

June 25, 2020

Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:05pm by Vice Chair Jobbagy.

The meeting was hosted via Zoom internet conferencing.

Roll Call: Barbara Barry, Tim Liptrap, Sondra Astor Stave, Sam Belsito, Kristen Bilotta, Carolyn Gerrity, Bill Jobbagy

Absent: Rick Conti, Mark Lavitt

Citizen: Andrew Ladyga

Town Staff: Eric Trott, Director of Planning and Development

Special Agenda Item: Preliminary discussion with Matthew Bruton of BL Companies regarding a proposed retail use at 1600 Boston Turnpike.

Atty. Robin Pearson, Matthew Bruton, were present to provide details on the project.

The project has been under staff review for many months. IWA approval has been gained. The existing conditions plan and proposed site plan and the work to prepare the plans were discussed. A 7,500 sf retail use is proposed. DOT has been involved with the curb cut review. The project plans have been modified since the onset of the process due to site constraints.

The architect reviewed the proposed elevations and architectural plans. Classical and Greek Revival themes were utilized with the design. Photos of a site in Woodbury where the same architecture is used was shared.

Outside storage of racks should not occur do to orientation of the building. They were noted in the Woodbury image.

The landscaping and wetlands enhancements were reviewed, some of which involve stormwater features. This strengthens the overall landscape plan and aesthetic of the site. The stone wall will be enhanced.

One tenant is proposed which could be either Dollar General or an auto parts retailer.

A 15 year lease would occur with Dollar General if it was that use. The relationship between the Storrs one and the proposed Coventry one was discussed.

10-15 employees would be hired if it is Dollar General and be a positive tax impact. Construction would be expected in the Fall and completion by end of 2020.

Landscape maintenance is in the operations manual with the stormwater and other aspects. This was required as part of the IWA decision.

A motion was made by Gerrity to support the retail use for the development, seconded by Bilotta. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

1. Nichols College – Coventry business intern project -

Students from the College were present for the meeting. Tim provided a background to the internship and intent with the project. Students were matched with town businesses based upon their background.

Olivia – A general business major and working part time for a travel agency. Her team is working with the Daniel Rust house to improve social media as well as mailchimp to get more bookings. They are trying to get more weekday business. Air BnB business has had a negative impact on them. Only 2 traditional BnB are in town. An improved reservation system would be very helpful to her with better communication with her customers.

Taylor – Hospitality Major - Also working with Daniel Rust house. Work on the Facebook page is occurring. She is also working with Song A Day Music on a new website.

Olivia – Also working on the project, recently joined the team full time.

Kelly – Business Management major – is working with Meadowbrook Wine and Spirit. A new website is being worked on, he does not have one at this time. He is active on Facebook. Website maintenance and management will need to happen, which the owner understands.

Dimetria – Human Resources major – her team is working with Coventry Arts and Antiques on increased social media presence, better website and a logo. Photo image improvement will also occur to help her business. She is hoping to cross promote other antique businesses.

Joe – Economics major/accounting minor – EyeTrade is their client. She is taking unique approaches with advertising. She has a robust website and has active social media, but needs more visibility on that platform. Tracking her customers with her website could be helpful. The Lion's Club is Joe's other client. They are just getting started with their work on an improved website. They would like to focus on the members, the history and accomplishments of the Club and make that more visible. The hope is to engage a younger demographic to join the club.

Ackert Electric is another business students are working on. Students are working with Tim on an improved website.

John Prior, a Coventry resident, owner of Image Works in East Hartford, is another business being worked with. He does not have any social media or internet presence, this has now been a challenge. The students are working on setting up his website and social media.

Tim asked if the Commission would like to get involved in any of the business projects or any assistance that can be offered. All of the students have been or will be working in addition to their internships.

Adoption of Minutes: A motion was made by Barry and seconded by Jobbagy to adopt the May 28, 2020 minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Planner/Manager Reports: Copies of the reports were included in the Commission agenda packet.

2.Coventry Business Reopening

As more restrictions relative to COVID have been relaxed in the State as of recently, businesses are able to facilitate more customers in their respective locations. Staff continues to share relevant resources and information with the businesses that is received from the State and other agencies.

3.Coventry Farmers' Market reopening

The Market is going into its fourth week of operation this weekend. Operations in the field have been going smoothly overall. Customers are working well with the new operation. The new traffic management team of the Coventry Fire Police have done a great job. Work continues on addressing issues with the vendor of the online purchasing program.

4.Google small business event

The webinar event has been scheduled for July 13 from 10 am to 11am. The subject will be how to use YouTube to help grow your business. The three other towns involved in the Regional Economic Vitality Action Plan have been included to invite their businesses as well as the Tolland and Windham Chambers.

5. Economic Development update memorandum - A copy of the updated memorandum was provided to the Commission and shows the latest activities on a variety of projects.

6. AdvanceCT (formerly CERC) – Regional Economic Vitality Study – ongoing work

The consultant has provided a revised draft of the Study that includes the revisions which Town Staff had requested. Town Staff are in the process of reviewing the revised draft and are meeting next week to discuss the revisions. A public forum is anticipated to be held via online video conferencing when the draft is complete.

7. Caprilands status – next steps

The Estate is pursuing the outright sale of the property on the open real estate market. Prospective real estate professionals are being considered by the Estate. The individual who responded to the RFP, remains interested in the property and has been communicating with the Estate. The Town will continue to assist with this situation to help find the most appropriate end user. Litigation continues between the Estate and Mr. Cook, but is beginning to slow down, due to the reduction of legal options that are available.

8. 1572 Boston Turnpike – development proposal

The designer of the medical office project has indicated that they expect to hear from the developer on if the project will move forward. It is looking positive, since a formal survey of the property is being prepared at this time. An update is expected in early July.

9. 2050 Boston Turnpike – adaptive re-use proposal

An ‘amusement center – festival use’ that is seasonal – such as a Haunted Hayride and Santa’s Village - has decided not to pursue the property. They determined that it was not a good match for their use, but appreciated the time and effort the Town Staff made to assist them.

10. EyeTrade – Coventry Village – development proposal

The owner of EyeTrade is pursuing a Special Permit with the Planning and Zoning Commission to allow for a building addition to connect the two separate buildings that she owns at 1197 Main Street. This will allow for more business space and to bring on an eye doctor as well to expand the services.

Staff asked if the Commission would like to endorse the project so a letter of support could be submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

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A motion was made by Barry and seconded by Jobbagy to support the EyeTrade Special Permit application for a building addition. The motion passed unanimously.

The CLCC project being proposed through the Neighborhood Assistance Act for a vocational greenhouse was approved by the Town Council and the NAA grant has been submitted to the State. Other site work is going to occur as well.

Kristen mentioned a couple new commercial and property listings in town that would be of interest. The site next door to the town hall campus is going on the market.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development