

TOWN OF WETHERSFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting of November 14, 2003 At Village Tavern

Members present: Tony Camilliere
Frank Frago
Tom Grottke
Joan Hughes
Cindy Ramirez-Jacobs
Chris Lyons
Betty Rosania
Jon Vining

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

Chairman Tony Camilliere called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m. He asked members to review [minutes of the October 9th meeting](#); Frank Frago made a motion to approve. It was seconded by Ken Rizzio and approved unanimously. Tony asked for reports from the subcommittees.

Chris Lyons spoke on behalf of Marketing and Communications. He stated the members will attend a free training session on business visitations sponsored by the MetroHartford Chamber, emphasizing "Meet and Greet" opportunities. EDIC business cards will be printed, with generic "Economic Development and Improvement Commissioner" wording and Peter's phone number. It will cost \$37.50 to print 500 cards. The committee also proposes the slogan "Win With Wethersfield." John Breglio will lead real estate broker meetings. Other ideas include Business of the Quarter promotions with three categories including customer service. The current budget is about \$5,000. Betty Rosania stated the business directory is a longer-term goal of the committee. Chris noted that town website hits are often referred to CERC, and we should eliminate that step. He said business visitations would be done in coordination with the Chamber, and that the training session was open to anyone interested. He stated these are all small but important steps. The Marketing and Communications subcommittee meets the first Friday of the month at Antiques on Main.

Paul Courchaine mentioned a survey done by students of Dr. Benfield at CCSU; they talked to restaurants and other businesses. Findings were documented and a master disk was to be given to the Tourism committee. He suggested Marketing/Communications obtain a copy.

Bonnie Therrien asked if the EDIC was at a point where it could appear on Channel 14 and perhaps do some interviews with local media. Chris and Betty both agreed it was time to pursue this. Peter Gillespie mentioned that Liz Kirkpatrick (Library) has an excellent database of local media contacts and deadlines that she'll share with us.

Tony then asked Frank Frago to report on work of the Finance subcommittee. Frank stated the members are Frank, Tony Camilliere, and Ken Rizzio. They meet the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 3:00. Peter Gillespie also attends their meetings. The Business Loan program document is complete and nearly ready for activation. Low interest loans for facades were the initial intent, but the committee may broaden the scope. The Incentive Policy drafted in May 2003 is ready to go to the new Council for review. Brownfields were also discussed in the subcommittee but it was agreed this is not a major issue in Wethersfield. Bonnie noted that CCROG is applying for Brownfields grant dollars on behalf of

the region.

Frank also noted the Finance committee will develop a clearinghouse for local businesses of local grants, loans and other support services. Peter and Marie Massaro will be responsible for this. Peter said it would involve State, Federal and local resources, and be available on the Town web site. Frank stated the Finance subcommittee will develop the EDIC annual budget, with input from all members. He also stated they would like to see liaisons from the three distinct business areas - Silas Deane, Berlin Turnpike and Old Wethersfield - who are active property owners.

Tom Grottke stated the tax incentive policy is working its way through a subcommittee; Bonnie believed it was Major Contracts. Tom then asked about the status of the \$50,000 allocated to the Silas Deane Highway improvements. Peter said it's part of the Capital Improvement budget, and is not encumbered.

Cindy Jacobs Ramirez asked if there'd been any follow-up on the CL&P conservation program raised at the Summit. Peter suggested the Building Department is the best front-line marketer for this initiative, and perhaps CL&P could meet with the Chamber.

Tom asked if money left over from the Town Hall/Police Station bond referendum could be accessed; Bonnie stated the architect is using those dollars toward the Town Hall basement renovation.

Frank Frago asked that all subcommittees provide him with their budget requests before the January meeting.

Tony then asked Tom Grottke to report on work from the Development subcommittee. In addition to Tom, members include Jon Vining, Frank Frago, and Cindy Jacobs-Ramirez. The next meeting is the 24th at 4:00 at Town Hall.

Tom went over a handout which reflected areas of focus of the subcommittee. They included ensuring the Design Review Board was a business incentive, not a hurdle; learning the key issues that may exist with respect to the Town Zoning Map Review; becoming familiar with old development plans and why they failed or faded away; identifying areas for redevelopment and considering possible combinations/bundling of properties; completing the property listing and developing relationships with key developers and commercial land owners.

Peter stated that part of the SDH Revitalization Plan was consolidation of parcels; he suggested the committee dig that out and see if they're still relevant. He said if the Design Review Board, Planning and Zoning and the Zoning Board of Appeals see plans in advance, we're able to build consensus and expedite the permit process.

Tom Grottke stated there are opportunities to call these companies, maybe five or so each quarter, and finding out why they didn't follow through with proposals - was it financing, town politics, etc?

Betty said she's excited to see such enthusiasm, and asked about the status of creating a redevelopment authority. Tom said it would need a business plan and target properties, which would take most of 2004. Bonding could then be proposed in 2005. The Town would have to buy these properties, and we need more facts and figures to proceed. Betty asked about the Beaver Brook proposal; Peter said it was folded into the Silas Deane Highway plan in 1987.

Frank asked why there was little mention of the Berlin Turnpike in the subcommittee's plan of action; Tom stated there is no shopkeepers or merchants group but that they will certainly look at this area as well as Progress Drive. In response to Tom's presentation, Tony stated the DRB should not be the same as the P&Z membership. Tom agreed and stated the Council, not P&Z, should appoint DRB members.

Bonnie Therrien reported that she met with the new Mayor, Russ Morin, and said he's very supportive of EDIC and hopes to increase funding. She thought the Summit was a great evening with lots of enthusiasm and energy. There are rumors that Northeast Utilities is looking to either expand or leave; Peter is trying to meet with them.

Bonnie also met with Anne Kuckro from Tourism, who said 2004 is the 225th anniversary of the Franco-American campaign. Anne is working with the Greater Hartford Arts Council to plan events that highlight Wethersfield's role in securing French support for the American Revolution. Tourism is requesting \$1,850 from the EDIC to cover promotional signage. Betty stated this is a very important event, but Tourism's budget has been cut. Paul noted there

are four key sites in Connecticut for this promotion, and 2004 is the first phase of the celebration. In 2006, there are plans for re-enactments.

Tony asked the status of the EDIC budget. Peter said the public service contributions line item is for items like parking signs, and the Cornfest, and it currently has a \$12,803 balance. Betty made a motion to allocate \$1,850 to the Tourism District; Frank seconded. Chris noted that we give away money easily but don't spend it ourselves, citing a \$45,000 balance on a \$53,000 budget. Betty agreed, saying they feel like they're begging for \$5,000; Frank noted that if the committee doesn't use it, it may lose it. Betty suggested a special meeting to specifically focus on the budget. Tony noted the EDIC is a catchall for these types of requests, which are all important, but EDIC needs to prioritize. Frank said his subcommittee could gather this info and present it to the EDIC. Tony asked if Tourism would be coming back for more money; Bonnie said they would not be asking for more at this time. The motion to allocate \$1,850 to Tourism was passed unanimously. Tony noted it was a worthwhile discussion raising important issues about EDIC budget and funding.

Peter Gillespie reported that he's talking to the Salute to Business nominees. The Bed, Bath & Beyond project was approved by P&Z, as was the CVS/Starbucks project. There is a request going to ZBA for a drive-through for Starbucks. Stop & Shop on Wells Road/SDH may relocate to the now-vacant Grand Union site at Town Line Road in Rocky Hill. Paul Courchaine noted that seniors and the disabled rely on that Stop & Shop. Chris Lyons noted the site is 43,000 square feet and asked if it could be expanded to the 70,000 Stop & Shop is looking for. Peter said it could not. Betty suggested it might be a good site for an IGA store, or possibly Bliss Market. Ken Rizzio asked if the ZBA decision to reject Stop & Shop plans for Goff Brook Shops means other grocery stores are also not eligible. Peter said no; other chains could consider the site. Tony asked if EDIC could help Starbucks with its ZBA request; Peter suggested a letter of support from the staff and EDIC, along with attendance at the meeting. Phil Knecht agreed the CVS meeting was very positive, and came a long way from the initial proposal.

Tony then directed discussion to the Salute to Business. Peter said a press release soliciting nominations was issued, and he's gone through permits, Planning and Zoning applications for ideas. He proposes awarding the top prize jointly to Connecticut River Community Bank and the developer, since everyone agrees it's set a new standard for development on the Silas Deane Highway.

Other businesses to be recognized with a smaller award include East Buffet, a new family-run restaurant; Super Laundry, which invested \$200,000 in the Silver Cove plaza; Hamilton's Bunker Café and Flower Box; Sterling Jewelers; and an investment company. IN the past, there was one major award and other certificates. These awards will be more substantial and worthy of display at the business sites. Tom Grottko motioned that the top award go to the Connecticut River Community Bank and its developer; Frank seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Paul noted that if every business gets recognized, the impact of the awards is diminished. Tom agreed; Cindy suggested some type of welcome certificate instead. Peter said he'd e-mail the list of nominees to all members.

Paul Courchaine stated that D'Esopo-Pratt Resource Center will receive the Village Improvement Award.

Betty made a motion to adjourn; Frank seconded. The meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.