



Economic Development Commission

MINUTES

March 21, 2023

Newtown Municipal Center
Shared Meeting Room 3
3 Primrose St

Present: Barbara Snyder, Valerie Fallon, Fran Pennarola, Tracey Pertoso, Jeffrey Robinson, Peter McLoughlin

Absent: Nick Roussas, Bruce Walczak, Steve Matiatos

Also Present: Christal Preszler - Deputy Director Economic and Community Development, Kim Chiappetta – Economic & Community Dev & Fairfield Hills Coordinator (clerk)

Public Attendance:

Chand Ahuja – owner of Great Ring Farm – 1 Great Ring Road
Peter Soreze – 8 Diamond Drive

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Public Participation:

Great Ring Farm:

Chair Jeffrey Robinson introduced the Commission to Mr. Ahuja, owner of Great Ring Farm. Mr. Ahuja told the group that he and his wife moved to Newtown 20 years ago. Before establishing their business, they began by planting gardens, and later raising chickens and goats all for their personal use. As part of trial they planted a large variety of flowers and came to the conclusion that they wanted to launch a micro scale farm. Mr. Ahuja has registered his farm business with the town clerk and State. In terms of local and sustainability, 80% of the flowers in the U.S. are imported. Mr. Ahuja explained the benefits of local grown flowers in terms of a carbon footprint and the chemicals associated with imported flowers. Great Ring Farm has started their marketing with 10 subscriptions of 1 bouquet a week for 12 weeks, and sold out of subscriptions within 2 weeks. In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Ahuja have been in contact with florists and event planners. Prior to obtaining their business license, Mr. and Mrs. Ahuja donated bouquets of flowers to local businesses including Sal E Pepe and Aquila's Nest as a trial run. Great Ring Farm uses organic practices for their gardens and is coordinating with Aquila's Nest Vineyards and Zesto – Organic Vegan Market and Juicery to collect organic waste for compost. They focus on local, sustainable and small scale. The business is run by Mr. and Mrs. Ahuja. Christal explained that one thing which makes the jobs of the Economic and Community Development department enjoyable and easy is seeing local businesses reaching out to one another and supporting one another. There is such strong support among the business community. She also noted Great Ring Farm's gardens are supportive of pollinators, which is good for everyone. Mr. Ahuja continued to tell the group about his and his wife's activity in the community and their efforts to bring about awareness of their business. As



an incentive to get the CSA going, Mrs. Ahuja created artisan made vases that were offered to all CSA members as a part of the sign on. When asked if Great Ring Farm would expand into vegetable sales, Mr. Ahuja explained that it was not part of their business plan and he recommended Shortt's Farm and Phinney's for fresh local vegetables. Mr. Ahuja asked if the EDC has anything in place that helps businesses collaborate. Christal recommended social media, and contacting the local breweries to see if they have compostable materials available. Tracey Pertoso recommended Facebook Shopping and events such as a Sip and Shop. Barbara told Mr. Ahuja about a business networking event that the department and EDC held at Reverie. Valerie Fallon told Mr. Ahuja that the library provides some business support and has held shopping events. Christal informed him that the former Newtown Chamber has joined the Danbury Chamber and he may want to consider contacting them. Barbara recommended he contact BD Provisions, and Christal suggested he contact Rosalind Road. Peter recommended the Newtown Farmers Market, and Christal added that Great Ring Farm can have a bouquet on display with information about their business. Mr. Ahuja invited members to visit the farm. The Commission thanked Mr. Ahuja for attending.

Peter Soreze - 8 Diamond Dr:

Mr. Soreze told the Commission that he was in attendance for an update on the strategic plan. Jeffrey explained that the content of the strategic plan has been put aside the last two meetings while the Commission addressed other aspects of the plan. He further explained that Peter presented information to the Commission on his understanding of what should be important to the strategic plan. At this time the Commission is working to refine the format to best present the information. Mr. Soreze explained that his interest is more specifically in how the Strategic Plan feeds into the POCD (Plan of Conservation and Development). Jeffrey explained that there is a piece in the POCD that is directly related to the Economic Development Commission. He added that there was a piece in the March 16th Planning & Zoning minutes which discussed P&Z volunteers for the POCD. Mr. Soreze then asked if there is a deadline for the Strategic Plan, and Jeffrey replied that the EDC would like the plan completed as soon as possible. Jeffrey thanked them for their interest.

Approval of Minutes:

Fran Pennarola made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from February 21, 2023. Tracey Pertoso seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Economic and Community Development - Staff Updates

Christal Preszler announced that she has taken a position with another entity, so she will be leaving at the beginning of next week. Barbara expressed that Christal will be missed, and emphasized the tremendous amount of work she has done. Jeffery agreed. Barbara continued to note the staggering number of grants and projects. Peter asked Christal for words of wisdom. Christal recommended that members get out there and network.

Christal updated the group that the meeting with the Danbury Chamber had to be rescheduled. She asked if a member of the EDC could reach out to them to reschedule. The Danbury Chamber will be holding Martini Madness this year. The 7 Glen Road project, which is funded by a STEAP grant, is moving forward. Christal informed the Commission that the Fairfield Hills mixed use project is at a



critical juncture and ask that members verbalize their support of the project if they feel so. The Fairfield Hills environmental testing is continuing. Christal explained that the 28a Glen Road project environmental testing is being funded through the CIP. The company performing the testing is expected to come forward with a written report in the next few weeks which should help quantify and determine a strategy for cleaning the buildings on the property. Hopefully the town will be able to cleanup and demo as many of the buildings as possible. The next step will be to look at the property. There is an application in progress for an EPA grant to install permeable surface parking on the campus. Peter asked if there is a plan for the location. Christal replied that it is not set in stone, but will probably be installed where the Farmers Market is held. She then added that in addition there is daily work such as business visitors, social media support, the Municipal Center table, plaza promotions and eBlasts.

Member Comments and Questions

6 Commerce Update:

Jeffrey opened the discussion on the 6 Commerce Road project. The developer's plan is going to the Inland Wetlands Commission tomorrow. The Commission members expressed their concerns about the new design. Jeffrey clarified for newer members that the EDC was the sponsoring agency that recommended the developer to the Selectmen and Legislative Council. Members questioned if the EDC has any say in the new design. The EDC does not have any direct role in the approval of the project. The discussion turned to the reasons why the EDC supported this particular developer. Barbara said that the initial design submitted was one factor in the selection of the developer. The town had positive previous experience with the developer in the building of the Church Hill Village property. Barbara explained that the initial design reflected that the developer had a feel for the property. Tracey added that it is recognized that the town needs other housing opportunities to keep people in town, and apartments are a good viable option.

The Commission was aware that this developer, having completed the Church Hill Village, was able to fund and complete a project. Peter asked if the design had changed. Jeffrey said yes, and explained that ledge was encountered which made a redesign necessary. Member discussed changes in the design and how it no longer compliments the natural surroundings. The Commission discussed various options of communicating its position as the process evolves.

Member Project(s) Update:

None

Business additions resident feedback:

None.

Vacant commercial space and Business Zones Observations:

None.

Other Commissions Observations:

None.

Newtown Municipal Center
3 Primrose Street
Newtown, CT
www.newtown.org



Chairman & Vice Chairman Report/Comments

Strategic Plan for Economic Development:

None.

Adjournment:

Jeffrey asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Fran made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 p.m. and was seconded by Tracey. All members in favor.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*