

**Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 6, 2007**

Attending: J. Albuquerque; M. Gionta; D. Mathiasen; R. Scherrer; D. Sloan; P. Stricker
Guests: R. Casner; P. Govert; J. Short; M. Ziobron; Goodspeed – H. Kittner; D. McMahon

Mr. Scherrer called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

MINUTES

The minutes of the August 2nd meeting were reviewed.

MS. MATHIASEN MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 2, 2007 MEETING MINUTES. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MS. STRICKER AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mr. Scherrer reported that Mr. Dominick Donofrio, President of Windstar Companies was unable to attend this meeting due to a scheduling conflict. He stated that he had spoken with Mr. Donofrio on the phone who provided him with an overview of his plans for the Johnsonville property. He noted that the plans are to convert the property to a tourist destination site similar to Peddlers' Village in PA. This conversion does not preclude the residential development planned for the site by MJB. Mr. Scherrer stated Mr. Donofrio asked to be re-scheduled for the October EDC meeting.

Mr. Scherrer welcomed Ms. Ziobron as the Economic Development Coordinator and noted her official start date was September 2nd. He circulated the list of initial EDC priorities and noted that the short-term focus for the Coordinator is to get up-to-speed on all of the major existing and planned projects, with a primary focus on the Town Office Site. He stated that the EDC Commissioners would continue in their roles as liaison to the various projects so that Ms. Ziobron can focus on the Town Office Site project.

Ms. Mathiasen reported that the press release about the Town's hiring an Economic Development Coordinator had been reported in the Hartford Courant and would also be in the Town's Newsletter. Ms. Ziobron stated she has a meeting scheduled with the Weekly Reminder and she would encourage them to also run the press release.

Ms. Ziobron distributed a handout to the Commissioners highlighting her efforts to date and her contact information. Several administrative issues were discussed.

OLD BUSINESS

Project Status Reports

1. Goodspeed Properties

Ms. Kittner reported that the Goodspeed has engaged Linda Savitsky as project coordinator who will, in conjunction with Scott Jezek and Pat Pinnell, develop a project plan and budget for the actor housing project. She noted that the Goodspeed's goal is to complete the project in the next two years. She noted they will be meeting with Ms. Ziobron on September 18th to provide her with an overview of the Goodspeed's plans. Mr. Scherrer inquired about the projected two-year timeframe and Ms. Kittner advised that it is their goal to have the new actor housing available by April 2009.

In response to a question from Ms. Mathiasen about Ms. Savitsky's role, Ms. Kittner confirmed that she and Mr. McMahon would continue to be the EDC liaison for the immediate future but advised that they hope Ms. Savitsky will be able to join them for the next EDC meeting.

In response to a question from Mr. Sloan, Ms. Kittner confirmed that they feel the Town's Boards and Commissions have been very receptive to their plans.

2. Town Office Site

Ms. Mathiasen provided a document that was created for the spring Board and Commission presentation which outlines next steps prior to seeking a developer. In response to a question from Mr. McMahon, Ms. Mathiasen advised that EDC is still seeking additional developers because the Commissioners feel they need more varied input to bring to a public meeting. Ms.

Ziobron reported that she has spoken with Mr. Simon a number of times about his proposal and, personally, finds his concept very appealing. Mr. Scherrer stated that he feels it is important to obtain several proposals to evaluate but noted that it has been challenging to generate interest due to the size of the site.

There was a general discussion about strengthening the description of the site by being more specific about the joint efforts of the Town and the Goodspeed and identifying the properties that will potentially be available once the actor's housing is completed. Ms. Kittner and Mr. McMahon agreed that the site could be strengthened by more specific references to the Goodspeed properties. Ms. Ziobron stated she would work with the Goodspeed and draft language for an updated site description that can be re-submitted to the list of developers.

In response to a question from Ms. Stricker regarding the status of the Mobility Study grant funds, Mr. Scherrer advised that First Selectman Parker at their last meeting stated pursuing the grant funding is one of his key priorities.

Ms. Mathiasen provided an update on the USDA grant that had been awarded for the Town Office Site project. She stated that the original grant amount was for \$29,000, part of which was in matching funds from the Town. She noted that the grant terms had been extended several times and reported that the USDA would like to close out the grant. She reported that HMA has submitted invoices totaling \$27,500 for their work, which includes facilitating a future public meeting, and noted that there is a balance of \$1,500 remaining in grant funds which will be allocated for related miscellaneous expenses.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Stricker regarding the Middle School Re-Use Committee, Ms. Ziobron advised that a number of additional applications have come in and the Selectmen have not yet had time to review all of them. She noted that the Selectmen have a special meeting scheduled for Tuesday, September 18th, and it is quite possible they will discuss the issue after that meeting.

Mr. Gionta provided Ms. Ziobron with a general overview of the research he had done regarding potential developers and offered to meet with her separately to provide more detailed information. He also suggested discussing with the Goodspeed the possibility of combining the construction portion of the actors' housing with the Town Office Site development project to entice developers.

3. Johnsonville

Mr. Sloan noted that he had talked with Mr. Ventres about Mr. Donofrio's involvement in the Johnsonville project. He advised that Mr. Ventres feels Mr. Donofrio has a lead role in the project and that his first priority is to rehab the existing buildings. He stated that Mr. Ventres does not believe Mr. Donofrio will be involved in the residential aspect of the project, but stated that he is not entirely clear how the responsibilities for the various aspects of the project will be divided. Mr. Sloan advised that he feels Mr. Donofrio's involvement has reinvigorated the project and he is encouraged that it is once again moving forward.

4. Banner

Mr. Scherrer reported that Mr. Albuquerque had expressed concern in being EDC's liaison for the Banner project while also serving as a contractor on the project. He advised that Ms. Stricker has agreed to replace Mr. Albuquerque as the liaison to the Banner project. Ms. Stricker stated that she has not had an opportunity to meet with the developers recently but hopes to do so in the near future. She noted, however, that the last time she visited the site she provided Mr. Lewis with the names of some people who could get the banquet facility up and running and manage it on an on-going basis.

Mr. Sloan reported that the realtor has indicated that there has been a lot of interest in the properties. There was a general discussion about the current real estate market in general and the real estate market in East Haddam/Banner, which both Mr. Sloan and Mr. Casner agreed was positive.

5. Other Business Updates

Ms. Mathiasen distributed information on several new businesses in town that will be listed in the Oct. Town newsletter:

- The Carriage House at Goodspeed Landing is doing well and hopes to plan an open house for some time in the future.
- Hayden Wine & Spirits is doing well and has plans to renovate the store's façade to look more traditional and convert the second floor into residential units.
- Nino's Pizzeria and Pub is open regularly and doing a good business.
- Adriana's Hairstyling, now New Image Salon, has a new owner/manager, however, Adriana is still working at the salon.

Ms. Ziobron inquired about the status of the buildings across from the Grist Mill Plaza and it was confirmed that there is quite a bit of vacant space in the buildings.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Stricker, Mr. Scherrer stated that he believed that Dutch Oil has acquired all of the Town approvals and permits needed to begin construction of their new building. Mr. Albuquerque noted that he believes they are currently pursuing financing for the project.

Events/Tourism

1. Website

Ms. Mathiasen reported that she and Ms. Stricker met and gathered information on changing web hosts and discussed additional services they would like to add to the website. She stated that they are looking into whether or not there will be any cost involved into switching over to another host and, if so, she will share the information with the other Commissioners via e-mail if needed before the next meeting. Mr. Scherrer stated that the Town may also be updating their website.

Ms. Stricker noted that, to date, they have reviewed each of the categories on the website for redundancies, updated a number of pictures, and did over the Business Development section. Mr. Scherrer suggested incorporating a "recent news" section on the front page of the EDC website and Ms. Mathiasen said she will discuss that with the web designer.

Ms. Mathiasen noted that she and Ms. Stricker had also talked with Ms. Ziobron about adding a section on available business properties. Ms. Ziobron stated she has several other ideas for the website that she will discuss with Ms. Mathiasen and Ms. Stricker.

2. Town Graphics Brochure and Banner

Ms. Mathiasen reported that she has not yet received the Town Graphics banner and left a follow-up message at the vendor's office the week before Labor Day. She noted that she is also waiting for a promised interactive disk of the map and all the listed businesses that can be up-loaded to the EDC website. Mr. Scherrer noted that some of the participating businesses have expressed their frustration with the delays experienced throughout the process and encouraged Ms. Mathiasen to do all she can to get the promised materials as soon as possible.

Mr. Sloan referenced an article that he had read in the newspaper reporting that the Economic Development officials for the Town of Cromwell worked with a company to develop up to six videos about the town, at no cost to the town. Ms. Mathiasen stated she would follow-up on the possibility of a similar project for East Haddam.

Plan of Conservation and Development

Mr. Scherrer reported that the edited Economic Development section of the Plan of Conservation and Development had been shared with all of the Commissioners. He advised that he and Ms. Mathiasen met with the Planning and Zoning Commission on August 23rd and reviewed the updated section. He noted that they advised the P&Z Commissioners that EDC considers the submitted document their official position for that section. Ms. Mathiasen noted that there was some give and take regarding the revised draft, however, it appeared from the discussions at that meeting that the majority of the EDC version would be retained. She stated the P&Z will distribute or post a final draft before the public meeting.

Mr. Sloan reported that he had attended the last P&Z meeting where the Plan was discussed with representatives from several of the other Town Boards and Commissions. He stated that he was impressed with how thorough P&Z is being with the document and the amount of input they are soliciting. He advised that he feels the Town Meeting will not be scheduled in the immediate future due to the amount of revision work that needs to be done to the Plan as a result of these meetings.

There was a general discussion about the Plan in general.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Mail received

Ms. Mathiasen advised that, other than two reminder postcards about the Smart Growth Seminar in November, there was no other mail to report.

2. EDC Applicant Comments

Mr. Scherrer reported that EDC has received four applications to fill the vacant Commissioner position and noted that two of the applicants were at the meeting. He introduced Mr. John Short and Mr. Robert Casner and invited them to make some comments about their interest in EDC.

Mr. Short thanked the Commissioners for their consideration and advised that he is currently semi-retired. He provided some background information on his business experience, noting that he is retired from his career as an engineer for NE Utilities, that he also worked as a project engineer for the Town of Middletown²; and currently assists his son, on a part-time basis, with his businesses. Mr. Short stated that the Town has been good to him and he is now in a position to give back to the Town.

Mr. Casner thanked the Commissioners for their interest, and advised that he is a building contractor that has been living and doing business in East Haddam for approximately twenty-five years. He noted that, due to his business, he has a good knowledge of many of the business owners and the status of the various business properties in Town. He stated that, for the same reason, he feels he has a good understanding of the hurdles new businesses must meet to start-up in East Haddam and would like to help those businesses successfully overcome those hurdles. He also feels that it is important to be cognizant of the issues encountered by existing businesses wishing to expand in East Haddam and help them overcome any obstacles in doing so. He feels that the Commission can be instrumental in bringing new businesses to Town as well as retaining existing businesses.

Mr. Scherrer thanked Mr. Short and Mr. Casner for their applications.

3. Other

Ms. Mathiasen reported that she had circulated to the Commissioners the EDC annual report that was filed with the Town.

Mr. Govert advised that, due to his schedule for the upcoming year, he will be limited to attending EDC meetings to once a quarter. He stated, however, that if he is needed at any meeting EDC should contact him and he will make every effort to attend. Ms. Stricker offered to e-mail Mr. Govert prior to the EDC meetings so that he can provide the Commission with regular updates. Mr. Govert agreed to provide pertinent updates to Ms. Stricker.

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO DISCUSS, MR. SLOAN MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING TO AN EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS THE APPLICATIONS FOR THE VACANT POSITION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONER. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MS. MATHIASEN AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The regular meeting was adjourned at 8:~~45~~ p.m. and went into an Executive Session.

MR. SLOAN MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE EXECUTIVE SESSION AT ~~9:00~~ P.M. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MS. STRICKER AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

MS. MATHIASEN MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION BASED ON THE DISCUSSION DURING THE EXECUTIVE SESSION. "Resolved that the East Haddam Economic Development Commission make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen to appoint Robert Casner to the Commission." THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MR. GIONTA AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO DISCUSS, MS. STRICKER MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MR. GIONTA AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at ~~9:10~~ p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon R. Wheeler
Recording Secretary

