficient bargain that will greatly advance our town's reputation and image without breaking the bank.

Measurement of success: the success of our branding campaign will be seen in the way people think about our town and the amount of money that people spend in town, either on goods and services or in purchasing real estate. We will measure these variables by:

- Tracking property values on an annual basis;
- Monitoring business expansion in town and, to the best of our ability (given cooperation with local business owners), business income and success;
- Including questions about town perception in future community surveys to measure the differences from now to then;
- Measuring the amount of attention and the number of people we are connected to on social media and through our website;
- Convening the branding focus group at set intervals after the brand is launched to collect qualitative data from residents, business owners, and prospective residents and business owners about their perception of the town and its messaging; and
- Measuring participation in Bolton's boards and commissions, community programming, elections, and more.

Conclusion: In short, while there is an up-front cost associated with the project, it is extremely likely that we will reach the break-even point of our investment within the first year or two following the brand's implementation. The benefits are numerous and hard to measure, but the town's staff stands ready to collect all the data it can to demonstrate the effectiveness of this

campaign. Moreover, the campaign symbolizes the town's willingness to actively invest in economic development and lowering the tax burden for all. It is lastly important to note that the 300th is the perfect time to develop and launch a branding scheme for the town, as we already have increased media and public attention on the town. Developing the same brand in a different year would likely cost more, as we would have to make up for the difference in media attention by paying for advertising.

Financial Impact

Up-front: \$8,070.00.

Long-term: Likely increase in home values due to increased demand (resulting in lower or mitigated mill rate and increased net homeowner assets), likely increase in business revenue due to increased recognition and attraction to town (which can lead to increased jobs and new business development to meet the demand), likely increase in fee-based service program participation (such as Rec Department programs, etc, resulting in increased town revenue), likely increase in trail and park use (which can result in increased business revenue due to increased demand), and more. Overall, a net gain for the town, its residents, and businesses alike.

Attachments

1. "Strategies for Measuring Brand Success."
2. "Branding Input – Other Connecticut Towns."

Strategies for Measuring Brand Success (Attachment 1)

Summary

In order to measure the success of Bolton's branding initiative, the Selectmen's Office will routinely record and report back to the Board of Selectmen and the community-at-large on the following 15 metrics and measurements:

1. Percent change in property value growth (measured by Grand List and average home selling prices).
2. Difference in property value growth in current year to prior years (Grand List and average home selling prices minus prior year measurements in the same categories).
3. Percent change in total student enrollment in Bolton Public Schools (measured by BPS).
4. Percent change in number of students who choose to attend Bolton Public Schools from other towns (measured by BPS and partner schools).
5. Percent change in number of residents employed in-town (measured through Bolton Community Survey).
6. Percent change in resident population (measured through US Census Bureau).
7. Percent change in average commercial business revenue (measured by Selectmen's Office through participating businesses).
8. Percent change in number of commercial businesses actively operating in town (measured by Community Development Department).
9. Percent change in trail use (measured by Bike-Walk Bolton).
10. Percent change in number of participants in annual Recreation Department, Library, and Senior Center activities (measured by respective Departments).
11. Percent change in town meeting attendees and Election Day turnout (measured by Town Clerk's office).
12. Percent change in total board and commission vacancy rate (measured by Administrator).
13. Percent change in number of active volunteer firefighters (measured by Fire Chief).
14. Percent change in general town approval ratings (measured by Bolton Community Survey).
15. Percent change in town social media "likes" and "follows" and change in E-Bulletin readership (measured by Media Coordinator).

1 & 2. Property Value Growth

As brand awareness increases and attention is drawn to Bolton, with it Town staff will work to promote more information about the town's offerings, services, and regular programs. A successful total effort should result in increased demand on Bolton properties, which in turn should drive up property values. This will be a long-term impact that can be measured by analyzing the trend in average sale prices over time as the brand is implemented as well as grand list growth.

3 & 4. Bolton Public Schools Attendance

As Bolton rolls out a new branding scheme and generally markets itself better to the outside community, students too should take notice. We can measure the amount that the new marketing strategy increases the attention of younger generations by measuring the number of students enrolled at Bolton Public Schools and measuring the increase in students from Columbia and Hartford who choose Bolton High School as their school of choice.

5. In-Town Employment

As awareness about the town grows, thanks to this branding and marketing campaign, more business will likely be conducted, which will potentially create more jobs. While it is difficult to measure the number of jobs available in town, the Community Survey measured the percentage of town residents that claim to have a job in Bolton. This question can be asked on future surveys, and the increase in that number over time can help us to gauge the success of this branding campaign.

6. Total Population

A branding and marketing campaign will ideally result in more people wanting to live in Bolton. As a result, more people may end up living in Bolton. Continued monitoring of the total population can help us determine demand for living in our beautiful town.

7 & 8. Business Income and Expansion

As brand awareness increases and attention is drawn to Bolton, businesses in town should see a similar increase in attention. If the branding campaign is truly successful, businesses should see increases in sales and may even expand, or we may attract new businesses altogether. Expansion can be measured by both the number of businesses that are developed and open in Bolton in the years following the implementation of the brand and by measuring the number of vacant commercial properties that exist.

9. Trail Use

Increased awareness in town doesn't just mean an increase in homes sold or businesses created: it means an increase in visitors from outside our community, too, who will increase demand on our local businesses and drive our economy. One major selling point that the town has is its trail system, and any successful marketing campaign will capture and promote our town's natural beauty. Measuring the change in number of trail uses over time will help us to capture a snapshot of the branding campaign's effectiveness. Luckily for us, we have a significant number of residents in town who are willing to help promote the trails and measure the number of uses at regular intervals.

10-13. General Town Participation

A successful branding initiative should inspire a level of excitement about the community as a whole. Therefore, it stands to reason that increased participation in the community may be a key indicator of such a successful campaign. Participation can be measured in several different ways, such as by examining how many participants get involved with recreation, library, and senior center programs, the number of vacancies on boards and commissions, how many people vote in budget referendums and elections, how many attendees are at town meetings, how many active members of the town's fire department there are, and more.

14. Town Approval Ratings

Any successful marketing campaign should inspire the public at-large, and furthermore it should generate tangible results (albeit in the long run) that the community supports and is generally excited to see. To measure this approval of the town's actions, the Community Survey has asked a number of specific questions including "how would you rate the overall quality of life in Bolton?" and "How would you describe your level of satisfaction with each of the below-listed town services and items?" The change in these responses over time can help us capture a glimpse of how successful the campaign is.

15. Social Media, E-Bulletin, and CVC Administrator's Report Engagement

Bolton has had a Facebook account and published its E-Bulletin for multiple years now. Trends in growth on these accounts and newer social media accounts made to represent the town will be

documented by Town staff in the months leading up to the conclusion of the brand design phase and through the brand's implementation. Increases in resident engagement with social media accounts and sign-ups for the E-Bulletin after the launch of the new brand scheme will be interpreted as a positive impact. This can be broken out into a plethora of sub-measurements, including number of website visits, number of searches for "Bolton CT" and related phrases on search engines like Google, number of mentions on social media, number of social media users reached on a per-post basis, number of "likes" or "follows" on a given Town social media account, number of interactions with social media accounts on a per-post basis, and more.

Branding Input – Other Connecticut Towns (Attachment 2)

(In Order of Closest to Furthest from Bolton)

Vernon, CT – Jon Roe, Resident

“[My understanding is that] Bolton is undertaking a branding and marketing campaign to attract commercial development and improve the marketability of homes in town. Vernon is doing the same thing. Vernon’s biggest sales point to the outside world is our trails and parks. We have over 35 miles of trails and the southern part of town (the Tankerhoosen Valley) has a combination of DEEP Wildlife Management Areas, Land Trust Properties, and town parks that are contiguous letting hikers walk from the east side of town to the west side without ever leaving greenway....

“When people think favorably of Vernon they usually mention the greenways... My point with this is that Bolton also has a lot of preserved properties, state parks and hiking trails that could be marketed collectively as an asset to the town and a draw for young home buyers. Many of the businesses considering locating in Vernon also see the trail systems as a plus for attracting and holding young employees....

“The town might not appreciate the marketing value of its extensive trails and green space - yet.”

Mansfield, CT – Steven Ferrigno, Economic Development Commission Chair

- Completed branding campaign in Oct 2019 with new logo (see below) and tagline “your place to grow,” work done in conjunction with four-town economic development initiative of which Bolton is also a part.
- Established a goal of “creating a distinct identity for Mansfield as a great place to live, work, learn, play, and visit.”
- Looked to the following metrics as a means of measuring campaign success:
 - Resident population;
 - In-town employment;
 - School enrollment;
 - Business revenue, retention, and development;
 - Use of town services; and
 - Property value (grand list) growth.
- Will continue to share information about their successes as they move forward.



**New
Logo**



**Old “Logo”
(Simply used
seal)**

Windham, CT – Jim Bellano, Economic Development Staff

- Stated that Windham just completed an “extensive branding campaign,” to be rolled out in the near future.
- Used an outside consultant and recommended it. Will be sharing that consultant’s SWOT analysis and strategic plan for Windham with Josh so that we may reference it during our process.
- Highly recommended taking on a branding campaign as a means of investing in and attracting economic development – of any kind.

Waterbury, CT – Mackenzie Demac, Mayor’s Chief of Staff

- Stated that Waterbury is choosing to undergo a branding campaign to try and ward off perception issues that stem back to a city recession in the 50s when certain businesses left.
- Staff and elected officials found that many residents were sharing negative perceptions of Waterbury online, and the local press did not help that fact.
- Stated that there was pushback from the community about how a branding initiative would help, which he said speaks to the need for such a campaign (see quote below).
- Currently in the process of campaign – drafting an RFP to seek an outside consultant (also spoke to Stamford and wants to avoid public contest pitfall).
- Looking to similar metrics of success as we are.

“Some resident push-back just speaks to the need of a branding campaign – people said that it would be a waste since the city did nothing proactive to better its condition, but they didn’t see that’s exactly what we’re looking to do.”

Norwalk, CT – Joshua Morgan, Communications Director

- Branding campaign undertaken in 2015, spearheaded by Economic Development Department.
- Community survey of between 900-1,000 respondents helped kick it off and gather input.
- Outside branding consultant helped evaluate what the “voice” of Norwalk is, what its assets are, and what the residents of the town like most about it.
- Brand has been successfully implemented and even had components adopted by outside agencies, including nearly local transit authority.

“It has been successful for us, it was a much-needed refresh for the town’s image.”

“Branding is totally tied into professionalism... small things like uniform email signatures help residents feel more like they’re being handled professionally, even if that’s been true all along.”

“More residents take ownership in their town when they identify with the government and its services, and they take more pride in their town and brag about it to others, too, when they have pride.... Residents want to support a town they have pride in.”

“Branding creates a unique identity that helps prospective residents and businesses who we are and what we value.”



**New
Logo**



**Old “Logo”
(Simply used
seal)**

Stamford, CT – Thomas Madden, Director of Economic Development)

- Stated that there were multiple road blocks to the campaign, conducted a few years back, but once there was buy-in from elected and appointed officials, it moved forward wonderfully.
- Noted that the city tried to use a contest to select their logo and tagline – it did not go well, and it left the town more divided than anything. Recommended hiring outside consultant working with a small focus group or the board directly.
- Did a quick evaluation of current Bolton visual and verbal assets for us (posted on our website and social media accounts) – noted that there are 3 other towns in the state (and at least 9 more around the USA and 3 internationally) that already use “A Town for All Seasons” as a tagline. He also strongly recommended a move away from using the seal in place of a logo (see quote below).
- Stressed that the campaign should be about looking forward to what the town aspires to rather than a reflection of its past. Campaign should help the town achieve its goals rather than highlight a past that’s no longer a reality.

“Any town that is still using the town seal in place of a logo is advertising the fact that they are so stuck in the mud that they aren’t willing to invest in the community more than bare-bones - what’s required by the state.”

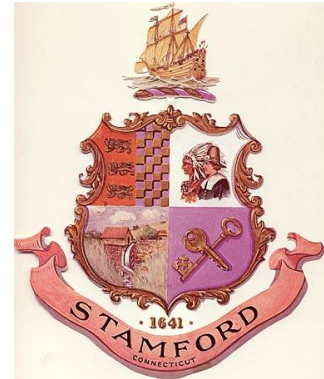
“Branding is really about thinking of site selectors, whether they be future residents or businesses and thinking: what’s the story we’re trying to tell them? And who are we trying to attract?”

“A brand needs to look to the future: what we want to be. We’re always looking to the past... Stamford’s seal has a pilgrim and Indian on it, and ships – we have no shipping now, we really have corporate headquarters... The younger generations looking to move to or around the city were seeing our seal and thinking we were so behind the times, but branding can turn all of that around.”



**New
Logo**

**CITY OF
STAMFORD**
innovating since 1641



**Old “Logo”
(Simply used
seal)**