

To: Town Council, Economic Development Commission

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

Re: Economic development updates

Date: October 18, 2019 (**updated May 23, 2022 – in bold**)

We thought we would take a minute to share some Economic Development updates. This is to keep you in the loop and have accurate information as the social media world sometimes gets ahead of the truth. In general it would be helpful to not widely distribute this information since it can change quickly and you may be caught in passing on stale information.

**Village:**

1600 Main St: The old house and barn next to the School Admin building was proposed to be demolished soon to address the blight conditions by the owner, but it has not occurred. Now being advertised and marketed for commercial use: 2 acres on sewer - commercially zoned. New owners are not interested in building new gas station/convenience store. Staff has learned that the demolition is being pursued again and is expected to occur in the coming weeks. Since no action is occurring, Staff has no choice but to pursue blight enforcement action at this time to require the property clean up. A blight notice of violation was issued and received by the owner. The blighted house and accessory buildings have been demolished and are in the process of being removed, which brings the property closer to conformity. The debris has been removed from the site and the property has been brought into compliance. Staff spoke to the former realtor who is interested in reconnecting with the owner to advertise, sell and develop the property for an appropriate adaptive re-use.

1465 Main St: Former Devine's building (former small engine/boat repair). Sold to new owner who wishes to do fleet vehicle repair (oil truck) and repair of tractors for personal use. Exterior site work has been completed and has provided much improvement to the site.

Reid's: Property has been purchased by owner of Lakeview Restaurant who recently opened a take-out only pizza restaurant after he temporarily closed Lakeview. Staff is aware that a new restaurant is pursuing the site, but formal permits have not been submitted. Staff has contacted the owner about the status of the situation, as well as the tenant/lessee living upstairs. Land Use and Building Staff with the new tenant and reviewed options to address the residential use of the site and consulted on permitting the restaurant. They are pursuing the option of legitimizing the residential unit, but need to perform some interior work. Recent illnesses have limited the owner's ability to take next steps, but they have informed Staff it is their intention to complete the work and open this spring. Staff is reconnecting with the owner to discuss steps to gain compliance.

1340 Main St: Coventry Antiques - Environmental clean-up conducted by Red Tech (owner) who are looking for buyer. Have someone interested and trying to get CT DEEP paperwork to allow a mortgage to be issued. Prospective owner has hired an architect and engineer, and plan on a professional office. The owner is on the final steps of environmental monitoring and it should be complete by April. The property, once considered 'clean', may have an increased likelihood for sale. Staff reached out to the owner to inquire on the status and assist with next steps as necessary and was told that the site

monitoring for chemical contamination has been completed and was approved by DEEP. The realtor selling the site inquired about a potential professional office development that could involve an abutting lot on Stonehouse Road and provide more development area for the project.

1011 Main St: Beebe House. Husky Pizza has relocated from Downtown Storrs and is now open. Staff spoke with the owner while he visited the office and they are beginning planning and preparation to expand the kitchen amenities to be able to expand their menu offerings. He indicated that he is very happy with their new location and the choice to come to Coventry. Staff understands that a 'cottage business' cookie baker has recently started in one of the apartments above Husky Pizza. They bake gluten and nut free cookies and are selling them at Husky Pizza. (Perhaps there is interest in expanding their operation if things take off?)

Sanborn's Garage: Sale unlikely without an environmental study. Eric Trott went to a CRCOG brownfields workshop in 2019 to learn what type of assistance is available. There are limited opportunities for private gas station sites. Rental is still possible. Staff understands that there had been some environmental testing done which revealed no contamination of the site. Staff spoke to an interested party who has signed a contract to purchase the site and is working with Staff to obtain the local approvals as well as the DMV. The new owner intends to improve the site and create an attractive 'custom and unique' Japanese vehicle dealer on site. The new owner's dealer and repairer license was approved at the May 19 ZBA meeting, have received their DMV permit and are now open for business. The owner appeared at the September EDC meeting.

Teleflex: EDC visited with Teleflex in late 2019 and learned of the growth of the firm. They are running three shifts and looking for 15 or so more employees. Staff met with the plant manager to discuss their plans, how we may be able to work on parking issues, and how we can help in recruiting. Teleflex is now renting the lower level of the building where Pizza on Main is located for storage. We received word that Deb Masso, the plant manager, is retiring this week. She has been a very responsive and supportive connection with Teleflex for 20 years.

1034 Main St: Former Sanborn Auto Parts - antique shop closed – new tenant is occupying and selling pool table supplies and antiques. New owner exploring options including residential. Staff met with an individual who expressed interest in buying the property to establish an antiques store and possible coffee shop. Guidance was provided by Staff on the steps that would need to be taken to accommodate these uses.

580 Main Street: DragonFire Meadery - Owner will be proceeding with sampling in the mead production building which was delayed due to the need to change liquor control law. Mead is a fermented substance made from honey. The owner continues to perform work to the site to further accommodate the business. The PZC recently approved a permit to allow a deck to be constructed to serve as an outdoor public space for tastings. The owner has erected a new sign and the website is accepting orders for a variety of mead options. Dragonfire Meadery has been invited to be a vendor at the Coventry Farmers' Market. Permits have been approved to enable that. State liquor control permits are being pursued by the owner to open their operation for tastings.

1409 Main St: Former House on the Hill Antiques – Property actively on market for sale, but no inquiries have been made with Land Use Office. \$699,000 price likely not reasonable considering constraints of site.

Bidwell Spirit Shoppe: Owner of Spirit Shoppe has purchased entire building and has done minor improvements to stabilize building and rentals. The owner of the building has leased the liquor store business to another entity.

Nathan Hale Antiques: Nathan Hale Antiques is attempting to purchase the entire building, but complications have arisen with a deed restriction which appears to limit adaptive re-use. Their attorney appears to have gotten a sign-off from the State Attorney General's Office to address the deed issue. **A new antique tenant is going to be occupying the lower level unit – Vintage Antiques.**

Coventry Laundromat building: The personal training business has moved from the upper level to the lower level of 1153 Main Street, which provides more space. A new martial arts studio is being proposed for the upper level unit.

Lakeview Restaurant: The owner was contemplating improvements to the cottage that is located within the limits of the outdoor patio, which would allow for it to be utilized on a year round basis for residential purposes. A ZBA variance was approved recently to accommodate this use. The owner has recently listed the vacant commercial property for sale on Woodland Road that was used for overflow parking. Staff spoke with the owner about his various commercial landholdings and the direction he is going during the pandemic, which has created large impacts to all his tenants and his business. Staff continues to speak to a real estate professional who is working with the owner about the potential for future adaptive re-use projects involving the site. **Recent discussions have involved interest in developing a new rental apartment complex in the location of the auction space.**

1159 Main Street: Location of the former Coventry Fitness. An individual who wishes to establish a tea house with limited food service has expressed interest in locating at this location. Staff discussed the various steps necessary to pursue this proposal. It is Staff's understanding that the tea house proposal will likely not move forward due to the extent of necessary improvements to enable the food service aspects. Staff has had recent discussions with a local developer, real estate professional who has interest in purchasing the property and constructing a second story and an addition to the rear. He continues to perform due diligence and remains in contact with the owner.

1203 Main Street: Location of the former Nailed it Salon. The owner of the plaza indicated to staff that a real estate appraisal firm has expressed interest in location at this location. No permits have been submitted as of yet. The owner reports that a lease has been in place for several months and utilities have been connected.

#### **RT 44:**

1600 Boston Turnpike: Former eye doctor office. The property has been conveyed to a developer who is looking to establish a Dollar General. IWA and PZC have approved the project. Construction is expected this fall. The store is open to the public at this time and the final site improvements are complete.

1572 Boston Turnpike: A residence currently exists on site, although it is commercially zoned. Hartford Health Care previously expressed interest in establishing a new medical office on site, but decided not to pursue the project. Staff reached out to the developer of Dollar General to share info on the property and see if there would be interest for new development, such as an auto parts retailer. Staff was told that the developer has purchased an option to purchase the property and has begun the search for an appropriate use for the site. An auto parts retailer has been discussed. The option has since lapsed and a

new potential owner has submitted a purchase option which has been accepted by the owner. Dr. Jenkins, the local dentist, is pursuing a new professional office that will also include an oral surgeon. Staff has had initial discussions with the designer of the project on some potential options for site development. The owner and his design team are proposing a zoning regulation amendment that will enable flexibility with site design for this project and other similar ones. This amendment was approved by the PZC at the December meeting. Staff held a preliminary design meeting with the consultants to help guide the project. **A Special Permit application is pending with a May 23 public hearing. The owner plans for summer construction.**

Dunkin Donuts: DnD wants to change their drive through configuration to improve cueing. Waiting for permission from Colvest (owner). Designer has been hired to prepare plans, which staff has reviewed and commented on. A special permit amendment will be necessary for the proposal. The owner refuses to endorse an application of DnD (the leaseholder) to allow the project to move forward. The owner's legal representative has been in contact with Staff about pursuing a Zoning Regulation Amendment with hopes to alleviate this situation. Staff spoke with Colvest on the situation, the matter of the drive-thru and septic repair remain unresolved, but negotiation continues to resolve the matters. Staff has spoken to the designer of the drive-thru plan revisions and they expect to submit an application to the PZC, however they have been delayed in filing it. They have apparently received approval from the owner to proceed with the project. A preliminary discussion on the project was held with the PZC on January 24 and a subsequent Special Permit was filed. The PZC approved the application with conditions at its April 11 meeting.

Colvest: Colvest has leveled out their property next to CVS and is working on a septic repair. No discussion recently on any new construction but they did have an approved permit which expired for a large plaza which could be quickly re-permitted. Staff contacted Colvest about the potential of supporting a new building for Integrated Rehab to relocate in town. They have increased space needs. Staff spoke with the owner about the DnD situation as well as the development of phase 2 of the project. The owner is looking to take a different approach with the site and is more actively considering new tenants.

Hartford HealthCare (Dr. Keenan replacement office): Staff continues to have ongoing communication with HHC and their developer on how they plan to continue to have a medical presence in town. HHC has indicated that they are in a holding pattern for new development due to the pandemic. HHC indicated that they are looking at more regional solutions to providing medical services, other than an office in Coventry.

1776 Boston Turnpike – (former Dr. Keenan office): HHC has confirmed that a local financial advisor is pursuing the purchase of the property and is seeking financing at this time. Construction work is complete on the building and the new professional office is occupying the building.

Cumberland Farms: A CO has been issued and it is now open to the public.

On the Go gas station: Owner was approved to make sandwiches but has not started the project. They also recently received a grocery beer liquor permit approval with PZC and the State. The owner has completed the replacement of the fuel storage tanks. Staff has spoken recently to the owners who are pursuing a new fuel vendor which will cause for new signage on site. Subway has expressed interest in

moving from the Village to this site to increase visibility and sales. Staff met preliminarily on this with the franchise owner who is attempting to secure a lease.

Creative Living Community of CT: Application for a mixed use at the former Crestland Llama farm was approved. They are trying to find financing for the first phase of mixed apartments and farm retail. Agricultural activities have commenced on site, as well as stabilization of the buildings. Staff worked with CLCC to submit a Neighborhood Assistance Act application with the State to gain funds to help support the construction of a 'vocational' greenhouse. CLCC is also moving forward with the farm stand and a portion of the parking lot at the front of the property. The NAA has been approved. In order to facilitate the funding, a 'sponsor' business needs to 'adopt' the project for tax credits. The deadline for this to occur is October 1. Staff is helping with outreach to gain a sponsor. One sponsor was found for the amount of \$5000 and is being pursued. CLCC had a Farm Stand Day – Open House for their new farm structure for retail sales of products. CLCC appeared at the December PZC to do a preliminary review of a revised concept plan for their development of a residential/agricultural 'hamlet'. The plans were well received by the Commission. A formal re-application for the Special Permit will be required due to the nature of the changes to the plans. Staff reached out CLCC about the next round of the State of CT DRS Neighborhood Assistance Act funding and the town's support for the application. CLCC has expressed interest and will likely pursue involvement in the program again. Staff facilitated the application for HVAC improvements to structures on site and submitted it to the State DRS. The State DRS confirmed receipt of the application and is processing it. CLCC is considering options with the existing residence in an attempt to initiate a residential use on the property that will not require a large financial investment. They continue to explore options with the site and methods to address the needs of the organization. Staff continues to be in discussions with them.

Hytone Farm – anaerobic digester project: Staff met on site to review the project details. The owner is still finalizing the project design. Staff has determined a prudent path for the owner to take in order for the project to be considered by the Planning and Zoning Commission. A preliminary discussion with the Commission was held at the April 12 meeting. The Commission was very supportive of the project. The owner will need to pursue an amendment to the zoning regulations and a special permit due to the unique nature of the proposal. Staff prepared the draft language for the amendment application which was presented to the Commission on May 24. An 'agricultural exception' was approved by the IWA for the project. The PZC approved the text amendment application that provided support for the project at its July 12 meeting. The applicant is preparing the materials that will be necessary to facilitate the final permit issuance. Staff is speaking with the consultant about the potential of pursuing an EPA grant to facilitate a depackaging plant to accompany the project. The consultant team has initiated the permit review process with Town Staff. **Permits have been issued and construction has commenced. Town Staff has had conversations with the project team about a depackaging facility as a phase 2 of the project.**

Ladyga motor vehicle dealer and repairer location – A request to the PZC to extend the timeframe to complete the project was requested by Ladyga. At the PZC meeting of 4-12-21, the Commission recommended that Ladyga withdraw the request since there is 15 months left to complete the project and the Commission would like to see progress on the project during this time. The current CT General Statutes allow for the project to be valid until June 2029. Town Staff is working with the owner to assist in marketing the property with a commercial realtor for future adaptive uses.

Integrated Rehabilitation – Staff continues to work with IR to assist them in finding a location to establish a new professional office building. They were pursuing 1660 Boston Turnpike but the owner did not accept the purchase option. Staff prepared a list of potentially viable sites for them to consider. The information was shared with the owner, who will review them with their designer. Staff reached out to the contact at IR to check on the status of site selection. IR has indicated that they are currently working with the owner of Meadowbrook Plaza to reconfigure their office which will provide them additional space to allow them to remain at this location. Building plans are being prepared to provide more space for IR by moving the Meadowbrook Wine and Spirits into the former HR Block space. A PZC special permit is required for the relocation of Meadowbrook, due to liquor regulations. **A PZC special permit is pending for the May 23 meeting.**

#### **Other projects:**

Charles Boggini Company: Staff is working with the Boggini brothers on Bread and Milk Street for an addition to their building that requires the location of a different septic reserve area. Have had productive meetings between staff and the owners to chart options to go forward. They need space to address new CDB production that they have contracts for by using their expertise in emulsions from their soda syrup business. Staff continues to reach out to the owners to offer assistance, but indicated that they are on hold for the moment.

Vinton Village: Wicked Slice reopened in the fall of 2019. No real movement on CanDance studio space or other tenants yet. The plaza owner also owns the adjacent apartments and is hoping to tear them down and construct new units. Design for a new apartment project continues and has gotten preliminary approval from the State DEEP on septic design. Staff has been informed by the owner that they are putting the apartment project on hold at the moment due to costs. Courtside Nutrition is now open for business. A new nail salon has been permitted for the last vacant upper level unit. They are in the process of performing interior work. Wicked Slice is pursuing a new restaurant beer/wine liquor permit. Staff is assisting with the application, but it needs to be endorsed by the owner, who has not yet done so. The property is currently for sale.

Daly Road and Main: The building owner is looking to add a rear deck to the Penalty Box. Design for this has been considered. No urgent plans for the empty end unit. However, some prospective plans for interior modifications have been reviewed by Town Staff that improve the Penalty Box unit and connect it with the end unit for expanded food service. Michael's Penalty Box re-opened on July 19. A real estate sign has recently appeared at this location. Staff has not connected with the owner to determine what is the intention – unit lease or sale of property?

Caprilands: The Town hired an architect and engineering team to conduct a historic building assessment that is being funded by a State Historic Preservation Grant. The report is complete, and was included in a RFP for adaptive reuse. The RFP was issued in March with a May 11 deadline. Only one response was submitted that was not deemed adequate. The property on the open real estate market and an offer has been made for purchase. The prospective owner wishes to establish a farm on the premises. Staff is working with the designer to prepare plans for a new residence and agricultural use. Staff has learned that the owner is pursuing the dismantling of the residence for future reconstruction by a respectable historic reproduction company. Staff continues to work with the Fiduciary and State Attorney General's Office to discuss next steps for maintaining the legacy of Adelma as well as the intellectual property. A status update hearing was held on March 23 with the Probate Court. Staff attended the meeting. Staff

spoke with the fiduciary and he indicated that he is pursuing the court approved penalties against Dr. Cook with his Estate to assist with closing out the financial matters with the Caprilands Estate and potentially provide funds for future legacy planning efforts. Staff met with the Attorney General's Office to discuss future steps with the Estate. This includes legacy planning and how any funds remaining with the Estate can be utilized for educational purposes and furthering the work of Adelma Simmons. Atty. Purtill continues to work on closing out the Estate and is pursuing the penalties from Dr. Cook and his Estate, which will have an impact on remaining funds. An historic structure specialist is involved with the sale of the Caprilands house, which would enable it to be deconstructed and established at a new location elsewhere. It is currently being advertised. The owner of the property has submitted permits to construct a new residence on site. It is Staff's understanding that there is continued interest in the Caprilands house by an entity in Canada. **The fiduciary of the Simmon's Estate continues to pursue legal means to recoup funds from the Estate of Dr. Cook. The fiduciary continues to work with the Coventry Historical Society to help enable them to gain funds, former possessions, intellectual property from the Estate.**

Dimitri's: Owner commenced interior renovation project to expand take out area and shift bar further into restaurant. Permits were previously approved to begin work.

Dana Barnes – owner of Twin Hills Country Club: Staff met with Dana to discuss the improvements that he is doing on site. Dana is also a real estate developer. Ideas were shared and discussed on how he could potentially be involved in a Coventry project.

Knights of Columbus building – Snake Hill Road – Staff worked with a commercial archery club that wished to purchase the property for indoor and outdoor activities. A special permit application was approved by the PZC in April. Unfortunately, the new use will not proceed due to the impact by the pandemic. Interest continues with the property. Staff is aware that the property has been sold. The property has been sold to a party who wishes to use it as a residence. Work continues on site, but the property is now subject to a dumping violation. The property has been brought into compliance and is currently for sale.

Nadeau: The EDC reached out to Ron Nadeau (owner of Sabrina Pools and Industrial Park on Bread and Milk Street) to discuss his plans for the site and others that Nadeau owns. He did not wish to meet with the EDC. Staff met with Ron to discuss his current plans with the property. Both parties will keep each other in the loop as concepts are considered or interest occurs. It is Staff's understanding that there is a new owner of Sabrina Pools. Staff is investigating to get more details.

Sadlak Innovative Design: The EDC reached out to the owner who is located in the Nadeau Industrial Park to see if he would be interested in attending an upcoming EDC meeting to see if the Town can help. He politely declined at this time.

RTE 44 sewers: We continue to push the Town Line (Bolton/Coventry Gateway) sewer extension concept. Staff had a recent meeting with State Staff to rectify this matter. Staff has submitted a revised letter on how the project complies with the State, Regional and Local Plans as well as sewer service area maps and other details. DEEP has forwarded this information to OPM for comment. OPM has commented to DEEP, but DEEP has not responded or provided guidance to the Town on next steps. Staff attended a recent meeting with DEEP/OPM to discuss next steps. It is believed that a path will be provided to allow the Town to connect, based upon the recently adopted legislation and opinion of

DEEP/OPM. Town Staff responded to the request for information from DEEP and DEEP will be releasing the post scoping notice to complete the CEPA screening process. The notice was posted on the Council of Environmental Quality website in August – and closed out without issue. **WPCA Staff continues to take steps to work with the towns involved in the sewer agreement and has outlined other tasks that need to be addressed to further the project.**

Regional Economic Development Action Plan: The consultant, AdvanceCT (formerly the CT Economic Resource Center, has completed a first draft of the action plan. The final draft is complete. A public forum, via Zoom, was held on September 16 to unveil the document. Monthly meetings continue in order to work on the implementation of the Plan. The 4 Town Team is focusing on the following: an asset inventory of unique resources within the towns for future marketing efforts; the creation of a 4 Town event calendar; open space/park mapping info resource; creating guided tours of destinations in the 4 towns; instead of Tim Liptrap's Nichols College students assisting with the creation of a logo/slogan campaign that was originally planned, Tim has offered to have summer interns work on the development of a new website for the 4 Town Project. The initial testing of students on the logo campaign did not illicit positive results, so effort will be placed on the website project instead. A logo campaign subcommittee to explore this issue further. **Current projects include: seeking grant funds to assist with execution of Plan; utilizing EDC funds to pursue a logo/tag line- marketing plan; working with UCONN to create a formal pipeline between UCONN interns and local businesses; pursuing the hiring of a UCONN MPA program student to assist with 4 Town project; continuing to meet with regional Partners to find common ground activities; enhancing individual town webpages to be more robust with 4 Town information and data; updating implementation matrix to demonstrate ongoing projects and successes.**

Plan of Conservation and Development update: The Plan was adopted on June 22 and was effective on July 1.

3399 Main Street: A solar farm project is being considered for the site. A preliminary discussion was held with the PZC and the developer to gain input, answer questions. A lease is the process of being finalized. Once complete the developer will pursue a special permit with PZC.

Meadowbrook Plaza: Staff has learned that Swiss Cleaners will be closing, Integrated Rehab is exploring other sites that will meet their space needs more adequately, and that Dr. Adelheit is pursuing a more appropriate space out of town. Staff continues to work with the owner to assist in filling the vacancies. Staff understands that negotiations are proceeding to modify the units for Integrated rehab and Meadowbrook Wine and Spirits to give them both additional space. Building plans are being prepared to provide more space for IR by moving the Meadowbrook Wine and Spirits into the former HR Block space. A PZC special permit is required for the relocation of Meadowbrook, due to liquor regulations. **A PZC special permit is pending for the May 23 meeting.**

Nathan Hale Farm and Feed: Met with the EDC in the fall to discuss their new operation and how they can be of service to the community. Work continues on the property to prepare for a full opening. Permits have been issued for the business to operate.

Grid scale energy storage project: Staff spoke with a representative of East Point Energy about an electrical infrastructure support project involving the placement of large 'batteries' in cargo containers with transformers. The site being considered is adjacent to the North River Road electrical substation.



The process will likely be many months long as they explore the project and work with the Eversource. The project is subject to Siting Council approval, not local jurisdiction. A preliminary discussion was held with the Planning and Zoning Commission at its June 14 meeting and East Point Energy did a presentation. The Commission had a few questions that they asked EPE to address. EPE provided responses to the questions to the Commission's satisfaction. EPE received an endorsement of the project from the Commission at the August 9 meeting. EPE returned to the PZC to discuss project layout revisions that are required because of wetlands on site at the October 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. Final plans continue to be formulated, but the project is proceeding. The Commission requested enhanced screening since the project area will need to encroach closer to the road in order to avoid wetlands.