

## **Westbrook Economic Action Initiative (WEAI) –**

The Shoreline Basic Needs Task Force (SBNTF) was formed in 2013 for the purpose of examining and encouraging self-sufficiency in lower Middlesex County (essentially the area served by Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries). SBNTF has helped establish food programs and housing programs and has helped educate governments and residents about ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed), a United Way study of the bare level of income needed to live and work in each community in the U.S. The most recent ALICE study shows 32% ALICE in Middlesex County and 33% in Westbrook.

In 2017, SBNTF's Economic Action Committee began examining core economic issues that might provide quality jobs or otherwise address means of elevating households out of the ALICE category. This committee soon focused on Westbrook (then the highest ALICE population in Middlesex County, at 37%) as an example of what might be done. Following interviews of many business and community leaders, a "Roundtable" meeting of such leaders was held in September 2017 at the suggestion of First Selectman Noel Bishop. Enthusiastic support from businesses, non-profit organizations and government leaders led to further discussion and action, which has become the Westbrook Economic Action Initiative.

The WEAI has identified twelve areas of targeted action that might directly assist ALICE (or students who might otherwise become ALICE). These include better quality business development (including use of Town Center and government services to businesses), business-related skills (higher level job training, tech education and entrepreneurship), impediments to employment (transportation, childcare, employee skills) and personal skills (language literacy, financial literacy, mentoring) and communicating to ALICE effectively. Committees are working on many of these areas.

WEAI raised \$60,000 to enable Westbrook Public Schools to hire a full-time Career/College Readiness Coordinator (CCRC), a critical component of the WEAI plan. Information and programs developed by the CCRC will be shared with ALICE. Further information will be shared in Events and posted on the Town Website, under Services, Westbrook Economic Action Initiative, when available.