January 23, 2020

Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes

Location: Conference Room B

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:10pm by Chairperson Stave.

Roll Call Members: Rick Conti, Barbara Barry, Kristen Bilotta, Mark Lavitt, Sam Belsito, Sondra Astor Stave, Tim Liptrap (arrived at 7:15pm).

Town Staff: John Elsesser, Town Manager; Eric Trott, Director of Planning and Development

Audience: Andrew Ladyga, other citizen.

Adoption of Minutes: A motion was made by Conti and seconded by Bilotta to adopt the October 24, 2019 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Planner/Manager Reports: Copies of the reports were included in the Commission agenda packet.

John updated the Commission on a few matters.

The State DOT is having internal issues about the Swamp Road and RTE 44 project and the need for a signalization plan, which came as a surprise for the Town. This may cause for the project to be delayed to 2021.

ACOE permits have been issued for the Folly Lane Bridge. The project should move forward in 2020.

Negotiations have occurred with a Northfields property owner about a road reconfiguration and they are ongoing.

Cumberland Farms construction is underway and is scheduled to be completed by May of 2020.

Staff continues to reach out to Hartford Health Care to offer to assist with Dr. Keenan’s medical office. Despite numerous attempts to contact them, there has not been a response.

New Business:

1. Economic Development update memorandum

The memorandum was reviewed by the Commission. Some questions were raised on Reid’s, the solar farm proposal on RTE 31, Beebe House adaptive re-use.
Details will be forthcoming on the State of CT STEAP grants that the Town is eligible to apply for. The Town may seek funds for a water tower which can be used for fire suppression improvements in the Village and enable projects that require sprinklers.

2. Business visitations - next invitation?

Barbara Barry had talked to the owner of the Coventry Country Store (Memory Lane Antiques 2) and they are open to a visitation by the EDC. The March meeting could be hosted there. It would be interesting to discuss the nature of antiques businesses in town and how it relates to antique businesses in the Village.

The new owner of Twin Hills Country Club may be interested in coming into meet the EDC at a future meeting. He is also a real estate developer.

3. CERC - Regional Economic Development Action Plan - ongoing work

A meeting was held with the consultant and the 4 towns to review a draft outline of the Plan. The towns will provide comments on priorities and the consultant will distill the input and create the details in the plan. This will include phasing, funding, and partners.

4. Caprilands - Status

Litigation continues in the Probate and Rockville Superior Court. The consultant continues work in the historic buildings to prepare the assessment and report. A draft is expected by March. Staff will be drafting the RFP for an adaptive re-use of the property, which will likely be available when the report is complete.

5. Bolton - Coventry RTE 44 Sewer Extension - DEEP, OPM

A question was raised on the relationship of the Town Plan, State Plan and the efforts of property owners selling commercial land, while sewer extension negotiations continue between the Town and State.

The status of the situation of working with the State DEEP on this matter was discussed. Our State Representative and State Senator have been brought into the conversation to seek assistance and resolution.

The concept of a TIF (tax increment financing) was discussed and how it could relate to future growth at the Bolton/Coventry Gateway Node.
6. FY 20/21 EDC Budget Requests

A review of how funds were used for economic development purposes over the past few fiscal years was provided.

A motion was made by Conti and seconded by Liptrap to request funds similar to what had been approved in the past to support special economic development projects. The motion carried unanimously.

7. 1600 Boston Turnpike - development proposal

Staff met with the new owner/developer who is proposing a retail use, but not offering the name of the proposed retail. There are complications with the proposed layout of the project due to the presence of wetlands on site that were noted after the purchase. Design options are being evaluated and the developer will likely return to meet with Staff to further discuss the proposal.

8. Facebook Workshop

Tim provided an update on the workshop and listed the participants. Eight Coventry businesses are involved and two out of town businesses. Facebook Tools for Business is the focus of the workshop. Feedback has been very positive after two classes. It is a 12 week training treated very much like a college course.

Tim gave details on how the workshop is being guided to assist the individual businesses based upon the unique needs and products.

Staff will be pursuing another Google small business event as a follow to the event that was held in 2019.

Kristen indicated that Key Bank is interested in doing another small business breakfast meeting. Previous meetings have focused on tax support for businesses.

9. Coventry Village Partners - status, Spotlight on Main Street

CT Main Street Center has asked us to host the Spotlight on Main Street in September. It will be a nice opportunity to share our story and our successes, as well as network with other Main Street entities.

A tour of the Village, speaker or panel, refreshments will occur. An agenda and outline for the event is being developed.
John indicated that the Town will be pursuing CDBG funds to do renovations at Orchard Hill Estates.

In response to minimum wage increases, the Town Summer Camp will need to do aggressive fundraising efforts. Parks and Rec and Youth Services are collaborating to create a Coventry Lake Fest in May to procure funds. A variety of community stakeholders are being asked to be involved to make the event happen.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development