

March 25, 2021

Economic Development Commission  
Meeting Minutes

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm by Chairperson Stave. The meeting was hosted via Zoom internet conferencing.

**Roll Call:** Barbara Barry, Tim Liptrap, Carolyn Gerrity, Kristen Bilotta, Sondra Astor Stave, Andrew Ladyga, Sam Belsito, Bill Jobbagy

Absent: Rick Conti

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

**Adoption of Minutes:**

A motion was made by Barry and seconded by Garrity to adopt the February 25, 2021 minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

**Planner/Manager Reports:** Copies of the reports were forwarded to the members for their review and comment.

**New Business:**

1. Farmers' Market 2021 Season Planning:

Eric provided an update on the planning efforts for the 2021 season. The Committee continues to meet and prepare for the upcoming season, which is intended to be in the Market field. The vendor layout and overall logistics of the Market was reviewed with and generally accepted by the Health District. The vendor applications have been released and some have been returned with payment. Some vendors are reporting that they will not be returning for a variety of reasons, mostly positive business reasons. Efforts are underway to address the standard pre-season to-do list.

2. Nichols College – Coventry business intern project:

Tim provided a status report. Approvals for funding are in place with the College to assist the 4 Town project with website development. Work still continues with Ackert Electric, John Prior, and Meadowbrook Plaza. Student groups are being assembled at this time.

3. AdvanceCT – Regional Economic Development Study:

Monthly 4 Town Team meetings have continued since October. The core Town Staff meet monthly before the full Steering Committee meetings that are also held monthly. At the last meeting, the Steering Committee focused on the work of subcommittees that were assigned

specific projects/tasks. This includes: 4 town event calendar, regional open space – trail marketing resource, regional destination theme-based mini-tours, local currency, and Nichols College intern competition to create a logo/slogan for the 4 town effort. The Nichols College project will convert to working with an intern who will assist with creating a 4 Town website platform, since the student led logo design concept did not proceed as planned.

Tim discussed the testing work that was done with the students and a different approach that can be taken with the branding that is based more on the individual's experience and using social media to share that with the community.

#### 4. AdvanceCT Economic Development self-assessment:

Olivia, the Town Manager's intern had prepared a draft narrative on the self- assessment after speaking with John and Eric. Overall, the Town performs well with the various tasks that are required to properly promote a balanced approach to economic development in town. The one area that could use a little improvement relates to the maintenance of a more formalized database of available properties and properties that are marketed for potential interest in development. Staff has more recently solidified good communications with the various developers that are frequently worked with to establish positive relations that can illicit ongoing economic vitality.

#### 5. Target Development sites – member, staff contacts:

Members volunteered to serve as contacts with target development site owners and representatives in order to maintain contact with ongoing projects and the status of properties. The following is a review of the updates from the members and Staff:

1011 Main Street – Husky Pizza is now open. They are considering expanding the kitchen amenities to broaden their menu offerings.

1159 Main Street – A proposal for a tea house has been discussed with Staff and the prospective tenant is finalizing the lease with the owner.

1193 Main Street - Sanborn's Garage – for sale. No update.

1340 Main Street – former Coventry Antiques – property on market. Final steps with the environmental clean-up should be complete next month. Dr. Jenkins continues to be contacted on the property, due to his previous interest.

3514 Main Street – Colvest – No update since Staff spoke with the owner, but Staff did send some recent retail leakage data and asked for any updates.

3466 & 3480 Main Street – Vinton Village and apartments – Courtside Nutrition is now open. A new nail salon has been approved for the remaining unit on the upper level.

1660 Main Street – No update – Staff hopes paperwork for the demolition is submitted soon to address the blighted property. Kristen asked if a drive-thru coffee shop could fit on the property. Eric responded that the former owner had developed plans that incorporated a drive-thru.

Kristen reported that she visited the Welles Real Estate building and the two family residence next door in an effort to facilitate a new development with an investor.

The former MillRick Landscaping and agricultural retail use on Flanders Road has been converted to a more agricultural use – greenhouse, nursery, sales of agricultural and landscape products. Staff is working with the owner of ‘Tardiff Farms’ to insure that all permits and approvals are in place when they open soon.

John mentioned that Facebook news indicated that a new antique business in the Clock and Whale Factory that will need to be investigated. Concerns exist with fire code compliance.

An update on interest with the Michael’s Penalty Box property was provided by Staff. A new restaurant/pub is being considered.

EyeTrade will be merging the two historic buildings that she owns on Main Street.

#### 6. RTE 44 Bolton/Coventry sewers – status:

John provided an update. The Planning and Development Committee in the State Legislature approved language to allow for the sewer extension to proceed. DEEP and OPM are still at an impasse over this matter. John continues to pursue this issue with the Legislature.

Coventry, England would like to do a twin city poetry contest with our town that is in conjunction with BBC. News on this will be going out in the eblast next week to the community.

John has been working with Joe Courtney’s office for community projects (ear marks) to provide a list of viable projects that can be considered for Federal funding. The Town Council will be reviewing possible projects that can be submitted to Courtney’s office.

The UCONN Research Center is focusing on autonomous vehicles and has expressed interest in Eastern CT. The UCONN Depot Campus and the Lee Farm are being considered.

The Rescue Act will be providing for funding for economic development initiatives. John inquired if the EDC would make a motion that would be directed to the Town Council asking for an economic development ‘point person’ who could assist in facilitating the many projects that are being brokered at this time.

A motion was made by Barry that EDC ask the Town Council to allocate funds to enable a paid economic development staff person (full time if possible) that could be paid for by the Rescue Act. The motion was seconded by Bilotta. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Caprilands – status:

Staff continues to speak with the owner and a historic structure specialist about the preservation of the historic barn and the potential dismantling of the residence for reconstruction on another site. The Estate also continues to take steps to address the matter of the intellectual property associated with Caprilands. A Probate Court hearing was held earlier in the week where it was reported that Atty. Purtill continues to pursue funds from the Cook Estate after his passing since a large sum of money is still due to the Simmons Estate.

8. Perocchio Farm – anaerobic digester project:

Town Staff met with the Perocchios on site to discuss their current plans to install an anaerobic digester on their farm last month. The goal is to construct a barn addition, digester, associated storage of treated material, electrical production equipment, and supporting infrastructure. It will be necessary to amend the Zoning Regulations in order to create viable path for permitting of the project. The project will enable longevity and ongoing support to the farm so they can compete in the national market. Staff hopes to bring the Perocchios to the Commission in April for a preliminary discussion and introduce the issue. The Perocchios are in the process of finalizing their plans.

9. RTE 44/Grant Hill Road/RTE 31 Node – potential development interest, discussion with land owners:

Staff continues to communicate with Garrett Homes, Inc. the developer of Dollar General and their interest with the next door commercial property. The developer indicated that they appreciated the streamlined process and staff support that they received from the Town for their project and they are interested in considering another project in the vicinity. The developer now has a purchase option on the lot and is shopping the property to auto parts retailers, but has access to other uses as well. They have a clear desire to find a use that will be a good match with the community.

10. Coventry Village Partners – Spotlight on Main Street, business collaboration:

Staff met with the Partners on March 5 and 19 in order to check in to see if there are any unmet needs during the pandemic and to discuss all the projects and activities that are occurring in Town. A low-key spring event that will respect COVID protocols and help to encourage visitors in the Village will be occurring on April 17/18. The goal is to begin to meet more regularly with the Partners and support their efforts after a long hiatus due to the pandemic.

11. New Business Openings and Prospective Business Openings:

This item was discussed during the Target Property discussion earlier on the agenda.

12. Business certificates distribution to new and expanded businesses:

Staff inquired on the interest to distribute certificates of appreciation to new and expanded businesses in town. The EDC is willing to participate in this effort.

13. UCONN autonomous vehicle project:

Staff provided an update on the project earlier in the meeting.

14. CLCC – Boston Turnpike – State of CT Department of Revenue Services – Neighborhood Assistance Act Program:

Staff reported that the State of CT Department of Revenue Services has released the 2021 application for the Neighborhood Assistance Act funding. CLCC was contacted to inquire if they were interested in participating. CLCC responded that they would like to pursue this and Staff offered to assist again with the application and process. Matching funding that results in tax credits for the sponsor entity could assist in enabling the project.

15. TownFolio economic development data management service:

Staff reviewed and participated in a demonstration of an economic development data management service that can be incorporated into the Town website. The product provides a variety of demographic and business related data that can be helpful in providing accurate and up to the minute information in an easy to access platform. Staff has shared the information with CRCOG and the 4 Towns to see if a cooperative effort could occur to reduce the overall cost of the product.

16. Tardiff Farm – Flanders River Road/Flanders Road – retail agricultural use:

Staff reported that a new retail agricultural use at the corner of Flanders River Road and Flanders Road is looking to open soon. This is the former location of Popple's Greenhouses and MillRick Landscaping. The new owner intends to operate a nursery, greenhouse, sales of local and landscape related products similar to prior uses on site. Staff is working with the owner to secure all the necessary approvals.

Other items of interest:

Election of officers will be added to next month's agenda.

Kristen reported that Coventry CT Cares will hosting a food truck festival on May 8 at Coventry High School. It will be a grab and go situation. A portion of the funds made by the vendors will be donated to Coventry CT Cares.

Carolyn asked if an effort could be made to have a reliable internet available in town. Spectrum has not been reliable in her experience. John mentioned that Rescue Act could be used for broadband, but there are some State laws that limit this. John will be meeting with Committees at the State level to help address this. The goal is to have competitive broadband in the State.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott  
Director of Planning and Development