

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



Minutes
September 21, 2021
Newtown Senior Center
Multipurpose Room - A
8 Simpson St

Present: Wes Thompson, Jeffrey Robinson, Valerie Fallon (left at 8:28 p.m.), Fran Pennarola, Nick Roussas, Tracey Pertoso, Steve Matiatos, Barbara Snyder

Absent: None

Also Present: Kim Chiappetta – Economic & Community Dev & Fairfield Hills Coordinator (clerk)

Public Attendance:
None

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

Public Participation:
None

Approval of Minutes:
Jeffrey Robinson made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from August 17, 2021. Valerie Fallon seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

New Member:
Chairman Wes Thompson began the meeting reminding members of the Republican open seat on the EDC. He explained to members how the Republican Party interviewed interested candidates and unanimously selected Peter McLoughlin. Since the Board of Selectmen was not able to fill the open seat within the 45 day time requirement, the recommendation has been forwarded to the EDC for appointment. Wes and Vice Chair, Jeffrey Robinson, met with Peter and learned of his impressive and interesting career history. Peter McLoughlin has a Master in Social Work and a Masters in Arts & Business. After working sometime in Social Work, Peter recognized he liked working with his hands and began a career in construction. During this time he did allot of charity and volunteer work for people with disabilities. Wes and Jeffrey both support his nomination. Wes continued to tell the group that Peter is now retired and found his passion for videography.

Wes asked for a motion to nominate Peter McLoughlin to fill the Republican seat.
Nick Roussas made the motion. Fran Pennarola seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.



Economic and Community Development - Staff Updates:

Newtown – Sandy Hook Restaurant Week:

Kim Chiappetta told the Commission that the Economic and Community Development department is in the process of visiting all Newtown and Sandy Hook restaurants with information on participating in restaurant week, and a poster and coasters that has a QR code which launches NewtownSandyHookEats.com. Print and digital graphics have been forwarded to Voices, Hearst and The Newtown Bee. Kim explained to members that many restaurants are happy to participate in Newtown – Sandy Hook Restaurant Week, but often do not notify the E&CD of their specials. E&CD then looks out for restaurant specials and provides a link from the NewtownSandyHookEats website. Tracy Pertoso offered to share Kim's contact information on NewtownEats. Wes reminded members of Valerie's comment in the last meeting regarding the many restaurants being closed for lunch on weekdays. Members discussed a lack of staff being a primary reason for many of the restaurants reducing their hours. Steve Matiatos added that he has found New Haven restaurants have been changing their schedules frequently.

Member Comments and Questions:

Steve then informed members of his resignation from the CT Lodging Association. He continued to tell members of his work with the State DECD and how now as past president he will be on an employment task force. Steve expressed how interesting it has been working with the State Department of Economic and Community Development and Governor's office, and learning the aspects or how things are around the State. Barbara asked what the State's strategy is on employment. Steve replied that the task force is just beginning the work now and his focus will be on tourism employment. The group discussed funds that need to be spent on the arts and tourism. Barbara noted post-COVID tourism ad campaigns run by New York and New Jersey, but did not see anything for Connecticut. Steve said that this was discussed. He explained to members that CT has the highest hotel occupancy tax in the country at 15%. Many larger hotels have had to close and some are on the verge of closing. The larger hotels have not recovered yet because business travel has not returned. Wes added that this effects many other businesses beside hotels. Steve continued to inform the group that events are still being cancelled which is impacting the hotels and businesses around them.

Wes told the Commission that the Oxford airport is planning to expand. The area around the airport had been zoned for commercial development many years ago and they are now working to increase commercial traffic.

Barbara reported to the group that the 2021 Newtown Arts Festival was very successful. There were 54 vendors and 10 – 11 non-profits. Wes asked how many of the vendors were from Newtown. Barbara estimated there were between 10 – 12 Newtown artists. The Cultural Arts Commission very specifically allows only artisans. There were 3 wood workers, a forge artisan and 10 painters. All vendors did tremendously well. Several vendors commented that it was the best festival they had been at in years. Barbara continued to explain that the Arts Festival brings in people from out of town who then discover how great Newtown is, as well as bring art to Newtown residents. This is the first year the Festival has offered on-line ticket purchasing which also helps to expand the mailing list and provide data. The Arts Festival earned close to \$9,000 in on-line sales alone. Wes asked Barbara who set-up the application for the on-line ticket purchasing. Barbara replied that she did analysis of the various platforms available,



and performed the necessary set-up. Wes expressed that Cultural Arts was lucky to have Barbara as a volunteer.

Nick Roussas updated the Commission on his business. In order to fill vacant opening at his diner he has recruited kids from the Bridgeport Military Academy. These employees are helping to fill a huge void. They are easy to train and disciplined. Nick said he still has 5 positions that remain open. His business continues to run 24 / 7 with order fulfillment specialists whose only work is to assemble orders to go for Uber, Door Dash, Grub Hub and customer pick-up. With the increase in the minimum wage, he has also had to give increases to other positions. Prices of burgers and chicken has gone up. Valerie told members of a news segment she heard that said there are not enough truckers. The group discussed how many truck drivers retired during the pandemic and new drivers lack experience. Both Nick and Steve shared the difficulties in obtaining stock such as plastic cups and paper products, and that products received may not necessarily be what they ordered. Valerie agreed that she has also experienced some supply issues.

Tracey Pertoso shared a story of an out of town business who had received a negative post on social media from a long time customer who had not provided the business owner the opportunity to rectify the situation. Tracey emphasized the need for everyone to be kind and patient. The group then discussed the possibility of these problems in the supply chain resulting in more of a push to buy local and American made. Tracey also shared that the hospital is also experiencing issues with supplies too.

Fran Pennarola told the group that legal is doing well and his firm has 3 new hires.

6 Commerce Update:

Fran informed the Commission that he has reached out to George Benson and Dave Grogins for an update on the 6 Commerce Road property, but has not heard from anyone yet. Wes added that he spoke with the developer a week ago and found out they were waiting for information from Aquarion regarding sizing out the water pipeline.

Wes then told the Commission of the plan to install a walking bridge that would allow people to walk from Al's Trail down into the center of Sandy Hook Village. This type of trail will attracts visitors, as well as potential tenants for the Farrell Community apartments in Sandy Hook.

Wes updated members that progress is being made at Country Campers. The company is planning to do a ground breaking in October or November.

Business additions feedback:

Wes reminded members of the question put out to the public on what types of businesses they would like to see in Newtown. Valerie told everyone she posted the question in NicerNewtown – Facebook and received 310 responses. She summarized responses in high-level categories. Top responses



included Trader Joes, Whole Foods, and a bookstore. Some response were more family oriented like a bowling alley, mini-golf and an ice skating rink. Other responses in the category of retail included: a dollar store, a national or large retail clothing store, and shoe store. There were also responses for medium scale manufacturing. Wes reminded members that manufacturing equipment is not taxed and may not increase the tax base as would another type of business. Valerie continued to note requests for senior housing, affordable housing, a museum and shopping in Fairfield Hills, and ethnic food. Barbara added that she has heard requests for shared workspace. Wes said that the Edmond Town Hall and C.H. Booth library both have space that can be rented.

Wes continued to explain that there are other aspects beside taxes to be considered when determining businesses that would be beneficial to Newtown. He gave the example of Country Campers not only paying taxes, but also becoming a destination. They are turning an eye-sore into a productive piece of property. He added that niche stores make Newtown unique. Members discussed the people that Country Campers will draw into that area which will help surrounding businesses.

Chairman's Closing Comments:

Wes informed the Commission that he went to Selectmen's meeting last night (9/20) to listen to discussions on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

He explained that ARPA funds can only be spent in specific categories and provided high-level examples including: support of public health response, water and sewer infrastructure, and broadband infrastructure. Funds cannot be spent on recurring costs. The group discussed the opportunity to upgrade Wi-Fi in the Community Center and Edmond Town Hall. Steve asked how the town determines how the funds will be spent. Wes explained that this would be at the discretion of the First Selectman who will be using the Town's existing purchasing procurement process which will provide transparency through documented evidence of how funds are spent. Wes told the group that one town has decided to put money aside for grants for its businesses and noted the difficulty in determining what businesses would be awarded funds. It would be beneficial to all if funds were used for town projects because it will help hold the mill rate flat. The group then discussed how to handle questions and recommendations brought to them as EDC members. Wes asked that members not forward business owners to the First Selectman's office, but instead help shepherd them through.

Adjournment:

Wes asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Nick made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m. and was seconded by Barbara.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*