

April 22, 2021

Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes

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

Roll Call: Carolyn Gerrity, Sondra Astor Stave, Andrew Ladyga, Richard Conti, Tim Liptrap, Bill Jobbagy

Absent: Kristen Bilotta, Barbara Barry, Sam Belsito,
Also attending: Lisa Thomas

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

Adoption of Minutes:

A motion was made by Gerrity and seconded by Liptrap to adopt the March 25, 2021 minutes, with the correction of Carolyn's last name. The motion passed unanimously.

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

John mentioned that staff is very busy with Capital projects as indicated in the report.

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 applications continue to be submitted. Some vendors are reporting that they will not be returning for a variety of reasons, mostly positive business reasons. Efforts continue to address the standard pre-season to-do list. Hosting music performers and themes for the Market days are being discussed. The potential of the State relaxing certain outdoor Covid guidelines are causing for a re-evaluation of the Market operations. Staff and the Committee are working with the Health District on this.

2. Nichols College – Coventry business intern project:

Tim provided a status report. Some obstacles have occurred with having students work on the 4 town website design project. Work still continues with Ackert Electric, ImageWorks, and Meadowbrook Plaza – including video work. Advertising of the intern positions was released today, and student groups will be assembled soon.

3. AdvanceCT – Regional Economic Development Study:

Monthly 4 Town Team meetings have continued since October 2020. The core Town Staff meet monthly before the full Steering Committee meetings that are also held monthly. The subcommittees meet regularly on assigned tasks. At the last meeting, the Steering Committee focused on reports from the 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 creating a brand/slogan/logo campaign. A Nichols College intern is being considered to create a 4 Town website platform.

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. The self-assessment was discussed at the last meeting, but the final copy was distributed to the Commission at this meeting.

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. No new report.

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. Staff understands the goal is to open the business during the summer months.

1193 Main Street – Sanborn's Garage has a potential buyer who is going through the process of local and State permits. The buyer offers unique, custom Japanese vehicles and is looking forward to performing some improvements to the site.

1340 Main Street – former Coventry Antiques – The property is actively on the market. Staff spoke to the owner and he indicates final steps with the environmental clean-up should be complete this 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 last month.

3466 & 3480 Main Street – Vinton Village and apartments –Courtside Nutrition is now open. A new nail salon is performing interior improvements to locate on the upper level.

1660 Main Street – Blight enforcement will be pursued for the property since the owner has not addressed the building and site issues.

John discussed the status of Meadowbrook Plaza. Some obstacles have arisen in moving some of the tenants in the plaza as well as expansions. The State of CT DOT is currently leasing a space for a RTE 44 road project. The doctor office is moving out but the ECHN lab will be remaining. A new doctor is being sought. Meadowbrook Wine and Spirit has been considering an expansion. HR Block is moving to the former Dr. Keenan site.

6. RTE 44 Bolton/Coventry sewers – status:

John provided an update. The Planning and Development Committee in the State Legislature is considering language to allow for the sewer extension to proceed. This may be considered in the very near future. DEEP and OPM are still at an impasse over this matter. A meeting was held between OPM, DEEP and Town Staff recently to discuss next steps which continue to unfold, but progress is being made. The consistency with the State's Plan of Conservation and Development has been the crux of the issue between the State agencies. More information should be available by June.

7. Caprilands – status:

There is no update on this matter.

8. Hytone Farm – anaerobic digester project:

Greg Perocchio from Hytone Farm met with the PZC on a preliminary basis to discuss their current plans to install an anaerobic digester on their farm. 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 Perocchios are in the process of finalizing their plans. The Town Attorney is in the process of drafting new sample language for the amendment application.

Bill mentioned the electricity production that will occur with the project as well as the farm being able to address a food waste stream that will be combined with the farm waste.

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 about their interest with the next door commercial property. The developer now has a purchase option on the lot and is shopping the property to auto parts retailers, but has access to other services as well. Staff spoke to the contact at Garret Homes and they are still waiting to hear back from interested parties.

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

Staff continues to meet with the Partners on a biweekly basis to assist with projects and activities that are occurring in the Village. A low-key spring event that respects COVID protocols and help to encourage visitors in the Village occurred on April 17/18.

Plans continue to be formulated with the Partners in preparation for the CT Main Street sponsored Spotlight on Main Street event in Coventry Village. Considerations include: new art installations of David Hayes sculptures, Coventry Arts Guild artwork on display in Mill Brook Place, a small reception with food and drinks, a short tour of the Village.

The conveyance of the barn to the Town that is currently owned by the State DOT will likely be completed in the coming weeks. This can be a new site for the next David Hayes sculpture installation.

Also, the Bidwell Village project is nearing completion with one more unit remaining to be built.

11. Business certificates distribution to new and expanded businesses:

Staff prepared a list of new and recently expanded/improved businesses. Certificates of recognition are being prepared and will be distributed to the businesses by members of the Commission. Additional businesses were placed on the list.

13. UCONN autonomous vehicle project:

John provided an update on the project. He continues to connect with the staff at UCONN. The project appears to be moving forward at the Depot Campus. Other research opportunities are potentially being considered as well.

14. Federal funding opportunities for economic development.

John submitted two grants for Community Funding projects to Joe Courtney's office. Sidewalks from Hemlock Point Road to Daly Road on Main Street is one project. The other proposal involves funding to support the microgrid project, specifically connecting the grid to other municipal sites, and cross Main Street.

John conveyed the EDC's interest to the Town Council for Cares Act Funding that can be allocated for economic development staff support to further a couple of significant economic development projects such as the Holistic Center project or the Bolton Gateway project. Both projects would require new zoning regulations to accommodate these projects. One day a week of staff support is envision to support these projects. The Town Council will be considering community priorities for the funding.

Tim shared an article from the Wall Street Journal about mutual funds being used for real estate purchases. This is driving up the prices of real estate.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development