



Economic Development Commission

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

December 14, 2021

Newtown Senior Center
Multipurpose Room - A
8 Simpson St

Present: Peter McLoughlin, Fran Pennarola, Nick Roussas, Wes Thompson, Barbara Snyder, Jeffrey Robinson, Tracey Pertoso, Steve Matiatos, Valerie Fallon

Absent:

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 7:00 p.m.

Public Participation:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Barbara Snyder made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from November 1, 2021. Steve Matiatos seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Economic and Community Development - Staff Updates:

STEAP grant:

Christal Preszler began by telling members that the STEAP grant documents have come back from the State. She reminded everyone that the \$128,000 award will be used to encapsulate contaminants with a parking lot, grading and planting at the town owned property at 7 Glen Rd. The property is being leased to the Sandy Hook Organization for Prosperity (S.H.O.P.) to support their Heritage Trail project. Due to time constraints with the State grant, this portion of the project will be done first, then SHOP can proceed with the rest of their Heritage Trail project.

Visit Western CT:

Christal informed the Commission that she is on the Executive Committee for the Visit Western CT Board of Tourism, and that she has been on the Board of Directors for a year or two. Through this Committee she has learned that Newtown is considered part of Litchfield Hills regarding tourism, and she is working to better understand how to best market Newtown in both Visit CT and Visit Western CT. Land Use Secretary, Helen Fahey, is assisting Christal from reviewing State tourism websites and social media from



a consumer's perspective. In an effort to encourage qualifying Newtown businesses to be added to Visit CT, she is working with Helen on a process to offer businesses assistance in submitting a request to be added to Visit CT at the time when they visit the Municipal Center to set-up a business display. Upon removal of their display, they can then be aided by Economic & Community Development in creating their page. Steve Matiatos told the group that a new Director was coming to the State Office of Tourism from Miami, FL. The group discussed the new director and the possible opportunities for improvements. Christal added that she has recommended to the Committee to ask the marketing firm they use to consider Instagram and TikTok for their social media to help attract younger people.

New Businesses:

Christal told members that she visited the new Access Physical Therapy & Wellness located at 170 Mt. Pleasant Rd and coming to the same building in the next few months is a women's health practice. Tracey Pertoso added that Dr. Levi of Pain and Spin Specials of CT is relocating from Danbury to the same location in Newtown. Members discussed the growth in this location referred to as the *medical mile*.

February Restaurant Week:

Christal informed the group that Economic & Community Development is hoping to hold a restaurant week style event around the end of February when restaurants experience a slowdown. E & CD is considering somehow incorporate other businesses in the event.

Budget:

Christal explained that she handed in the budget today and that it remains flat.

Website:

Christal updated members on the website consolidation project. Responses to questions have been received from all businesses. Next a virtual meeting will be scheduled with the review team after the holidays.

Wes asked about the status of the 28a Glen Rd project. Christal explained that the grant funded work was completed and the grant is now closed, however further remediation is still required.

Fairfield Hills Residential:

Wes updated the Commission on the Fairfield Hills Residential discussions and explained that all original Fairfield Hills buildings remaining on the campus would have to be designated as historic to qualify for the historic tax credits needed for the projects to restore Kent House and Shelton House. The historic tax credits require that all historic buildings must remain standing for 10 years after the completion of the restoration projects. Christal added that any demolition could result in a claw back of tax refunds for the developer. The First Selectman is reaching out to the DECD Director to discuss further. Christal clarified that if the developer is not able to receive State and Federal historic tax credits, the project will not move forward, and all remaining vacant campus buildings will be demolished at taxpayer cost. (Not including Newtown Hall or duplexes.) Christal noted that there are CT Community Challenge grant funds available, and she has submitted an intent to apply. Award funds range between \$1 - \$10 million. If



awarded, funds may be used to secure remaining buildings and secure the campus. Wes noted Christal has been leading the effort on the Fairfield Hills residential.

Member Comments and Questions:

6 Commerce Update (*continued*):

Wes reminded members of how the 6 Commerce property developer had performed boring tests and hit a rock ledge. Since then, they have done more test borings and found the water level is higher than expected, however, the developer is still not too discouraged. Drainage can be added carrying water away from the area to address the issue. They are trying to determine the geology of the area to see if rock can be blasted or if the building design must be changed. Currently, the Town is pending demand estimates for the residential and Hubbard projects. Once received they will be brought forward to Aquarian.

Member Project(s) Update:

Wes informed the Commission that Peter McLoughlin has volunteered to take assisting E&CD with updating the Town video located on the Town website. Kim updated the group that she now has the contract signed by the First Selectman and will be submitting it to CGI.

Business additions resident feedback (*continued*):

Wes explained that this section has been added to the agenda for members to share feedback they received from residents.

Vacant commercial space (*continued*):

Wes explained this section has been added for members to adopt a section of town to share updates with the Commission. Member then discussed the progress on the Country Campers project. In addition, Wes informed the group of the work being done on the old Sandy Hook Fire House located across from Foundry in Sandy Hook. Members then also discussed the closure of Five Guys and the progress being made at Modzelewski's. Tracey noted the potential benefits of Country Campers customers for local businesses.

Wes told members that he spoke with the management at Farrell Communities in Sandy Hook and learned the units are filling quickly with renters. Rentals include 1-year leases and 6-month leases with an up charge. These apartments have not resulted in a drastic increase in school enrollment as has been concerned by many residents.

Other Business group adoption:

Wes deferred to the new year for the Commission to determine if members want to adopt business groups.



Other Commission adoption:

Wes reminded members the benefits of staying informed on other commission and boards business and reminded them that members do not have to attend meetings, but simply review the minutes.

Election of Commission Officers:

Wes opened the election of officers and opened the floor for the nomination of Chair.

Barbara Snyder nominated Jeffrey Robinson for Chair. Nick Roussas seconded the nomination. All in favor.

Jeffrey Robinson was unanimously elected as Chair.

Wes then requested a nomination for Vice Chair.

Valerie Fallon nominated Barbara Snyder for vice chair. Jeffrey Robinson seconded. All in favor.

Barbara Snyder was unanimously elected a vice chair.

Christal thanked Wes for his many years of dedication to the EDC and expressed how much she has learned from him. Member all agreed.

Adjournment:

Wes asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Steve Matiatos made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. and was seconded by Fran Pennarola.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*