

MINUTES  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
MARCH 3, 2016 – 4:45 P.M.  
TOWN HALL ANNEX – **COMMUNITY ROOM 2**

I. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Young, Preka, Hatcher, Cote, Dowling, Vignato, Legnos, Mathanool  
(5:06 p.m.)  
OTHERS: Nault, Bill Smith, Frink, Barber  
STAFF: Reiner, Mark Oefinger, Gilot

Chairman Preka called the meeting to order at 4:52 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF

1. February 4, 2016

MOTION: To adopt the February 4, 2016 minutes as amended.

Motion made by Dowling, seconded Cote. Motion passed unanimously.

The agenda was changed to move Mark Oefinger to next under the “Public Communications” section of the agenda.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Mark Oefinger presented an overview of the FY 2017 Town budget. He explained that it is a negative budget, but there will still be a tax increase due to a \$2 million deficit in revenues for this fiscal year. He explained the fund balance, the effects of the loss of the Pfizer building, and the Town Council’s decision to cut the tax rate in 2015. A tax increase will be proposed for next year. Rescissions in funding by the state were discussed. Oefinger said the Town’s health insurance is self-insured and insurance claims have been lower, and the Town has a new health consultant, which may result in some savings.

Oefinger distributed a copy of the “Groton School Facilities Initiative” Groton 2020 plan. Oefinger discussed the three new schools proposed: a middle school on the Merritt property, close Cutler and West Side Middle Schools, build new elementary schools on those sites, and close other elementary schools. The prices would be approximately \$200 million. The town is seeking special legislation to increase the amount of state aid. The town is currently eligible for 44% reimbursement, but hope to get that increased to 72-73%. There will be a school facilities meeting tonight at 6:30, and a presentation on March 16<sup>th</sup>, with hopes to start the referendum process. Oefinger encouraged everyone to attend the meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup>. A referendum must be ready to go, or a commitment shown by June that the Town will be ready by November for a referendum.

Reiner left at 5:16 pm.

The Commission and Oefinger discussed the school project, the square footage cost for renovation, and concerns with the dire state of the State's finances, as well as a probable tax increase for the Town.

Nault asked about the Merritt property negotiations. Oefinger explained that the land was purchased by the Town with open space funds, with purpose of building fields. Nothing has been done with the property, mostly due to objections by the community, and the state is critical that the Town has not done anything. The Town is currently in discussions with the state. The most popular proposal is for the Town to purchase another piece of property to use for active recreation in lieu of the Merritt property, and use the Merritt property to build a new middle school.

Young asked if the members should say anything about the school project when they are out talking to business owners or community members. Oefinger explained that it is just a concept right now until the Town Council and RTM agree to move ahead with the school project. A survey was done last year as part of the school initiative, and at least 50% of the respondents were supportive of an investment in the \$55-65,000,000 range. The State wants assurance that the project will be approved.

#### IV. REPORTS

1. Chair  
Preka reviewed his report. He said he attended the City EDC meeting last night. Juliet Hodge is no longer chair. He is working on a joint meeting with the City EDC, hopefully in May. He thanked the commissioners for their concerns and questions they have been emailing to him.
2. Subcommittee  
No meeting, no report.
3. Staff  
Staff was not in attendance; all questions will be accumulated for staff to address at the next meeting.
4. Liaisons  
Susan Dowling said she attended the GBA sponsored meeting at EB and provided an update.

Nault said she attended the Downtown Mystic Merchants meeting and provided updates. The snowflake social was well attended. The Mystic Stroll is May 7<sup>th</sup>; Sift Bakery is opening May 1<sup>st</sup>. Vignato asked about the kiosk; he said the bike swap at Bank Street Books would be a great location. Bonnie said the brochures cannot be outside. They need to be enclosed. There may be some space available at the train station. She said that Heather Bond has suggested an interactive map for the downtown area. Vignato and Preka said they may be able to build a nice weather-proof shed for the brochures. A cell phone app was also discussed. The Chairman said a member should be appointed to cover the various groups such as GBA and Downtown Mystic Merchants and bring a report back to the commission. The commission needs to be active and supportive of the community. Nault said she attends both of those meetings and asked what the commission is looking for in a Town Council report. Dowling said the report should contain anything that might be relative to the Economic Development

Commission. The commission discussed members attending group meetings, ribbon cuttings, and RTM and Town Council meetings.

Nault said the next RTM is Wednesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. She will not be there. A vote will be taken on the sale of Seely School and the settlement payment for the Mystic Streetscape.

Motion to accept the reports as presented was made by Dowling, seconded by Vignato, and passed unanimously.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Market Analysis and Zoning Audit Update – Cote said the final report was very well presented by the consultants. The critical issues were to change codes and regulations, fix customer service problem, industrial site readiness, mixed use, and improved, easy to maneuver website for economic development. Smith said some key elements included creating a development guide, public increment financing to encourage mixed use in downtown Groton; evaluation of town owned properties and market demand, which should be the next step, according to the consultant. They all agreed that Camoin is not done. Eight or ten opportunity areas were presented, but they should focus on one or two items.

2. Strategic Planning – No meeting, no report

3. EDC Brochure

The commission reviewed the draft brochure created by staff. They discussed the format, layout, and content, and who these recipients of these brochures would be. Hatcher offered to edit the document and send it to commissioners for comments. The commission discussed whether each member's business or affiliation should be listed, or maybe they should use a generic title rather than the specific business; conflicts of interest were discussed. Legnos said they may want to get the opinion of the Town Attorney. Nault would like Diane and herself added as Liaisons on the flyer.

Vignato and Young left at 6:16 pm.

The commission discussed the start and end time of meetings. Dowling felt that commissioners should stay until the meeting is adjourned. The Chairman would like to start the meetings on time.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Mark Oefinger, Groton Town Manager - Guest Speaker

Oefinger gave his presentation under "Public Communications".

2. EDC Budget

The Chairman would like to do a meet and greet joint meeting with the Town and City EDC Commissions; half of the cost of the meeting would be \$400. The Commission would like \$1,000 - \$2,000 discretionary funding to make their own flyers, host meetings, etc. Mathanool explained that historically there have not been any

funds for the EDC. He said approximately \$600 was set aside for members to attend meetings, training, etc. He also stated that Commissioner Peruzzotti gave \$30,000 to the EDC to put into 'growth things'. George said there is about \$1,000 each year to go to cocktail parties, etc. as ambassadors for the Town of Groton. This item was postponed to the next meeting.

3. EDC advocacy for Regulatory Review and Market Analysis recommendations during the FYE 2017 Town Budget process

This item was postponed to the next meeting. The Commission also discussed social media and Facebook access.

4. Other Business - None

## VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 6:34 pm made by Dowling, seconded by Cote. Motion passed unanimously.

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Catherine Young, Secretary  
Economic Development Commission

Prepared by Deb Gilot  
Office Assistant III