

[NOTE: These minutes are made available to the public prior to Redevelopment Agency acceptance.]

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**Minutes**  
**Redevelopment Agency**  
**Public Information Forum**  
**Wednesday, October 15, 2008**  
**7:00 pm - 8:45 pm**  
**Silas Deane Middle School Auditorium**

1. **Call to Order** - Chairman Lee Kuckro called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
2. **Roll Call/Attendance** - Members in attendance: Lee Kuckro - Chair, Daniel Camilliere - Vice Chair, Joseph Soja, Paul Thompson, and Michael Zaleski. Also in attendance: Martin Walsh, Town Council Liaison; Ken Rizzio, EDIC Liaison; Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; and Peter Gillespie, Town Planner/Economic Development Manager.

Members absent: none.

Paul Thompson served as moderator of this Forum. Town Manager, Bonnie Therrien and Agency members Mike Zaleski and Joe Soja were speakers at this Forum. Guest speakers were Linda St. Peter, Commercial Investment Realtor, and Principal of the Ibis Consortium, a Commercial Real Estate Investment Firm in Rocky Hill, Connecticut and Peter Simmons of the State of Connecticut, Office of Responsible Development.

3. **Public Comments** - Upon conclusion of the Forum presentation, the following members of the public commented: Mr. George Oickle, 224 Clearfield Road; Mr. Lee Standish, 278 Hartford Avenue; Mr. Ballou Tooker, 65 Harmund Place; Dr. Ken Sokolowski, 79 Main Street.
4. **Approval of Minutes** - October 9, 2008 - The discussion of corrections to these draft minutes will be held at the next meeting.
5. **Brief Recap of the June 2008 Forum** - Mr. Thompson outlined the June 2008 Forum, noting the ongoing challenge of changing the existing 90% residential, 10% commercial tax collection balance. Ideally, this tax collection ratio should be 60% residential and 40% commercial. There exists a flat growth rate in the Town's commercial grand list. Increased competition with neighboring towns exists for commercial development opportunities. Therefore, private and public partnerships are necessary to overcome the perils and challenges associated with development and redevelopment in the Silas Deane corridor.
6. **Silas Deane Highway Master Plan** - Mr. Zaleski stated that the Redevelopment Agency has based much of its work on the conclusions of the April 2006 Silas Deane Master Plan. He noted that the Master Plan Document entitled "A Vision For Reinvestment" can be accessed through the Town's website in the Economic Development webpage. The plan document suggests action items and proposed design guidelines for the Town to implement. The goal is economic revitalization while creating a sense of place and improving aesthetics. The plan makes several recommendations as to how to arrive at that point, looks at options for reinvesting in existing properties along the Silas Deane Highway and notes that there are many properties along the Silas Deane Highway which are underutilized.

One of the emphases of the planning document is mixed use buildings in commercial properties. Several mixed use buildings in commercial properties now exist in Town and more are encouraged. Such buildings would include commercial office space with ground floor retail and/or commercial buildings with residential components. True mixed use buildings have several different uses that incorporate a variety of different concerns.

The plan offers some examples of mixed use projects that can help bring greater density and vitality to the

Silas Deane Highway. The plan also suggests offering incentives to private developers to encourage higher density, mixed use developments.

Since the plan promotes the notion of public investment as necessary to encourage private reinvestment, Mr. Zaleski noted that for the past 18 months, the Redevelopment Agency has promoted that notion of Wethersfield being a partner in setting the stage for private reinvestment.

Wethersfield has implemented various incentives such as façade improvements, tax incentives and partnerships for private investors to become involved and assist the private market. Continued streetscape improvements are vital to the long term success to the commercial areas of Wethersfield, as a more pedestrian friendly environment is also encouraged in the master plan document. Medical, healthcare, and other retail businesses can be created to meet the gaps now existing in particular markets.

In terms of land use, the plan looked at proposing zoning changes to existing regulations. The plan stressed that zoning regulations need to be conducive to appropriate redevelopment and reinvestment by private entities. Regulations encouraging mixed-used developments should be moved forward. The plan suggested that an overlay zone be instituted in certain areas of Town, primarily on the Silas Deane Highway, allowing for greater flexibility to allow and encourage private development.

The Redevelopment Agency has had discussions with developers and property owners. Site redevelopment potential exists. Streetscape improvements have been implemented. A Design Review committee exists. New, flexible zoning regulations have been adopted. Businesses have partaken in The Façade Improvement Program. Mixed Use Zoning exists.

These development opportunities need to become realities because our Town budget projections are growing and our grand list needs to increase in order to keep in pace with the projections.

In response to the master plan, the Redevelopment Agency evaluated 16 properties that have been identified as underperforming and might be able to generate additional tax revenue if used for different and/or additional purposes. The Agency's evaluation considerations included acreage, environmental restrictions, property costs, assessments, private ownership and potential uses. Some properties lend themselves to redevelopment and others do not. A determination was made in terms of priorities from an Agency and Town perspective.

One location that the Agency reviewed is the property situated at 1178 Silas Deane Highway a/k/a The Fun Zone. This property is an example of a property that has potential for redevelopment. This property is currently an underutilized property that has sat vacant for approximately 10 years. The site is approximately 1.8 acres and has 1 owner. The present assessed value is \$1,240,000. The acquisition cost is \$2,200,000. In terms of redevelopment, for example, 30,000 square feet would be assessed at \$2,400,000. 35,000 square feet of medical office use would be assessed at \$2,800,000 and a 45 unit condominium would be assessed at \$9,000,000. A Condo and office complex would be assessed at \$11,000,000.

- 7. Site Analysis** - Ms. Therrien, Town Manager, spoke of the Town's continual directive to her of economic development being the number one priority to implement. As such, there exists a need to shift the tax burden from the homeowners to the commercial side. She stressed that both public investment and redevelopment referendum are necessary to achieve the desired economic development to ease the tax burden on homeowners. She stressed that the taxpayers need to be cognizant of the cost of Town services and how much are they willing to pay for those services that they want and/or need. She also stressed that Wethersfield needs to decide whether to keep tax rates down by bring in businesses that will work in the community versus maintaining the status quo. The latter would mean cutting services and/or raising taxes. Grand list growth has allowed many other towns to keep their taxes low, and money is needed ahead of time because developers will not wait for referendums to pass to proceed with their plans.

Ms. Therrien continued her presentation by providing some examples of properties viewed by the Agency which can provide increased tax revenue potential when redeveloped. The top 5 sites are presently assessed at approximately \$16 million dollars and development concepts could realize increased assessments from \$63 to

\$154 million dollars. The discussion of the following sites serves as an example of what additional tax revenue can be realized.

The property situated at the corner of Jordan Lane and Silas Deane Highway is another example of an area that has potential for redevelopment. The present assessment for this site is \$3,600,000. Present Taxes are \$124,965. Proposed new retail uses are 88,000 square feet. Projected assessment is \$7,000,000. Projected taxes would be \$242,979. If a mixed use building project with 90 condos and 20,000 square feet offices was implemented, the projected property assessment would be approximately \$20,000,000 and the projected taxes would be \$694,200.

The property situated on 1000 Silas Deane Highway a/k/a Weight Watchers is another example of a property that has potential for redevelopment. The property assessment is \$6,000,000. Present taxes are \$208,260. If a mixed use building project with 140 condos and 90,000 square feet of retail and office space were implemented, the projected assessment would be \$33,000,000 and the projected taxes would be \$1,145,430.

The property situated on the corner of Church Street and Silas Deane Highway (Town Center) is another example of an area that has potential for redevelopment. This property has multiple owners. The present assessment is \$5,000,000. Present taxes are \$173,550. If a mixed use project of 50 condos with office/retail space was implemented, the projected assessment is \$15,000,000 and the projected taxes would be \$520,650.

8. **Obstacles To Redevelopment** - Mr. Soja spoke regarding the obstacles to redevelopment. These obstacles include high property costs, small lot sizes, contaminated sites, wetlands/floodplains, multiple owners to property/area, business relocation, demolition, market competition and the concept of "not in my backyard" a/k/a NIMBY.
9. **Commercial Development Considerations** - Ms. Linda St. Peter, a Commercial Realtor, was a guest speaker who asked the public to consider: solutions, Agency support, market conditions, activity in the region and redevelopment challenges, as the Town approaches the subject of economic development. She mentioned that in terms of market conditions, developers create a plan based on financial, market and decision analysis. She stated that developers know that real estate is a good long term investment and that a long term plan is possible to achieve goals. She indicated that when a market assessment summary is created, an action plan must follow soon after, as market study information can have a shelf life. She suggested that the approach to redevelopment should involve flexibility within the Town's strategic plan noting that zoning regulations have to be examined and discussed. She noted changing the perception of a challenge exposed by redevelopment may allow positive things to emerge. She stressed the importance of the Town and its citizens embracing redevelopment opportunities.
10. **Sustainable Development** - Mr. Peter Simmons from the State of CT, Department of Economic and Community Development's Office of Responsible Development, spoke to the characteristics of sustainable development. These include maximizing use of existing infrastructure, maintaining quality of life by balancing growth and conserving resources, encouraging regional cooperation to reduce competing projects, encouraging mixed-use development to reduce private automobile dependency usage, and applying energy conservation measures to reduce demand.
11. **Additional Information Requests and Topics for Future Meetings** - No requests or topics were mentioned at this meeting.
12. **Executive Session To Discuss Real Estate Matters** - No session was held at this meeting.
13. **Next Meeting Date** - Proposed dates will be circulated, discussed and decided upon via e-mail.
14. **Correspondence** - none.
15. **Meeting Adjournment** - Mr. Thompson ended the Forum at 8:45 p.m. by thanking all present for attending and participating. He mentioned that the ability to track Agency activities by way of posting meeting agendas and minutes is available and that the public is invited to the Redevelopment Agency meetings, the dates of which are posted on the Town's website.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Goslicki  
Agency Recording Secretary