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***Federal, State, Local and Community Leaders Celebrate the Grand Opening of Norwalk's Business Development Center***

**(Norwalk, Conn.)** – Today, November 3, 2022, federal, state, local and community leaders joined Mayor Rilling to celebrate the grand opening of the City of Norwalk's Business Development Center on 3 Belden Avenue. This week also marks the third anniversary of the launch of the City's Small Business and Main Street (SBMS) program. Leaders highlighted how federal, state and local investments have impacted the small business community since the inception of the SBMS and how the Business Development Center will continue to support this commitment.

"Small businesses are the foundation of our community and enrich all of our lives," said **Mayor Rilling**. "They create jobs, attract people to our incredible City and contribute to the vibrancy of what makes Norwalk so authentic. We are always looking for new ways to support our local businesses and I'm grateful that our local, state and federal leaders understand the importance of investing in our small business community. Through a combination of funding streams, we successfully launched our Business Development Center, where entrepreneurs and business owners can go to gain the tools and expertise they need to start, operate or expand their businesses."

The Norwalk Business Development Center is the first of its kind in Fairfield County and designed to be a continuous resource that various entrepreneurs and business owners can depend on throughout the life cycle of their businesses. This all-inclusive resource acts as a one-stop shop by providing services to support entrepreneurs and business owners, which include financial education guidance, loan or grant application assistance, and technical support for local, state, and federal permitting and licensing.

The Business Development Center Norwalk was made possible through federal and local revenue sources, including the American Rescue Plan Act, Community Development Block Grant funds, and local funds.

"Small businesses are the economic engine for local communities and the national economy," said **U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal**. "The business development hub in Norwalk will equip business owners with the resources and expertise they need to grow and thrive in the community, creating new job opportunities. I am proud to have fought for federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act to support entrepreneurship here in Connecticut."

The Business Development Center is just one example of the City's investments in supporting the business community. Since 2019, the City has invested \$1.3 million in funding towards the small business community, supporting over 80 businesses, of which 75% are women and minority-owned business entities. The City also provided over 450 businesses with technical assistance and marketing support during this time and plans to expand its reach by committing an additional \$3.1 million to support the small business community by 2024.

In addition to opening the doors of the Business Development Center today, the City has launched a website where potential businesses can learn more about the City of Norwalk, and existing businesses can learn more about available resources for permitting and licensing. You can visit this new website at [norwalkforbusiness.org](http://norwalkforbusiness.org).

As a result of the City's commitment to the development, retention and growth of small businesses, during the pandemic, Norwalk welcomed a diverse set of businesses with growth in our creative economy industries. Now, the Norwalk Business Development Center will serve as a place where current and future entrepreneurs can get direct assistance for their businesses.

“What started as a quarantine hobby blossomed into a business, and through the City of Norwalk, I was given the opportunity to grow my business,” said **Lindsay Arakelian, Small business Owner and Norwalk Business Center client and loan recipient**. “The Business Development Center provided me with the tools to help me get the loan to rent my own business space and afford essential equipment like my own freezers to expand my business right here in Norwalk, where I live.”

The Norwalk Business Development Center was made possible through a partnership with the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Norwalk Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the NAACP.

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