



Minutes
August 17, 2021
Newtown Senior Center
Multipurpose Room - A
8 Simpson St

Present: Wes Thompson, Jeffrey Robinson, Valerie Fallon, Fran Pennarola, Nick Roussas

Absent: Tracey Pertoso, Steve Matiatos, Barbara Snyder

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

Public Attendance:
None

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m.

Public Participation:
None

Approval of Minutes:
Nick Roussas made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from July 20, 2021. Valerie Fallon seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Welcome New Member:
Chairman Wes Thompson welcomed the new Commission member Fran Penarolla. Fran told members that he has lived in Newtown since September 1st 1989. He is a lawyer in Danbury and does a fair amount of business work and trademark work. He served on the Legislative Council for 8 years. In preparation to join the Commission, Fran read through the minutes from the last 6 months. He further explained that he has worked with the Town in documenting leases for the NYA and Ambulance garage, so he is familiar with what goes on. Fran told the group he joined to learn and help.

Economic and Community Development - Staff Updates:
Fairfield Hills Residential:
Christal Preszler began by telling members that the largest task at the moment is the work being done on the Fairfield Hills mixed use. The Town has entered into discussions with Winn Development who is interested in Shelton House and Kent House. There is still a lot that needs to happen. Christal informed members that the views from both buildings are great. They show the beauty of campus and it will be great to get the buildings back to being used. Historical tax credits will be used for the project which will be a big hurdle. The Town will assist Winn in working with National Parks Service and the State Historic



Preservation Office (SHPO). The current plan is to demolish Stamford Hall, Norwalk Hall, Plymouth Hall and Cochran House. Valerie asked if the developer has experience in historical restoration. Wes replied that Winn has extensive experience and told members about visits to two of their properties; The Tyler in East Haven, CT and Ludlow Mills in Ludlow, MA. He told members how The Tyler was a former high school where some residents had attended. Portions of the building are preserved with trophy cases and lockers (which are no longer useable). Christal explained that these aspects were preserved as part of historic requirements from SHPO and gave the example that the fireplaces may be preserved in Kent House. Christal continued to tell members that Winn is very open to discussing things and plan to do community engagement.

Grants:

Christal then told members that Kim Chiappetta has been busy with follow-up from the EDA grant design response. She explained to members the level of detail and work involved in managing the grant and that the design progress continues. Construction is scheduled to begin sometime in December.

Christal informed the Commission that the STEAP grant contracts are back from the State. These funds will be used on infrastructure for the Heritage Trail in Sandy Hook. The Sandy Hook Organization Prosperity (SHOP) will be installing a pavilion at the location that will serve as the start of the Heritage Trail.

Newtown – Sandy Hook Restaurant Week:

Christal told everyone that the department has been working on Restaurant Week which is scheduled this year for October 4th – 10th. This year's marketing will incorporate the department's new branding. Coasters are being distributed at the Arts Festival in September. These coasters have a QR code that routes to NewtownSandyHookEats.com which contains a complete list of all the restaurants in Newtown. The department is also in the process of obtaining quotes for distribution of coasters to restaurants.

Businesses:

Wes asked Christal for an update on Kimball Midwest and Country Campers. Christal said that Kimball Midwest is doing great, and that their move into town may take time. Country Campers is doing ribbon cutting at the end of September.

Fairfield County Commercial Brokers Luncheon:

Christal told everyone that the EDC and Economic and Community Development department hosted the Fairfield County Commercial Broker (FCCBN) luncheon meeting at NewSylum in July. Brokers expressed how much they like NewSylum and the Town. The EDC and E&CD department also hosted a meeting two years ago in the Alexandria Room at the Edmond Town Hall. Christal said that the purpose of hosting these meeting is to network and remind them that Fairfield County includes Newtown. She added that her goal is to keep Newtown top of mind.



Member Comments and Questions:

Wes told the group that three 3 buildings are for sale on South Main Street. Christal clarified that none of the businesses are for sale. Nick said that the owner of Burrito Shack had to put up a sign saying that his business was not for sale.

Wes continued to open up conversations on business development and vacant spaces. The strip mall to be built on route 34 by Toddy Hill Rd is moving forward. Curtis Corporate Park does have some empty space. Members discussed commercial properties in town. Wes informed the group that Tier One was bought out by Arch Medical who has about 18 business around the country. The company does high precision manufacturing.

Wes then explained to members that different companies make different contributions to the town such as taxes, jobs or bringing people into Newtown. He reminded members of the research he had done in the past regarding businesses and the taxes they pay. This is something that should be considered when trying to draw businesses into Newtown. Wes asked members to consider what types of businesses they would like to see in town. They need to consider what brings in revenue and if the business is a destination that energizes the economic base. Valerie said she recalled past conversations pointing to manufacturing and that she needs to understand what buildings are available. Wes told members they cannot dismiss small niche retail because these businesses bring people to town. Members discussed the new businesses in Sandy Hook Center, which include Uncle Matt's Bakery & Café, Gino's Parlor and Dolce Italian Ice and Gelato.

Valerie told everyone that she recently learned a number of restaurants are not opening for lunch until Thursdays. This appears to be due to an employee shortage. Christal said she find this is common. Wes said that the restaurants he's spoken with said they are unable to find people. Valerie informed members that the Toy Tree is moving to the Village at Lexington Gardens. Members discussed the closing of Panificio Navona. Christal noted that they are honoring gift cards. Valerie asked if the business was moving to another location. No members were aware of a move. Valerie then said that Lucas Local moved to Southbury. Christal said that the same owner is opening a new restaurant in the former location of Lucas Local called The Quarter. Valerie asked if Kings is building in the same spot. No members knew for certain the status of the property. Valerie asked for the status of Sand Hill Plaza. Christal said that the status remains the same. Nick informed the Commission that there has been a huge increase in the price of produce and that he's had to re-do his entire menu. Wes noted how Nick was able to pivot his restaurant during the pandemic to quickly adapt.

Wes asked Commission members to ask friends and family what they would like to see in Newtown. He is planning to discuss feedback they receive in the next meeting. Valerie and Christal said the same question was asked in the branding survey. One common response was independently owned niche stores. Christal and Valerie added that these stores offer atmosphere and an experience.



Chairman's Closing Comments:

Wes informed members that the contract for the 6 Commerce Road property has been signed. Reporters have already been calling. So far there has been nothing but positive feedback. Fran said there is still allot to do. Wes reminded members that the sale is contingent upon zoning approval. Wes said the EDC has been trying to sell the property since 2006. This development meets the highest and best use of the property. Wes commended the Commission and said everyone should be proud of the due diligence they did.

Finally Wes noted that per the Planning & Zoning minutes, Covered Bridge has applied for another connection to the sewer for another building.

Adjournment:

Wes asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Nick made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. and was seconded by Fran.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*