

TOWN OF WETHERSFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting of January 8, 2004 At Town Hall Meeting Room - Lower Level

Members present: Frank Frago
Tom Grottke
Joan Hughes
Cindy Ramirez-Jacobs
Chris Lyons
Ken Rizzio

Also present: Andy Adil, Town Council Liaison
Phil Knecht, P&Z Liaison
Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager
Peter Gillespie, Dir., Planning & Economic Dev.
Paul Courchaine, Silas Deane Hwy Rev. Cmte.
Joe Cornelio, resident
Marie Massaro, P&ED, EDIC Secretary

Vice-chairman Tom Grottke called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m.

1. Minutes

Frank Frago made a motion to approve the [minutes of the December 11, 2003 meeting](#). It was seconded by Chris Lyons and passed unanimously.

2. Chairman's Report

Tom stated he did not have anything to report in Tony's absence.

3. Subcommittee Reports

Marketing/Communications Subcommittee

Chris Lyons reported the subcommittee met with Todd Andrews from MetroHartford Alliance on December 16 to overview the Business Visitation program. The presentation was well-attended by Town employees, Chamber officials and others. The Alliance has excellent training materials on how to conduct the program effectively, and gave the subcommittee a lot to consider before plunging in. On January 15, the subcommittee will meet with Todd again to discuss what materials and types of questions should be asked during business visitation. Andy Adil asked if copies of Todd's Powerpoint presentation were available; Chris said he could provide copies to anyone who couldn't attend.

Cindy noted that Channel 3 is doing a series called "Every Town Has A Story" and asked if EDIC should contact them about Wethersfield. Paul Courchaine said he has also put Wethersfield on the producer's list. Phil Knecht said Mike McGarry from Hartford magazine is interested in doing a profile on Wethersfield and asked who would be the best person to contact; Chris suggested they should start with Bonnie.

Finance Subcommittee Report

Frank Frago reported the subcommittee needs more members; currently Ken Rizzio, Frank and Tony Camilliere are members. Ken Rizzio will chair the subcommittee in Frank's absence over the next few months. The business loan

program is being modified and redrafted, reflecting more competitive interest rates and a provision that all loans paid back on time will receive a rebate on interest paid. Seven banks will be approached for \$20,000 grants each; the Town Council will be asked to contribute \$60,000. Phil Knecht suggested looking at other banks that have invested in redevelopment of Park Street in Hartford; Tom agreed and suggested approaching HEDCO as well. Cindy Jacobs-Ramirez asked if the loans were only for facades, or if landscaping would be included as well. Frank stated landscaping would be considered, and that there would be a \$25,000 maximum and no minimum.

Frank said the Tax Incentive Policy was presented by Peter Gillespie to the Council on December 15 and adopted on January 5. Tom noted that under New Business, they'd discuss representation on the TIP review committee.

Frank noted the grants resource listing is being developed, and liaisons from the three business districts are being recruited. Andy Adil asked if Silas Deane and the Berlin Turnpike have formal business groups; Frank said no.

Frank also said the subcommittee is working on the budget; Peter provided a handout on current year budget status. Paul asked why SDHRC is under EDIC; Frank said it has always been there. He stated that Tourism also needs funding; Bonnie said they have a separate budget number. Peter said the budget, listed under new business of today's agenda, would be tabled and discussed in more detail at February's meeting.

Development Subcommittee

Tom Grottko stated he met with Paul, and they've set up a joint meeting with the Silas Deane Revitalization Committee Tuesday to learn its goals and objectives. He also met with Cindy, Tony and Frank regarding budget development. Tom provided a handout showing the subcommittee's comments on the design review proposal. The subcommittee believes the DRB should expedite, not inhibit the approval process, and suggested changes to the Purpose section. The subcommittee also felt membership should be appointed by the Town Council. There was discussion about whether Planning and Zoning, the Town Council or the Town Manager should be responsible for appointment to the design review board. Andy stated it should be the Town Manager's decision. Tom stated that technical expertise is important, but having people who represent the will of the community is also important. He didn't want the Town to create a two-tier technical review process - DRB and P&Z - which would deter developers. Peter stated that the DRB would be a mandatory step but with an advisory role, helping developers address potential issues before getting to Planning and Zoning. The DRB would establish the design philosophy for areas of town; P&Z doesn't have the authority to say "I don't like brick", etc.

Cindy asked about current standards. Tom stated the ten year Plan of Conservation and Development has very generic standards; Paul agreed it doesn't have any real "teeth." Joe Cornelio asked how EDIC can manage a façade improvement program if there are no standards against which to measure applicant plans. Tom stated that some basic standards are in place, and that P&Z would still review applicant plans based on those. Tom stated the subcommittee would discuss this issue further, and that it is also leaning toward focusing on 6-8 parcels or groups of parcels it wants to focus on. He stated this could provide a roadmap toward possible creation of a redevelopment authority.

Cindy asked what the deadline is for design review regulations. Peter stated Planning and Zoning is wrapping up its process with a public hearing likely in early March. Tom said EDIC input should be provided by late January in order to be reflected in public hearing materials.

4. Reports of the Town Manager

4a. Bonnie opted not to provide a Town Manager's report, stating her key issues were addressed in other portions of the agenda.

4b. Andy provided the Town Council update, saying councilors are pleased with the monthly reports Peter has provided. He also felt most councilors were generally enthusiastic about a redevelopment authority if it could be self-supporting.

4c. Peter provided the Town Planner report, providing a handout that outlined various stages of economic development activity. Bed, Bath and Beyond hopes to open in early summer, CVS continues to work with the State DOT on traffic

issues and is targeting spring to begin construction. Chris asked if Dal-Tile had found a new location; Peter stated they were looking at several sites, including Rocky Hill. Frank asked if the Mozzicato bakery would be a new building; Peter said it would be a new structure attached by an archway to the current SBM building. It would be away from the street because moving closer would exacerbate parking problems. The plans still need to be reviewed by P&Z. Peter said Town House motel has a new owner who bulldozed the pool and may create a retail/restaurant pad in its place. The owner is also installing new doors and windows; the same owner did a good job fixing up the Rocky Hill Howard Johnson's site. The Church Home site on Ridge Road has a buyer who wants to raze all buildings and create market rate condo units for seniors. Peter mentioned the opening of the new Stop & Smile Exxon station and stated we should do more of these ceremonial openings with the Chamber and local politicians.

Peter also met with the realtors of the Fun Zone property and of Putnam Park. He's also meeting with owners of Goff Brook Plaza. Ken asked about the status of the Wells Road Stop & Shop. Peter said that site has the same owners as Goff Brook shops, who sometimes hold onto a lease and keep properties vacant, which the Town would not want to see happen.

Andy asked about Progress Drive. Cindy asked what the zoning was for the property, stating that there was a proposal in the late '90s for some type of trucking company which seemed inappropriate with a preschool and program for hearing impaired children on the same road. Peter stated it's zoned industrial and the school was an exception to the industrial zoning.

4d. Phil provided the P&Z report. He complimented Peter on his comprehensive report to the Council, said P&Z is working hard on the new regulations, and stated he has been asked to represent Wethersfield on CCROG's legislative and housing committee.

5. Old Business

5a. Tom stated that the subcommittees were still working on 2004-2005 budget figures, and Peter suggested tabling this item until February.

5b. Marie distributed the current list of EDIC assignments to Town Council meetings; Tom asked members who have not signed up yet to get back to Marie with dates.

5c. Tom stated the tax incentive program review committee needs an appointed representative from EDIC. Ken Rizzio volunteered. Frank made a motion to approve Ken as the EDIC rep; it was seconded by Cindy and approved unanimously. Frank agreed to be alternate.

6. New Business

6a. Peter raised the request for funds to support Planning and Economic Development staffing and support services. Currently one secretary supports Planning and Zoning, Zoning Board of Appeals, the Building Department, the Historic Commission and Economic Development. The Council is supportive but has not yet formally approved additional staffing. For next calendar year, a full-time administrative person is being requested. Other EDIC items such as the Business Visitation program and Express Loan could be supported through additional hours for Marie Massaro. Tom asked what the responsibilities of the administrative person would be. Peter said typical duties would include organizing and supporting EDIC meetings, handing correspondence to developers, and maintaining the web site. Cindy asked if this would be a full-time job. Peter said yes, it would be a Secretary II position for 4 months (until the next fiscal year). Tom recommended developing a detailed job description with key tasks so the position would not be vulnerable during budget cutting times. He made a motion to allocate \$7,500 to part-time administrative support for Peter. Cindy seconded the motion; it passed unanimously.

6b. Peter raised a request on behalf of Mike Turner for a \$5,000 funding request for new street signs on the Silas Deane. Paul said the SDHRC wanted the brown signs originally proposed but they will not meet new federal standards. He also wanted to see building numbers on the signs, as well as just "Silas Deane" rather than "Silas Deane Highway" in case the name is changed. Tom asked if property owners on the Berlin Turnpike or in Old Wethersfield would be upset about just one area being targeted; Paul said the money was targeted for the Silas Deane. Tom felt the \$50,000

allocated for Silas Deane improvements would be better used if allocated for the loan program, perhaps improving a few buildings and getting banks interested in participating. Cindy agreed, saying signage is not a true capital improvement. Peter suggested the EDIC and the SDHRC need to agree on what would provide the best return on investment. Tom suggested that at their joint meeting next week, they could make an advisory opinion endorsing the idea. Chris Lyons said he would prefer to see funds for the express loan program, and that he views the SDHRC as working "between the sidewalks" on roadway beautification, and EDIC express loans addressing the individual sites. Tom asked for a motion to vote \$5,000 for capital improvement signs on the Silas Deane Highway. Frank made the motion; no one seconded the motion and it was passed on.

7. Correspondence - None

8. Adjournment

Cindy noted she has a friend who would be interested in serving as a non-voting member of the Finance subcommittee. Bonnie responded that Fred Autorino and John Breglio have been contacted and asked to make a commitment to EDIC or resign so others who show an interest in EDIC can be contacted.

Bonnie stated that revaluation notices are going out on Friday. Cindy asked about the status of Northeast Utilities; Bonnie said they may move to Bloomfield to accommodate Massachusetts employees. Peter said the lease goes until 2007, that NU doesn't own the building and the property owner is proposing some options. Cindy asked that a future agenda include discussion about retention and expansion of agriculture. Tom asked for a motion to adjourn. Frank made the motion, seconded by Chris and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 12:40.