



## MINUTES

February 16, 2021

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

### **Present:**

Barbara Snyder, Wes Thompson, Cramer Owen, Steve Matiatos, Tracey Pertoso, Jeffrey Robinson, Jim Maguire, Christal Preszler – Deputy Director Economic and Community Development, Kim Chiappetta – Economic and Community Development & Fairfield Hills Coordinator (clerk)

### **Absent:**

Valerie Fallon, Nick Roussas

### **Public Attendance:**

None.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m.

### **Public Participation:**

None.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Cramer Owen made a motion to accept the minutes from January 19, 2021. Jeffrey Robinson seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

### **Economic and Community Development - Staff Updates:**

#### **General Update:**

Christal Preszler began by telling members that she and Chairman Wes Thompson had a meeting with Site Finder magazine. After some thought it was decided to do a print ad in the March edition to market Newtown. Christal told members that she still has copies of Site Finder in her office and it's a good magazine. Christal then informed members that staff continues work on the 5 live grants plus a pre-application for a 6<sup>th</sup> grant. Work is composed of grant applications and project management. Economic & Community Development will be shifting focus back to the website redesign that had been placed on hold due to other priorities. The department has spent the past 4 months supporting businesses with social media ads. Christal expressed that it was nice meeting some of the new commission members and thanked Tracey and Steve for their time. Wes added that Site Finder is a magazine for corporate executives and developers looking for sites and appears to be a good publication to get the news out about Newtown.

#### **Google tracking sheet review:**

Wes reminded members of the EDC Business and Property Tracking spreadsheet. Kim displayed a sample document and explained the layout for the new members. Wes clarified that the protocol for properties is to contact realtors first. If Commission members are unable to find the commercial realtor for a property they can reach out to the property owner. Christal informed members that Economic & Community Development and Land Use often have discussions with property owners, so the



Commission is urged to reach out to these town departments for information. Jim Maguire asked for clarification on what they are trying to achieve. Christal replied that the most effective use of time is to meet with business owners and filter information back to Economic and Community Development to help us better assist our businesses. Wes provided the Commission an example of businesses who want to expand. In these cases, the EDC must direct the business owner to the Land Use department to ensure the zoning would allow for the type of expansion. Steve Matiatos asked about the sensitivity of business information. Christal explained that the information is subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) act, so it is best to keep details at a high-level for information that is private to the business owner. The group continued to discuss the benefits of creating a relationship with businesses.

#### **Member Comments and Updates:**

##### **General Discussion, business observations and recommendations:**

Barbara Snyder asked if there is any creative marketing that can be done by the Commission to help bring traffic to businesses this spring. She told members about the creativity in New Orleans where homes were decorated in place of the Mardi Gras parade floats. Christal and Barbara both mentioned to members the #WeLoveNewtownCTBiz marketing that has run for the month of February.

Wes asked Steve if there was anything in his area of work that could be applicable to businesses in town. Steve explained that hotels continue to try to adjust. The Governor just announced that effective March 19<sup>th</sup> indoor capacity will be increased from 25 to 100 and outdoor from 50 to 200. He explained that events effects everybody's business in regards to gathering safely. Downtown city hotels will see that business with groups and business travelers will be slow to increase.

Cramer informed the Commission of the news from the SBA that they will be rolling back out the grant program for small businesses. The program will be a phased roll-out. The first phase will allow for companies, who had not been awarded a grant because funds ran out, the first opportunity to apply for this round. Cramer also told members that financing was still available for qualified small businesses. He recommended that Commission members direct interested businesses to SBA.gov for details and added that people interested in the grant program should check the website daily for updates.

#### **Chairman and Vice Chairman Reports:**

##### **Continuation - Commerce Rd Update and Next Steps:**

Wes gave a quick recap on the status of the town owned Commerce Road property. The town attorney has determined that the EDC is allowed to hire a broker. This means that the EDC can continue with the commercial broker they had already selected, but should check with the town's Purchasing Agent to see if any responses to the RFP were received. If responses were received the associated proposals will be reviewed and compared. Wes then reminded members of two unsolicited development proposals that went directly to the town. These proposals may be later reviewed by the EDC. He recommended creating a sub-committee of 3 EDC members to screen all development proposals. The sub-committee can then reach out to other EDC members for their expertise. Wes recommended the following:

The EDC authorizes a sub-committee consisting of Wes (Thompson), Jeffrey (Robinson) and Jim (Maguire) to act on the EDC's behalf to screen and summarize offers from buyers brought forward by our future realtor.



Tracey Pertoso recommended the verbiage "and eliminate" be added.

The recommended motion was revised as follows:

The EDC authorizes a sub-committee consisting of Wes (Thompson), Jeffrey (Robinson) and Jim (Maguire) to act on the EDC's behalf to screen, summarize and eliminate as appropriate offers from buyers brought forward by our future realtor.

Cramer so moved. Barbara seconded. All in favor.

Wes then told the group that George Benson, Director of Planning, has re-engaged on the Commerce Road project because some of the permits are in the town's name. He is currently taking care of the inland wetlands permit, re-engaging with the Army Corps of Engineers and with Mr. Carboni of the SB group. The Hubbards (CVH Foundation) have begun the construction of the driveway. Wes commended George Benson for his work on the project.

#### **Business Districts Refresher – Infrastructure enablers:**

Wes began by telling the group of infrastructure enablers including electric, water/well, sewer/septic, broadband connectivity, etc. He explained that new developments where water and sewer are in question must go in front of Water and Sewer Authority. The amount being used by a new development is deducted from the total available capacity. Wes then gave the example of the sewer capacity in the exit 9 area. The capacity was around 100,000 gallons per day that could be treated and pumped out. The development of the medical buildings and apartments has reduced the available capacity. He asked that when Commission members speak with businesses or developers they think about zoning and infrastructure and call town departments for information.

#### **Misc. cross commission activities:**

Wes told everyone that because of the impacts to the economy, towns are discussing their tax incentives in open forums. He gave an example of a recent article in Voices about the town of Middlebury EDC discussing their tax incentive program change. The towns of Bethel and Monroe have been doing the same. Monroe is talking about what can be done to incentivize a developer for the old Stevenson Lumber property (1585 Monroe Turnpike). Newtown's tax incentives are typically given for blighted properties or properties that have been vacant for an extended period of time. Developers interested in receiving a tax incentive first go through Christal or the First Selectman, and then if they meet criteria are passed onto the EDC for review. The EDC then takes a vote and forwards their recommendation to the town.

#### **Adjournment:**

The Chairman asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Jim made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m. and was seconded by Jeffrey.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*