

January 27, 2022

**Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes**

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm by Chairperson Stave. The meeting was hosted via Zoom internet conferencing.

Roll Call: Sondra Astor Stave, Andrew Ladyga, Bill Jobbagy, Barbara Barry, Carolyn Gerrity, Tim Liptrap

Citizens: Lori Klar, John Sabol

Absent: Rick Conti, Darby Pollansky, Sam Belsito

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

Adoption of Minutes:

A motion was made by Liptrap and seconded by Jobbagy to adopt the December 2, 2021 minutes.

The motion passed unanimously.

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

New Business:

1. 4 Town Regional Economic Vitality Team updates:

Eric provided an update on 4 Town initiatives:

- : A consultant will be pursued to prepare a logo/brand for the region as well as a marketing plan.
- : A project with UCONN will be launched in February that will provide a conduit between the University and local businesses to gain interns that can support projects and needs of the businesses. A series of webinars will begin and extend into the spring about this and other programs being offered such as Tech Park space offerings to local manufacturers.
- : The Tolland County Chamber attended yesterday's meeting and a great conversation was held on how to work better together. Tim will be doing a workshop with the Chamber to support local businesses.

2. Target development sites – member, staff contacts:

Eric gave an update on a couple of properties of interest and referenced the staff project memo that gives a comprehensive overview on the status of projects.

The site next to town hall that was under enforcement has been cleaned-up.

John gave an update on contact with a medical office developer who have expressed interest. We are gathering demographic information to share with the developer.

A machine shop from East Hartford has shown interest in locating in town. Staff is looking for compatible sites.

The sewer treatment plan will need an upgrade and Staff is pursuing funds to help facilitate that. DEEP processes may be complicated. A connection to Windham could be possible.

3. RTE 44 Bolton/Coventry sewers - status:

John provided an update. WPCA is pursuing some preliminary design work for a future low-pressure system on RTE 44. This will provide guidance on the needs and cost of such a system. Infrastructure funds will be becoming available soon and having conceptual plans will be helpful. The Town has hired a consultant to assist with the analysis.

4. New potential medical – dental office – Boston Turnpike –status:

Local dentist, Dr. Jenkins, is pursuing a professional office use at 1572 Boston Turnpike, which was the former target for Windham Hospital. Dr. Jenkins has hired LADA, P.C., who had been hired by the Town previously to do a target economic development site analysis on Boston Turnpike. Prospective designs have been prepared and shared with Staff. It was determined that there is a need for a zoning regulation amendment to create some front yard setback flexibility. Staff worked with the designer and the PZC to create draft language. The amendment can have a positive impact on this and other development projects. The PZC approved the amendment on December 13. Staff will continue to work with the applicant and designer to facilitate the project. The recent focus has been working with a transportation consultant to examine the site line for the driveway.

5. 1% for the Arts – ARP funding for cultural arts:

Town Staff prepared an application and criteria to consider funding requests for use of the \$36,000.00 designated by the Town Council for support of cultural arts entities in the community. Eight applications were submitted by local arts and culture institutions in the community for the grants. A first round of review has occurred and follow up information has been requested. Awards are anticipated in February.

State Cultural Arts funding have been awarded to local museums and arts stakeholders.

6. Hytone Farm – anaerobic digester project status:

Permit applications have been submitted to the Building and Land Use Offices for consideration of the project. A meeting was held between Staff and the consultant to work through the remaining required information. Final permit approvals are almost in place. It is Staff's understanding that Hytone Farm will be breaking ground in the spring.

John gave an update on the Transfer Station project as well as the landfill methane venting project, and the girls' softball field project.

7. Dunkin Donuts – access – vehicle cueing improvements:

A special permit application has been filed to create a new cueing layout for the drive-thru. The Commission had a preliminary discussion on the matter and is in support of this application. It will address traffic issues at the intersection with RTE 31.

8. PZC regulations development – cannabis establishments:

The PZC is in the process of developing zoning regulations to enable the sales and propagation in town. A public meeting was held in December to kick off the dialogue with the Commission. The Town Council was asked by the Commission for their position on the subject. The moratorium on the development of the regulations ends in July.

Andrew asked a variety of questions on the regulation development, possible connections with higher learning institutions in the region, types of licenses to be issued by the State, opinions of the community on the adoption of regulations.

Tim shared some news Federal laws being considered about the financial processes to deal with money tied to cannabis establishments.

9. Affordable Housing Plan development:

The Town received a \$15,000.00 grant from the State of CT Department of Housing to assist in the preparation of an affordable housing plan for Coventry. The consultant firm of SLR was hired by the Town to assist with the development of the Plan. A kick off meeting was held with the consultant and the Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee last week. The launching of a project website that includes a community survey. A community workshop is being planned for March. A lot of effort will be made to provide education and education on the affordable housing topic. The Plan must be completed by June of 2022 to comply with CT General Statutes.

10. New/improved businesses – certificates of appreciation – business visitations:

Eric will prepare a list of businesses that are new in town and have recently done a significant improvement projects so that EDC certificates of appreciation can be distributed. This will be prepared for the next meeting.

John mentioned that the Town has been connecting with local businesses to distribute masks and tests kits.

11. Tolland County Chamber of Commerce – small business workshop:

Eric and Tim are working with the Executive Director of the Chamber to do a small business education workshop, likely focusing on social media. This will be under the umbrella of the 4 Town Economic Development Vitality Plan.

Tim discussed a new product involving AI – ‘bots’ to prepare content for social media, websites, and blogs for businesses. Tim is working with one of his Nichols College classes to explore this further.

12. Business Employee Recognition Program:

John gave an update on the program. The Town Manager’s intern has initiated the program which has gotten a mild response from the community so far. An e-blast will be sent out to the community to help spread the word.

Tim mentioned that Daniel Rust House has been using the email marketing system that Tim’s interns assisted in developing.

Andrew is looking to hire a commercial real estate broker to help market and sell his property for a commercial development. Andrew asked the Commission for their opinion as to what uses would be desirable to the Town so he can market them for his site on RTE 44. Also, Andrew asked what assets the Town offers to attract visitors to the area.

Some ideas include: Panera, Starbucks, hardware store, Tractor Supply, oil change service, Aldi’s, senior housing, Alzheimer’s center, physical rehabilitation center, food service, community YMCA, fitness gym, medical offices.

A lengthy discussion occurred about a variety of economic development initiatives that have occurred over time in Coventry to support economic vitality. Challenges and opportunities were reviewed in detail. A review of business that are active and successful include medical offices, affordable housing, electrical vehicle operations, and cannabis establishments due to the revenue that is generated and directed to municipalities.

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Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development