

January 28, 2021

Economic Development Commission  
Meeting Minutes

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Chairperson Stave. The meeting was hosted via Zoom internet conferencing.

**Roll Call:** Barbara Barry, Tim Liptrap, Carolyn Gerrity, Kristen Bilotta, Sam Belsito, Sondra Astor Stave, Andrew Ladyga

Guest: Jean Nelson, Chair – Farmers’ Market Operating Committee

Town Staff: John Elsesser, Town Manager; Eric Trott, Director of Planning and Development

**Planner/Manager Reports:** Copies of the reports were forwarded to the members for their review and comment.

**New Business:**

1. Presentation by Jean Nelson, Farmers’ Market Operating Committee Chair – Farmers’ Market survey report

As part of her work in obtaining a Masters’ Degree in Communication at UCONN, Jean conducted a statistically valid survey and analysis of the motivations of customers to attend the Coventry Farmers’ Market. The analysis involves that the social aspects are direct motivations for customers to attend the Market.

340 responses were received in total. 327 responses were utilized. The survey questions were outlined from an Australian study that provided the focus for each one of Jean’s – social, policy, food and other related reasons.

The analysis demonstrates that the social aspects are strong motivators to attend the Market. There is a positive relationship between the sense of community and customer attendance. Travel distance did not relate to motivations as much. Most came from within 20 miles or 20 minutes away. Another significant motivating factor is the support of the Market vendors. Results focused on the statistical ‘mean’ importance with the analysis.

The conclusion is that the Market is much more than simply a Farmers’ Market, and the customers are driven by much more than the availability of fresh food and local products. These conclusions are being included in the planning of the Market for 2021.

John provided an update on the South Street reconstruction and sidewalk project and the important elements of the design as it relates to the Hale Homestead and Farmers’ Market. The project is fully grant funded.

## 2. Farmers' Market 2021 season planning

Jean provided an update on the planning efforts for the 2021 season. Sampling and programming will not be part of the Market this season due to the pandemic.

The Operating Committee has been meeting for several weeks to plan for the 2021 Market season. The goal is to pursue an in-field operation while employing the necessary Covid protocols to provide a safe environment for the volunteers, vendors and customers. A detailed map is being prepared that delineates vendors' stalls, possible food truck locations, customer areas, entrance and exit with one-way customer flow. Once the draft map is prepared, it will be shared with the Health District for their input and guidance.

The Committee is also revising the vendor application process. The application platform that was used last year will not be used again due to functional challenges with it. The application form will have a section where the vendor will need to provide details on how they are contributing to the Market operation, beyond simply showing up, such as volunteering, or assisting with the operation of the Market. Also, there will be stronger language about the need for vendors to use social media to post about them and the Market to their customers. Vendor fees are also being considered.

## 3. Nichols College – Coventry business intern project

Tim provided an update on the project. Work continues with the businesses involved as websites and social media platforms are expanded and improved. Video work has been a focal point with the assistance of the Nichols College video production class.

Ackert Electric has been the focus of recent work with the students. A recently posted YouTube video was shown about the electrician trade. Another video provided details about starting his business. About half of the work is completed with Ackert's website.

A new semester will start on Monday for additional work to occur with the students and the businesses. The internships will be able to run through the summer. Website design education is occurring in advance of the work with the businesses so that they have the necessary skills to apply.

## 4. AdvanceCT – Regional Economic Development Study

Monthly 4 Town Team meetings have continued since October. The core Town Staff meet monthly before the full Steering Committee meetings that are also held monthly. The focus of the Committee has been performing a regional asset inventory of important destinations,

resources and attractions between the 4 towns; considering a 4 town event calendar that can be a clearinghouse of regional activities; collecting resources – publications that can serve to market the region’s uniqueness. Nichols College will also be helping directly in developing a 4 town ‘campaign’ for furthering marketing opportunities and create a logo or slogan that is easily identifiable. The Committee consists of Town Staff, Board/Commission members, UCONN Staff, as well as other regional stakeholders.

#### 5.Target Development Sites

Members volunteered to serve as contacts with target development site owners and representatives in order to maintain contact with ongoing projects and the status of properties. The following is a review of the updates:

1011 Main Street – Husky Pizza is completing work to open very soon.

1159 Main Street – No update since Coventry Fitness and National Ribbon have closed. The owner continues to seek new tenants. Kristen spoke to the owner of the building. He is open to leasing and open to selling and financing as well.

1193 Main Street - Sanborn’s Garage – for sale. No update.

1340 Main Street – former Coventry Antiques – property on market. Final steps continue to be taken on the environmental clean-up. Dr. Jenkins remains interested in the property.

3514 Main Street – Colvest - No update, they remain difficult to communicate with. The owner of Dunkin’ Donuts continues to pursue a modification to the drive-through and access to relieve vehicle congestion, but the owner will not support the proposal or applications with the Town. Options are being considered.

3466 & 3480 Main Street – Vinton Village and apartments – Permits have been issued to establish a juice bar in Vinton Village. The owner has put a hold on the apartment project due to costs. The lower level unit and one upper level unit remains available. Can Dance Studio will likely not be returning to her former location.

1660 Main Street – Staff has learned that the owner is pursuing the demolition of the structures after lengthy delays.

A new tenant for the former Reid’s Restaurant has signed a lease with a restaurant from Branford that serves breakfast and American fare.

John reported that the Booth and Dimock Memorial Library project is moving forward. Sondra mentioned her very generous donation of \$75,000 to help facilitate the special improvements in

the expansion project that may not have been normally possible. The goal is to help inspire further donations to support the project as fundraising.

John mentioned that the old barn at the sharp curve in the Village across from Teleflex will be conveyed to the Town from the CT DOT and must be used for municipal purposes.

Work continues between the Town and a forest management company to conduct a management activity on the open space that was conveyed to the Town from the State DOT which will provide for the beginnings of pedestrian trails.

A new bridge will be constructed to continue the Hop River Trail section where there was a disconnect. The work is expected to start in 2022.

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

The matter continues to move forward with the State. All of the materials required by DEEP have been submitted. A referral had been sent to OPM for their input which is expected in the next month. A post scoping notice will need to be prepared and filed by the State, which will dictate next steps. The Legislature will be holding a public hearing on the matter to help further the situation along.

#### 7.Caprilands – status

Staff understands that the owner is considering having the residence dismantled and removed by an historic structure rehab specialist. The attorney from the State Attorney General's Office who was involved with the matter for many years is retiring at the end of the month. A new attorney has been assigned to assist. Work will continue to find ways to continue the legacy of Adelma and Caprilands with any funds that remain with the Estate. There has be no update on the plan development for a new residence on the property or other improvements on the site.

#### 8.Integrated Rehabilitation – expansion

Integrated Rehabilitation has outgrown their space at Highland Park Plaza and is interested in finding a new location to build an office structure. Staff continues to assist them to find a location to do a new building project or re-establish the use in an existing space.

#### 9.Meadowbrook Plaza – meeting with owner, tenant vacancies

Staff has been communicating and working with the owner of the plaza to find ways to assist in maintaining the tenants by either expanding the operation into a new unit, such as Meadowbrook Wine and Spirit, as well as Integrated Rehabilitation, and the dentists.

10. Former Reid's location – Main Street – new restaurant

Staff spoke with Leo Papa about the situation with his various commercial properties. Reid's has been leased out to a new restaurant called 'Reverie' that are currently located in Branford. They serve breakfast and American fare. A realtor/appraisal office has signed a lease to locate in the former 'Nailed It' salon. The Woodland Road property that Leo owns is for sale at this time. No new plans are proposed for the Penalty Box property. The Covid situation has created challenges for Lakeview Restaurant but Leo and Marianna continue to be open.

11. Former Beebe House location – Main Street – The owner of the property also owns Husky Pizza that recently moved out of Storrs Downtown. They are in the final stages of interior work and are looking to open very soon.

Kristen reported about generous activities involving businesses in town and ways that they have been giving back to the community. An update on activities being planned by Coventry Cares was provided.

**Adoption of Minutes:**

A motion was made by Barry and seconded by Bilotta to adopt the December 3, 2020 minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:32p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott  
Director of Planning and Development