

**Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 7, 2008**

Attending: R. Casner; M. Gionta; D. Mathiasen; D. Sloan; P. Stricker, M. Ziobron (EDC Coordinator)

Guests: H. Kittner; D. McMahan (Goodspeed); M. Walter

Ms. Mathiasen called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

MINUTES

The minutes of the January 10, 2008 meeting were reviewed. Ms. Ziobron noted that the fifth bullet under the Economic Development Coordinator Update should be changed to reflect that she had received an e-mail from Mr. Lyman, not Mr. Sloan.

MR. GIONTA MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 10, 2008 MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MR. SLOAN. MR CASNER ABSTAINED, HAVING NOT ATTENDED THE PREVIOUS MEETING, AND THE MOTION CARRIED BY A MAJORITY OF AYE VOTES.

OLD BUSINESS

EDC 2008-2009 Budget Request

Ms. Mathiasen distributed copies of the draft EDC budget for 2008-2009. She reviewed the proposed budget and noted that the hourly rate for the EDC Coordinator had not increased, however, she had put in for a 33% increase in the number of allowed billable hours. She also advised that some of the YTD actuals totals need to be updated. The EDC Budget excluding the Coordinator line remains the same as the previous year's budget at \$6,000.

MR. CASNER MADE A MOTION TO SUBMIT THE EAST HADDAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION BUDGET REQUEST FOR 2008-2009 TO THE BOARD OF FINANCE AS WRITTEN. MS. STRICKER SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Mathiasen advised that Mr. Scherrer will meet with Mr. Budzick, EDC's liaison on the Board of Finance, and Ms. Tatro to review EDC's final presentation to the Board of Finance.

Economic Development Coordinator Update

Ms. Ziobron noted that her goals for the following month are to meet with several of the stakeholders in the Village and discuss upcoming changes with them. She stated that she will work with Mr. Scherrer and Mr. Walter to arrange a schedule of meetings. Ms. Ziobron distributed her monthly report and provided the following detail:

- She advised the Haddam business owner interested in the Swan property that she was going to expand her efforts to seek out other interested businesses.
- She met with the Brownell owner and a potential buyer on 4 occasions and continued a strong communication with both parties throughout the process.
- She coordinated a meeting with the Brownell owner and representatives from the East Haddam Historical Society (EHHS) and a tour of the Brownell buildings for EHHS; she also facilitated a donation of historical documents from Brownell to EHHS.
- She reached out to the Kito Group, an international import/export firm based in Moodus;
- She followed up on information provided to her by Selectman Govert and contacted the owner of Biopellet to discuss possible space in the Brownell buildings.
- She met with Mr. Joe Wake a Town resident and former Federal Highway & Transportation Authority official who is an expert on eminent domain issues. She advised that Mr. Wake has offered to attend an EDC meeting and/or assist them in any way possible.
- She contacted Mr. Andre Hymander, the owner of the former Seraph House, and has scheduled a meeting to discuss his plans to convert the house into a Bed and Breakfast.

Ms. Ziobron also advised that she will attend an event at UConn where a panel will discuss the pros and cons of tax incentives. There was a general discussion about the benefits of business tax incentives and Ms. Stricker suggested they set-up a sub-committee to research the subject. Ms. Mathiasen agreed to add the topic to the next month's meeting agenda.

Ms. Ziobron reviewed her summer schedule. Ms Stricker observed that she was pleased to note that Ms. Ziobron's efforts for economic development initiatives were being undertaken in Moodus and other areas of East Haddam in addition to the Village projects.

Project Status Reports

1. Goodspeed Properties

Ms. Mathiasen distributed a copy of a draft agenda for the February 26, 2007 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting and noted that one of the items on the agenda was an informal discussion with the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation regarding their plans for Actor Housing. Participants in the discussion, in addition to Goodspeed representatives and P&Z Commissioners, will include members from the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses, Historic District, and Economic Development Commissions and the Board of Selectmen. She encouraged the EDC Commissioners to attend the meeting.

Ms. Kittner advised that the Goodspeed has received several responses to their Civil Engineering RFP and will make their selection soon. She noted that attendance at the Festival of New Artists tripled this year which also had a positive impact on business at the Gelston House. Mr. McMahan stated that they feel the additional events that were planned this year contributed to the increased attendance.

Ms. Kittner stated that they are looking forward to the P&Z meeting on February 26th and hope to have the plans for the actor housing vetted at the meeting so that when they go through the formal meetings with the various Town Commissions there will be no surprises.

Mr. Walter advised that in several meetings with Mr. Price, it has become clear that the Goodspeed's long-term profitability is dependent on the expansion of the Theatre. Coupled with the fact that the Town is currently pursuing a master plan for the development of the Village, he felt the timing was advantageous to re-open a discussion about a Goodspeed expansion in East Haddam. He advised that he had written a letter to Mr. Price to that effect. Ms. Kittner stated that the letter will be presented to the Goodspeed's Board of Director's at their Saturday meeting. In response to a question raised by Ms. Stricker, she advised that the focus of the meeting with P&Z on February 26th will be on the actor housing project.

Mr. Walter asked Ms. Kittner and Mr. McMahan about whether or not to pursue any publicity for the potential expansion of the Goodspeed Theatre in East Haddam. Mr. McMahan recommended that efforts toward publicity wait until after the Goodspeed's Board of Director's meeting. Ms. Ziobron felt it would be best to get out in front of the publicity and recommended that EDC and the Selectmen initiate communications with the Village businesses and stakeholders as soon as the Goodspeed Board weighs in on the Town's proposal.

There was a general discussion about parking and Mr. Gionta advised that he had met with Mr. Kent Schwendy of Fuss and O'Neill who had a number of creative solutions to the parking issues in the Village.

2. First Selectman's Discussion

Mr. Walter advised that he had been contacted by Mr. William Feeley, the owner of International Underwater Construction Company, regarding the planned work on the Moodus Reservoir dam. He stated that Mr. Feeley advised that the work could be done without lowering the reservoir and he would like to talk to State regarding this option. It was noted that Mr. Ventres would have State contact information for the project.

Mr. Walter further advised that the Lion's Club and the Rotary are respectively underwriting the cost to replace the Town's two "Welcome to East Haddam" signs and the High School championship signs. He advised that the slogan on the Welcome signs currently states, "*Proud of Our Schools*" and he is soliciting input about whether or not that statement says enough about the Town to give visitors driving through an adequate feeling for the nature of East Haddam. He stated he was also interested in EDC's opinion on the best locations for the three signs.

Ms. Mathiasen advised that EDC uses the slogan, "*Alive with history, arts, and natural beauty*" on all of its publications. The Commissioners and other people present at the meeting expressed their preference for the EDC slogan. There was a general discussion regarding appropriate locations for the signs. It was agreed that placement of the High School Championships sign by the swing bridge could present a hazardous driving situation and the Commissioners felt a location in the center of Moodus would be more appropriate.

3. Town Office Site

Mr. Gionta distributed a copy of the letter addressed to Governor Rell from First Selectmen Walter with copies to several other State and Federal elected officials dated January 23, 2008, requesting that the Mobility grant funds be reallocated to the

Town of East Haddam. Mr. Gionta advised that Ms. Ziobron and Mr. Walter did a great deal of research to draft the letter. He noted that one of the findings from that research was that the \$3M grant for a parking garage is not tied to the Goodspeed expansion. He further noted that EDC's role in the process to reinvigorate the Mobility Study funding was one of advocacy.

Ms. Ziobron advised that the Town's current draft Ethics Policy contained language that would prevent her from advocating for any public project and expressed her concern that the issue be cleared up quickly. Mr. Walter noted that the issue was originally raised by Mr. Ventres and he will be discussing it with Attorney Wells.

Mr. Gionta stated that it has been recommended that a steering committee be established to work on the re-development of the Village. He noted that members of the committee should include representatives from CT DOT, Goodspeed, Fuss & O'Neill, the Village Planning Group, a member of the Board of Selectmen, and the Town's Land Use officer. The Commissioners also agreed that two EDC Commissioners should participate on the steering committee.

4. Johnsonville

Mr. Sloan reported that he has not yet been able to talk to Mr. Jabara, however, it is his understanding that the plans for Johnsonville are being re-designed. He noted that Mr. Donofrio is still interested in creating a Peddler's Village on the site. There was a general discussion about the density of the project and how sewage treatment will be achieved. Mr. Sloan advised that he believes the engineers are updating the plans for an on-site septic system. There was a discussion concerning some issues of public concern regarding the original plans. The Commissioners discussed the difficulty in contacting Mr. Jabara and Mr. Walter stated he would reach out to him. Mr. Sloan agreed to provide him with Mr. Jabara's contact information as well as MJB's website address.

5. Banner

Ms. Stricker reported that she had left messages for Mr. Lewis but had not heard back from him. She noted that she expects he will call her when the project is scheduled to go before P&Z again. There was a general discussion about the inspections at the project and Mr. Walter advised that he is keeping on top of the issue and he feels that it is running smoothly at this time.

6. Other Business Updates

a. Open Space Letter Reply

Ms. Mathiasen advised that she was told the Open Space Committee members discussed EDC's letter and noted that Mr. Thomas had recommended that EDC and the Open Space Committee meet jointly to discuss and commercial properties that come up for Open Space designation. The Commissioners stated they were satisfied with that arrangement. She expected a response letter from the Open Space Committee will be coming soon.

b. Plan of Conservation and Development next steps

Ms. Mathiasen referenced an article from the Hartford Courant that stated the Public Meeting was continued to February 12th. Mr. Sloan read an e-mail from Mr. Scherrer, in which Mr. Scherrer acknowledged all the work Ms. Mathiasen had done to get EDC's position accurately represented in the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. Mr. Scherrer's e-mail also extended his appreciation to Ms. Mathiasen for her efforts.

c. Municipal Sign Business Addition

Ms. Stricker advised that the Ray of Light Farm has requested to be added to EDC's business listings signs. She stated she will follow-up with Mr. Albuquerque to get this request implemented

d. Other

Mr. Sloan noted that he had received his property re-valuation letter from the Town. Mr. Walter advised that, so far, only one-third of the Town's property owners have received the communication because the mailings were staggered to try to control the calls coming in about the re-valuations.

Mr. Sloan reported that home sales in East Haddam are slowing down, however, prices have not softened. He stated that in the current reporting period, prices of single-family homes in East Haddam were up 5%.

Events/Tourism

1. Chowder Cook-off and Eagle Festival To-Dos

Ms. Mathiasen stated that there is coverage for the hospitality suite at the River House with the exception of the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. period. She asked that names of potential volunteers for those times be forwarded to herself or Ms. Stricker. In response to a question from Mr. Walter, Ms. Mathiasen advised that EDC would like him to announce the winners of the event. She noted that there are five confirmed participants in the Chowder Cook-off and that she has already received contributions from several local businesses. In response to a request from Ms. Stricker, Mr. Casner and Mr. Gionta stated they would be available to assist with the pick-up and set-up of the tents.

Ms. Mathiasen solicited suggestions for potential recipients of the charitable donation from the event's profits. The following list was generated by the Commissioners:

- purchase a Town message center;
- a contribution to the Liberty Bank fund for Melinda Blaschik-Meyer;
- Music on the River;
- Village Arts Festival;
- the Nathan Hale barn project;
- the Ray of Light Farm to underwrite the cost of a Town-related event;
- the Food Bank;
- Land Trust.

Mr. Casner suggested the option of splitting the donation among several recipients and the Commissioners discussed possibilities for matching donations.

Ms. Stricker reiterated her suggestion from an earlier meeting that the Chowder Cook-off date be changed to coincide with the Goodspeed's January Festival of New Artists. The Commissioners discussed her suggestion and it was agreed to consider creating a different event for January.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Mail received

Ms. Mathiasen distributed copies of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) handout. She noted that Mr. Tom Hennick previously hosted a presentation on FOIA for the Town and made himself available for related questions. She advised that Mr. Hennick's e-mail address is Thomas.Hennick@CT.gov. It was also noted that the Town Clerk will be scheduling another presentation for people that were unable to attend the earlier one.

Ms. Mathiasen reported that she had received a letter from Ms. Denette describing an act of thoughtfulness by Marty Witkowski toward a couple that recently visited East Haddam. The Commissioners agreed that EDC should send Mr. Witkowski a note acknowledging his consideration of visitors to the Village. Ms. Mathiasen will draft that correspondence.

2. Other

a. Business Signage in Village

Ms. Mathiasen stated that Marty had advised her that he was recently asked to remove the neon "Open" sign from the front window of the Carriage House and he asked if EDC could look into the Village signage restrictions. The Commissioners discussed signage requirements and agreed that they should educate themselves regarding East Haddam's business requirements.

b. East Haddam Historical Site Experience

Ms. Mathiasen reported that Mr. Charlie Farrow, of the East Haddam Historical Society, had told Ms. Ziobron that Bill Hosley would like to help the Town promote its historical sites. Ms. Mathiasen noted that outlining "historical tours" are part of the draft Plan of Conservation and Development and a goal of the new Town website. She stated she will draft a letter to Mr. Farrow to thank him for the suggestion and advise him that EDC will be in touch with Mr. Hosley to assist in these goals.

c. East Haddam Events Magazine Feedback

Ms. Mathiasen advised that she has received a lot of positive feedback regarding the new Town Event's magazine. Ms. Ziobron stated that East Haddam residents living on Lake Hayward had not received a copy of the magazine. She noted that it is a chronic problem for those addresses and recommended that one option of correction the problem is to have an overrun be printed and mailed to all residents on that route. The Commissioners discussed the benefits to the advertisers by such an approach. In response to a question raised by Ms. Mathiasen, the Commissioners agreed to repeat EDC's ad in the next edition of the Events magazine.

MR. CASNER MADE A MOTION TO PLACE A QUARTER PAGE AD IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THE EAST HADDAM EVENT'S NEWSLETTER AT A COST OF \$140.00. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MR. GIONTA AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

d. Other

Ms. Stricker advised that the Parks and Recreation Commission is organizing an Arts Festival in the Village this summer. She stated that she had contacted Ms. Quinn and offered her assistance.

She also reported that she had spoken with the owner of the Wolf's Den who advised that the business is going well. She noted that the Hog Rally was not scheduled to return this summer, but there is another motorcycle club that has booked an event there.

Ms. Mathiasen circulated a copy of the Greater Hartford and CT River Valley Visitor's Guide which contained several references to East Haddam as well as the ad placed by EDC. She noted the wide circulation of the publication.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon R. Wheeler
Recording Secretary