



MINUTES

April 21, 2020

This meeting was held remotely due to COVID-19 mandates and precautions.

Present:

Cramer Owen, Wes Thompson, Barbara Snyder, Nick Roussas, Steve Gogliettino, Valerie Fallon, Jeffrey Robinson, Christal Preszler – Deputy Director Economic and Community Development, Kim Chiappetta – Economic and Community Development & Fairfield Hills Coordinator (clerk)

Absent: Al Roznicki

Public Attendance: none

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Public Participation:

None.

Approval of Minutes:

Wes Thompson made a motion to accept the minutes from January 21, 2020. Jeffrey Robinson seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Appointment of candidate for open Commissioner position:

Chairman Owen asked for a motion to nominate Tracey Pertoso to fill the vacant Commissioner position. He noted that Tracey was recommended by the RTC, but the deadline was missed so the EDC must vote.

Nick Roussas motioned to appoint Tracy Pertoso to the vacant EDC position. Wes Thompson seconded. All in favor.

Economic and Community Development - Staff Updates:

Christal Preszler explained to members that the Economic and Community Development staff has been busy working full-time with staff splitting time between the office and working from home as a precautionary health measure. The department has been sending out a lot of funding information. Everything offered so far has closed out already. Unemployment has been expanded. The Paycheck Protection Program is currently maxed out but additional funding has been approved by the Senate and is going to the House on Thursday (4/24). Once funds have been approved E&CD will send out an eblast with the information.



The department is trying to share more good news such as Curtis Packaging and Sonics manufacturing personal protection equipment, and thank you notes sent to the Municipal Center thanking town employees for their work during this time.

Christal continued to tell members that local governments are now allowed to defer taxes up to 90 days to provide temporary relief for citizens. Many Newtown and Sandy Hook restaurants are open for take-out & curbside pick-up and are able to sell alcohol in sealed containers. Nick Roussas told the group that the biggest problem he is experiencing with his business is that people don't want to return to work because they are making more money on unemployment with the additional \$600 per week from the Federal government.

She told members Economic and Community Development is helping to fund the Chamber who is assisting with communications and coordinating with other groups. The EDC is sponsoring the Newtown Leaders Forum presented by Andy Sax and coordinated by the Chamber. This is a periodic Facebook live event that provides information and advice from experts in our community.

The department has been making calls to businesses to check-in. The reception has been fabulous and we are happy to be able to connect with businesses again. There have been numerous webinars that help E&CD stay in touch with what people are thinking and planning. Work continues on grants and Valerie Fallon has been instrumental with the branding project.

Valerie told members that it is exciting to see the branding project move along. She recently sent out an email on behalf of the EDC to members of various commissions and a number of small business owners to let them know Haven Creative will be sending them a survey. Haven had sent out the survey shortly after Easter and have had a great response so far. Christal added that Haven is also doing telephone interviews for them to get a feel for the town. The owner of Haven Creative and one of her employees were supposed to visit Newtown on Memorial Day weekend to get an experience of the town but now this is not possible. Christal has received positive feedback from business regarding the rebranding initiative.

Chairman's and Vice Chairman's Reports:

6 Commerce Rd:

Chair Cramer Owen began by telling members that they have received an appraisal for the 6 Commerce Rd property. The appraisal seems lengthy and well done. Once the appraisal has been reviewed with the Director of Planning – George Benson and First Selectman – Dan Rosenthal, it will be shared with Commission members. Cramer added that the appraisal provides various numbers based upon certain aspects such as the installation of the driveway. The group discussed the options for the property. Cramer highlighted that it is beneficially to work slowly on this project and that it has been in the works for many years. Barbara Snyder explained to the group that having an accurate estimate for the



driveway will be a significant piece of information. Wes reminded everyone that infrastructure also needs to be brought up to the property.

Member Comments and General Discussion:

Project Updates, Seminar Attendance, and General Discussion:

Nick Roussas brought to the attention of the group that the climbing number of COVID-19 cases in Bridgeport is due to its citizens not exercising proper social distancing. Nick explained the measures his business has taken to ensure patrons and employees are safe. The group discussed the many businesses who have adapted in order to stay open. Cramer noted that Reverie is taking advantage of the relaxation in regulations and is selling canned beer which is selling very well. Newsylum is also working on selling canned beer as they are unable to officially open at this time.

Jeff Robinson informed the Commission that he has been busy working for the not-for-profit Capital for Change who is a community development financial institution that provides loans to people who are unable to get loans from banks.

Wes added that he has been signing up for various business and state mail lists. Once restrictions have been lifted the EDC and E&CD staff will need to help our businesses really quickly. While ensuring social distancing, he has visited around 19 businesses and found many restaurants are selling family meals which is working well. Wes recommended that when members are getting take-out to ensure restaurants are aware that the town sign regulations have been temporarily relaxed and that they should take advantage of posting signs so that people know they are open. Cramer reminded members of the businesses who provide services such as hair and nail salons who are unable to remain open.

Barbara mentioned that real estate has shifted overnight to all virtual tours. Rentals have been in high demand and homes are selling quickly. Barbara is also the Chair of the 2020 Newtown Arts Festival. The Arts Festival committee is moving forward with planning but is considering that there may still be restrictions on large numbers of people congregating in September. Their goal for this year is to bring more people from out of town to grow the Newtown Arts Festival and encourage visits the town's breweries, restaurants and shops. Barbara explained that she considers the Arts Festival a part of an economic development package. The Arts Festival Committee is still planning to begin market beginning in May.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned by Nick at 8:07 pm and was seconded by Barbara.

Respectfully Submitted, Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk