

**February 23, 2023**

**Coventry Economic Development Commission**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm by Chairperson Stave. The meeting was hosted via Zoom internet conferencing and in Conference Room B at Town Hall.

**Roll Call:**

Present: Sondra Astor Stave (remote), Tim Liptrap, Carolyn Gerrity (remote), Cathy Mitchell, Barbara Barry (remote), and Darby Pollansky (joined at 7:06 PM)

Absent: Bill Jobbagy, Sam Belsito, and Eric Trott (Director of Planning and Development)

Citizens: Andrew Ladyga

Town Staff: John Elsesser (Town Manager)

**Adoption of Minutes- January 26, 2023:**

I move to adopt the meeting minutes of January 26, 2023.

By: Gerrity

Second: Barry

Discussion: Under #8, it was asked to be clarified that the new dog groomers are going in the space next to Pheonix Chinese, not in the Pheonix Chinese location.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

**Planner/Manager Reports:**

Elsesser highlighted on the following matters:

- Congressman Courtney was out last week and did ribbon cutting at Woke restaurant.
- We were made aware we got the money for sewers. Bolton Town Administrator has authorized to send a letter to Manchester asking for a map abutment of the sewer service area, which is the next step. We will need a similar letter from Vernon, who are a part of the Bolton Lake Sewer Authority. The Town Administrator in Vernon needs to get working on that as Manchester needs their letter and it needs to go to the Board of Directors. At this time, we have not received any paperwork from the federal government, which will take months.
- Town Manager's office has been very busy this week with grants. There are 2 significant grants, one is a TRIP grant for pedestrian safety, that would fund \$650,000 for ADA sidewalk improvements and crosswalks with flashing beacons. The other is a LOTCIP grant, which would fund 100% of the

completion of Daly Road. We have completed 2 of these grants this year. We would be responsible for the engineering costs of this project, but it would allow us to have a completed pedestrian network around the lake. Included in this grant would be the lowering and updating of the rotary wall, where Daly meets South Street. We will also be adding flush mounted lights to make it more noticeable. Repairs will be through the insurance claim and will address landscaping too.

- It's Budget time. Capital budget is finished, and the operating budget will be finished next week. The Budget hearing is on March 9<sup>th</sup>. We are not in good shape, as the state is cutting education funding for us by \$250,000. Inflation is also impacting us. Electricity and oil are locked in at good rates which help us. We are trying to lock in natural gas as well.

### **New Business:**

#### **1. 'Connecticut's Countryside' (former 4 Town Regional Economic Vitality Team) - updates:**

No updates at this time.

#### **2. Business appreciation certificates:**

Business updates were given, and there seems to be a lot of interest in Coventry:

- The new boxing place, Scrub Scraps, was presented with a certificate. They combine boxing and therapy to help tackle mental health and other issues. Their goal is to offer therapy and counseling with physical exercise to address drug addiction and anger issues. The owners are looking into linking up with the therapy consults next door.
- Dog grooming is going in where the nail salon used to be next to Pheonix Chinese, it is unknown when it will be going in and be operational.
- Burger Fry Pie has an approved menu with the health district, so things are moving forward for them.
- Leo (Lake View) is looking to lease the business out and has talked with Eric Trott. The building is outfitted and all that would be needed is décor changes etc. A new menu will need to be approved by the health district as well.
- Trott has had discussions with someone for Coventry Collision, and it seems a luxury sports car manufacturer is looking at that location.
- 7/11 is closed, and for sale by the chain. It only makes sense for another gas station to go in at this location.
- The dentist office construction is going well and has a very attractive building. There were some complaints about the Dollar General next door. People agree that they don't think this business will make it. It was discussed what the Dollar General could be repurposed to if the business fails, and since it is wide open, it can be used for any commercial purpose.
- Tax sales are going to happen this year. The list of properties in town went from 20 to 8. They are all houses.
- Pelletier Builders deal is still moving along. We are not sure what is happening at this point, but it is still a live deal.
- Sanborn Auto has a custom embroidery business that has moved in for operations.

- Ladyga asked if there was any progress with the property across from Cumberland Farms. Elsesser informed the soil testing did not go well, so it could not be used for a coffee chain or restaurant. Best suited for offices.
- Pollansky noted that she had received complaints about the right-hand turn from Rte. 31 to Rte. 44. With the new light system, and allowing right turns on red, there is not enough of a break for people to get out of their driveways on Rte. 44. Elsesser suggested the complaint go to the DOT for them to look into and address the light timing, as they are now the owners of that equipment. He commented Todd Penney (Town Engineer) would have the best contact information at the DOT for them.

Business appreciation certificates were given to many businesses in town, thanking them for choosing Coventry.

Some recipients were: Husky Pizza, High Trades, 1153 Main St., Dragonfire Meadery, Dollar General, Nathan Hale Farm and Feed, MJ Nail Spa, Twin Hills Country Club, David Hayes Arts, Nathan Hale Antiques, C. Ward Electric, JDM Imports, Can Dance Studio, Scrub Scraps, Woke, Hammerhead Health.

Pollansky suggested a certificate go to Clancy's HIIT and Fit, Elsesser is looking into it. It was suggested we contact the embroidery business as well.

### **3. Local business recognition on Discovery Channel program – Sewer Divers:**

We received a call from a Coventry mother, whose son was featured on Sewer Divers on Discovery Channel. Sewer diver's scuba dive in large sewers to clear lines and unclog clogs.

This committee will be giving him EDC business recognition, as he is from Coventry.

### **4. Target development sites – member, staff contacts:**

We should use this as an opportunity to look at what people want to do, and where we should focus our attention. Trott and Elsesser would like to put focus back on the Rte. 6 parcel where the holistic center was, and then where an apartment complex was approved by PZC.

We have also gotten prices for design concepts looking at the piece of land that goes from Rte. 44 to Bread and Milk Street (Ron Nadeau Property). This is an intriguing piece of land, because you could build a connector road. This will be presented to the Town Council, and ARPA dollars could be a funding source. We would like to meet with Ron to share the proposals and information we have. The design consultants would come up with a concept for either a connecting road, housing and retail purposes. There is also the possibility of connecting to CT Water as they are in the neighborhood nearby.

Channel 3 Kids Camp has been closed and has been appraised low, at \$1.5M. It's under court filings, and since there is a Town road with access to it, it can be developed. It was suggested it could be a good spot for another camp, and it also sounds like what Creative Living was looking to build and is already there. It could also be a perfect spot for a rural wedding venue.

Any other target development sites, bring to the next meeting or call Elsesser or Trott.

### **5. Farmers' Market 2023 season preparation – 20th year!:**

Since this is the 20<sup>th</sup> year, we will be having a big opening ceremony this year. There will be a ribbon cutting event for the new sidewalks which will be completed. We are also looking to have Fife and Drum perform there. Since the market opens at 10 am, we will have the ceremony start at 9:30 am.

There are 2 new market masters taking over this year and we are finishing up negotiations for another 10-year lease with the Homestead.

The first market for this year is the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in June (the 4<sup>th</sup>). Rep. Tim Ackert and Sen. Jeff Gordon will be invited as well. We hope to have Joe Courtney there, and Susan Bysiewicz may attend as well.

#### **6. RTE 44 Bolton/Coventry sewers – status:**

No further update, other than what was mentioned in the Manager’s Report above:

*We were made aware we got the money for sewers. Bolton Town Administrator has authorized to send a letter to Manchester asking for a map abutment of the sewer service area, which is the next step. We will need a similar letter from Vernon, which is part of the Bolton Lake Sewer Authority. The Town Administrator in Vernon needs to get working on that as Manchester needs their letter and it needs to go to the Board of Directors. At this time, we have not received any paperwork from the federal government, which will take months.*

#### **7. Sewer Treatment Plant – Windham WPCA – status:**

They have hired a consultant, and we’ve got a 60% grant from the state for the WPCA study, and it will pay for the balance. They are looking at new service areas around the lake and up, and whether they should be covered or not. A study was done 5 to 7 years ago, and nobody liked the results. This study will look at the area to serve and if we should upgrade our existing plants and whether we are able to get permits, or if we should tie into the Windham plant.

#### **8. EDC member - business visitations:**

Elsesser noted we touched base on some key businesses under the business certifications agenda item. As new opportunities come up, emails will go out to committee members.

Barry shared that she visited the corner store, which is under new management and had a nice visit. She explained there are 3 new owners. The owners are making efforts to make alterations. She noted they filled out the wrong form regarding food service, so this service is not operational yet. Once that is up and running, they will be serving breakfast and lunch items. They also want to add a high-end picnic area, with a movie screen where they can serve hot dogs, soda, and popcorn. Elsesser suggested they look at zoning regulations first, before they spend money for the picnic area and movie screen. Barry will reach out to them to share that information, and recommend they speak with the Land Use office.

Barry also commented that she visited the gas station at the bottom of Rte. 44 and Main Street (Save and Go). The owner has great pride in her business. It was discussed that they have opportunities to add a small food service operation inside.

Any member can stop into a local business and let them know they are from the EDC and ask about their business and what the EDC can do to help. It's really about having conversations with the local owners. Eric Trott may have a list of open-ended questions that can be asked, and issues that we could look at.

Vibrancy down in the village is great and new businesses are happy to be there.

### **9. Mason Street mills – Clock and Whale Factory – site conditions, status:**

Elsesser wanted to discuss that a dialogue should be started for future plans for this site. The property owner's wife is working with the Coventry Historical Society to clear out the buildings as they are jammed packed with stuff. The buildings cannot be put on the market until they are emptied. A brew pub would be perfect for this location. They are working on getting an auctioneer.

There is a lot of parking at this location, and it has potential access to Main Street. A cool feature of this property is that the water runs under both buildings, so a clear floor could be installed.

Elsesser does not think they need to be gutted, but sprinklers will need to be added. This is something he is working on throughout the town. He explained we may have the money, as we are on a list with the Department of Public Health for a water project that includes a water tower. We are on the "go" list, but they haven't fully committed. This project is in partnership with CT Water. We would need to bond the money, and then CT Water would pay off our loans over 3 years, releasing partial ownership every year. This is a complicated issue that would need to be explained well to the public, in order to get a yes. However, CT Water is not as interested in owning a water tower, but Elsesser is working on alternative solutions with locations in town and working with Eversource as well. We would need height to give us the water pressure needed. Being able to do this would bring CT Water to a property in town that would be perfect for affordable housing. This would go along with Orchard Hill. There is a lot of property behind Orchard Hill that could be developed for this. Right now, discussions are just conceptual. It was mentioned that Orchard Hills has award-winning water, as they have 2 wells.

Elsesser noted that Al Bradley passed away last week. Bradley founded Orchard Hills and dedicated so much time and work to this community. It is unknown who will replace him at this time. Currently, Laurie Bradley is still the executive director of Orchard Hills.

### **10. Housing Affordability Committee – CRCOG initiative:**

The Affordable housing Committee will be kicked off next Monday. Affordable housing is going to be looked at as having mixed use, not just senior housing. There is a high demand for senior housing though. There are some design plans and concepts being looked at, at a town level as a starting point.

CRCOG is also offering support and guidance, but we have done a great job coming up with tasks to create the framework we need.

### **11. Election of officers:**

Astor-Stave commented that it has been an honor being Chair of the EDC. She thinks that things should move to a younger group of people and does not wish to be re-elected as Chair.

**Motion:** I move to nominate Tim Liptrap as new Chair of the EDC.

By: Astor-Stave

Second: Gerrity

Discussion: No other nominations were put forward. At the conclusion of this meeting Liptrap will be the new Chair. Astor-Stave was thanked for her service.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

It was also discussed that Bill Jobbagy has been the Vice Chair of the EDC for a long time and is also the Chair of PZC. Astor-Stave felt it is important to not have people serve in dual capacities and nominate a new Vice Chair as we have eligible members.

**Motion:** I move to nominate Carolyn Gerrity as the new Vice Chair of the EDC.

By: Astor-Stave

Second: Barry

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

#### **Other Discussion:**

Gerrity wanted to bring up some issues she had with the Woke ribbon cutting. It was supposed to be done as economic development and it seemed it turned into something different. Gerrity thought that the EDC was going to do the ribbon cutting and something else with the sewers. It turned out to be only ribbon cutting and only Joe Courtney was invited. Our normal reps who attend these types of things, like Tim Ackert and Jeff Gordon, were not invited. Gerrity explained she had issues with this, as it seemed to make this more political and does not understand why this happened.

Elsesser understood, and explained they did not want to occupy more than 2 booths and wanted to be in and out rapidly and did not want to shut down their business for a ribbon cutting. The sewer thing was up on Rte. 44 in Bolton and happened right after the Woke ribbon cutting. He further explained that this was not intentional but was an attempt to limit the people there. Gerrity explained that this was perceived badly and has caused issues on social media. Barry suggested that there be an understanding for the next ribbon cutting that everything be laid out prior to going and invite the appropriate people as we do not want to set a precedent.

Liptrap informed everyone that on April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Lion's Club will be hosting a comedy night at Lake View. It will be approximately \$35-40 for a ticket which covers some food. Doors open at 7 pm, for an 8 pm show. Tickets will be online as well as at the door.

Ladyga discussed some new ideas he has for his property. He informed that Ned Lamont has increased funding for affordable housing by \$600M and did not know if we were aware, or if we could get any of this for use in town. Elsesser informed that he is aware of this, but it is not focused yet. There are a lot of equity issues with this, but we are monitoring it at this time. Elsesser added that the state will be putting a lot of money into affordable housing. Ladyga touched based with Newman and Associates, a reputable firm out of New Haven, who looked at our gateway area and recognized there is a high demand for housing. They will be working with Ladyga doing some rendering work.

Ladyga has plans and ideas for his property, with housing being one of them. It makes sense to have housing along Rte. 44, as there will be sewers and density. His properties in Bolton can have both commercial and residential purposes as it is zoned for mixed use. Coventry is only zoned for about 3 stories, and no more as we do not have appropriate fire suppression.

In regard to cannabis, there have been a lot of updates, supply chain issues, rollouts, and fundability issues. There seems to be a lot of people in the cannabis industry who are interested in what we are doing here in Coventry. Ladyga, with his cannabis resources and licenses can partner up to obtain a Section 149 cultivator license. This license goes to a particular entity or group and allows them to operate in DIA areas. There are none of these areas around here where this license could be of use. However, this license comes with additional licenses through an EJV (Equity Joint Venture). Ladyga could partner with another person or group for this license and bring additional uses to town. The problem with this license is that it is not won through the lottery like the others he obtained. This license process requires the applicant to pay \$3M upfront to the State of CT. This would award the recipient a cultivation license, and two other licenses. Ladyga is working on partnering up with one of the potential individuals/groups that are in limbo for this license process.

Ladyga discussed the benefits of the multi-cultivation license, but our regulations do not reflect the ability to do this in town right now.

Elsesser suggested that Ladyga talk to the Boggini brothers who have property on Bread and Milk Street, in an industrial zone. He informed they run Harbor Hemp and know the business. He commented that they are smart investors too. He also added that they have the best water, as they have artisan wells from previous businesses. They also distribute internationally and know how to do things that others don't.

It was discussed that C. Ward is expanding their business to the property by Boggini's. They have expanded their business to focus on solar, so Chris Ward would like to have a showroom for customers to view/select equipment/fixtures.

Elsesser suggested Ladyga talk to Eric Trott for more information.

**Adjournment:**

Liptrap motioned to adjourn at 9:07 pm, seconded by Pollansky.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

**Nicole Archambault**

Nicole Archambault

Minutes Clerk

**PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Economic Development Commission at the next Economic Development Commission meeting. Please see the next Economic Development Commission meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.**