

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
JANUARY 7, 2016 – 4:45 P.M.
SHORELINE OFFICE SUITES - 500 BRIDGE ST, GROTON

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Preka, Dowling, Young, Vignato, Cote, Hatcher (4:52), Mathanool (4:56),
Absent: McCormack, Legnos
Other: Frink, Obrey, Smith
Staff: Reiner, Bronk, Post

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:56 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES December 3, 2015 meeting

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the December 3, 2015 meeting as written.

Motion made by Young, seconded by Hatcher, so voted unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS- Preka submitted a letter to Dowling thanking her for positive communications during her role as chair.

IV. REPORTS

1. Chairperson – Chair’s report was previously submitted by email for review. The annual report was submitted last month; Dowling will present the Annual Report to the Town Council at the January 12th meeting. Dowling welcomed the EDC members to attend.
2. Strategic Planning Subcommittee – no meeting, no report.
3. Staff –Staff report was previously submitted by email for review. Prior to staff report Reiner addressed the EDC. He assured the EDC we are on track with Economic Development and that it is a top priority. We are wrapping up the zoning/market analysis and are moving into the implementation phase. The EDC is invited to the Focus Group meeting on January 11th. Stated we are looking to fill the Economic Development Specialist position, and the job has been posted with applications due at the end of January.

Bronk stated staff has been in communications with the DECD. They are interested in providing a grant to Groton for the Mystic Education Center for assistance with marketing and redevelopment of the property.

He reviewed the draft of the Plan of Conservation and Development for overall consistency with ongoing Economic Development efforts. The minimal comments were provided to the Assistant Director of Planning.

Bronk stated we received a call back and interviewed on December 18th for the Brownfield grant. Staff felt the interview went well and we should hear back mid-January. If the grant is awarded we will target the Poquonnock Bridge Village area with funds being used for marketing, planning, transportation, and design.

Bronk mentioned other projects in the works. The Airport Development Zone is still a priority. The application will be a big undertaking and is still being developed. The Mystic Visitors Information kiosk is being worked on, we are deciding between two options on how it is utilized. We will be working on a Business welcome package, an ideal template was found and we will look to start this spring. This will be used to help businesses looking to come to Groton to help them from beginning to end in the process. Staff reviewed and provided comments to a draft RFP for the operation of the water taxi service for the Thames River Heritage Park. Staff also participated in a meeting with the City to help improve the project.

Bronk stated the Town received a grant from the CTDEEP for an electric plug in vehicle and two dual charging stations. One will be placed at the library and one at the Annex. Young stated that the airport received money to put one dual charging station in as well. Staff said it was great for branding Groton to set us apart from other communities because the public can use these stations and it is a low cost to the town.

Bronk attended a public meeting in Harford regarding the Northeast Rail Corridor and provided verbal comments on behalf of Groton in favor of option #1. Option #1 best invests limited funding in existing rail line locations with the potential of new stop in a location between Mystic and New London.

Bronk mentioned staff is meeting with the Chamber to address vacancies in downtown Mystic. The issue was presented by merchants as relating to lease rates. Valente said that while he understands the land owners have rights; vacancies affect everyone when those store fronts are not occupied. Staff suggested that we find what the base rate is for rent and see if that is the issue. An action plan should be put in place and an effort to be positive with the land owners should be made.

4. Liaisons:
Al Valente will now provide reports for both the GBA and the DMM as he is now the Vice President of the DMM.

Groton Business Association – The next GBA meeting is January 21st , 7:30 am at the new Mystic Museum of Art (formerly the Mystic Art Center) at their new gallery on Water St (former Emporium). The Executive Director, George King, will be the featured speaker.

Downtown Mystic Merchants – Meetings are held the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Daniel Packer Inn.

Town Council – No report was submitted

MOTION: To accept the reports presented.

Motion made by Dowling, seconded by Vignato, so voted unanimously

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Market Analysis and Zoning Audit Update- Next Focus Group meeting will be Monday, January 11th. Staff emphasized having comments prepared for the meeting. Frink said that people are going to ask why we should believe what is in the Market Analysis and suggested that the consultants show examples of other places that they have done Market Analysis and how it has been successful.

Staff said they had a successful Zoning Commission meeting discussing the Zoning Audit. Smith said it was one of the best reports thus far and they were really thorough reading every word of the existing regulations. His concern is that it will take a long time to complete and hopes it doesn't. Staff they want to get it going, money is already being utilized and can be done in a year to 18 months.

2. Strategic Planning- The committee anticipates moving forward and are in hopes of meeting with a facilitator once the Market Analysis is complete.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Preka urged members of the EDC to attend other meetings to know what is going on in the community. Doing this would allow more info to be shared among the EDC that may be helpful in their efforts. Preka also is looking in to inviting a different staff member from different departments for a 10 minute presentation on what is going on so that EDC is in the know and so that the staff member can understand what the EDC is about.

2. Coordination with Staff - Preka and Bronk met to talk about EDC and OPDS collaborative efforts. A listing of such efforts was included in the agenda packet emailed prior to the meeting. Business outreach is one avenue that the EDC can assist staff. Preka stated each member can reach out to one business a month as an Ambassador to find out their needs and how they are doing. It was suggested that the EDC have a brochure and some tracking so there aren't multiple people going to the same business. Staff said there would be training and a brochure can be designed. The important thing is that they engage, listen, and convey the role of the EDC in hopes that it starts a dialogue and ideas can be shared.

Market Analysis Review & Implementation is an area for collaborative efforts. Once completed it is important that we take it to the next level and look at opportunities to fill in gaps and align incentive programs. Frink is looking for some milestones, at least with zoning. Staff stated that the Market Analysis will have some it is multidimensional and hard to put a timeline on it.

Staff said they are looking to do a consumer and business survey and would like input from the EDC.

Frink left a 6:15p

Economic Development Fund needs to be revisited; the use is limited to public infrastructure. Staff would like help looking at the language to amend it to be more flexible using it possibly for loans, grants or possibly partnering with business for advertising.

Economic Development website, staff is looking to either update the current site or look into a new site, something that doesn't have a Government feel. Smith is concerned with the cost and if there is money as it is expensive.

3. EDC Roster - EDC roster is still being modified, some letters have been sent out for reappointments. Preka invited anyone to come to any meeting, while it is Mark's decision as to who is appointed it doesn't hurt to recommend someone. Dowling asked if recommendations should be sent to Mark or if Preka would like them. Preka asked that the recommendations are sent to him and he will forward them to Mark.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 6:25 pm made by Dowling, seconded by Vignato, so voted unanimously

Catherine Young, Secretary
Economic Development Commission

Prepared by Lauren Post
Office Assistant II