

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
April 7, 2016 – 4:45 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Preka, Dowling, Young, Vignato, Cote, Hatcher, Mathanool (4:57), Legnos (4:59)

Absent:

Other: Obrey, Barber, Nault, Flax

Staff: Bronk, Post

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:48 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES March 3, 2016 meeting

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the March 3, 2016 meeting as written.

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

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS-

Mayor Flax gave an overview of the budget process. Flax stated it is challenging to go through a budget process when the Town Manager's proposal is under budget and the Board of Education presented a "0" increase in their budget. Flax explained what Council looks at when making cuts to the budget. Flax said that he has heard several people speak about Paige Bronk and Jon Reiner. They are a great addition to the Town and create a sense of belief that they can get things going for Economic Development. Since becoming Mayor, Flax says he has been more involved in the community and encourages the EDC to attend other meetings and events as they are great resources. Flax thanked Preka for bringing everyone together stating the more you bring people together the more they get accomplished.

Cote said he has been involved for decades and doesn't want to see happen what has happened in the past where emphasis is put on something and then momentum is lost. Cote stated that if there is a time in history that they better keep the investment and effort going even against this budget, it is now. Flax said Cote's point is valid; last year's Town Council was trying to get things started and the current Council is behind that.

IV. REPORTS

1. Chairperson – Chair's report was previously submitted by email for review. Preka met with Young and Vignato about the length of the meetings and other items of protocol. Preka stated that there may be times that the meetings run over as they try to achieve the goals of the meetings, but he will try to make it more efficient. Preka also met with Bronk and Dowling regarding getting the EDC members involved in other meetings. The EDC gets support from others; Preka wants the EDC to show support as well. Preka met with Craig Melin, Chair for the City EDC. Preka stated that the meeting was positive and they will continue to work together.

2. Strategic Planning Subcommittee – no meeting, no report.
3. Staff –Staff report was previously submitted by email for review. Bronk announced that Sam Eisenbeiser has been hired as the Town of Groton’s Economic Development Specialist. His start date is April 11th. Valente stated he had the pleasure of sitting in on the first round of interviews and was happy with the decision saying Eisenbeiser stood out above the other candidates and will fit in nicely with Bronk and Reiner. Vignato seconded Valente’s statement adding that he had a lot of energy and will attack whatever he is given.

Staff is working on the final edits for the Market Analysis. Staff continues to work with Camoin regarding marketing/promotions. Funding has been requested in the 2017 budget for a stand-alone Economic Development web page, public relations, and community signage.

Staff is working with Great Blue Research to develop a survey to measure consumer and business sentiment in the area. This will complement the market analysis data.

Staff provided testimony in Hartford to try to gain access to other properties adjacent to the Mystic Oral School. There has been ongoing communication between Staff and the DECD regarding this property including funding for marketing.

The Town of Groton received a second grant for an additional EV plug charging station. This will be installed at Town Hall.

Staff has partnered with CERC to assist in completing the Airport Development Zone application; the hope is we will wrap it up this summer.

Staff has been reviewing existing local and state incentives. The goal is to develop an easy to use guide to help business better select appropriate incentives.

Staff received two Economic Development Funds from local businesses that are expanding. Staff will package the requests and bring them to Town Council. Staff is providing assistance to a local business in completing an Enterprise Zone business incentive application for submittal to the State.

Staff continues discussing the idea of pairing a “pop up shop” with information kiosk. It will help small businesses who can’t get started, solves vacancy issues with downtown, and helps with the kiosk.

An operator has been chosen for the Water Taxi at the Thames River Heritage Park, staff was active with the selection. Memorial Day is the targeted launch.

CTDOT is replacing all signs on I-95 from New London to the RI border. Plans have been provided to municipalities for review and comment. The destination signage is a key opportunity to gain exposure by passerbys. They are allowing businesses to design their own panel if interested. The business would be responsible for the cost. Obrey asked if it was going to include signage on the New London side of the Gold Star Bridge. They need to be advertising there

before people are already upon the exits for Groton. Bronk wasn't sure if that was something they would be able to do. Bronk has done the in house review and is seeking comments before the meeting with the DOT. Nault stated there have been complaints that the 117 exit only directs people to the 184 side of Groton and not into the Town for gas, food, etc. Bronk says it's fortuitous since money was requested in the budget for community signage; it is great that it is coming together. Obrey stated that new street signs are also needed but Bronk said main destinations would be the focus.

Bronk announced that Ivory Ella will be leaving Groton due to an inability to locate a building suitable for their growing needs. Bronk stated that it's an example of what the Market Analysis stated; Groton needs at least shells of buildings that are ready to go for businesses. Businesses don't want to build; they want to move in quickly. Cote stated that Ivory Ella is currently a tenant in his space. Cote stated they have grown quickly and Bronk and Reiner presented to Ivory Ella and actively tried to find a location in Groton. Cote said that while we lost Ivory Ella it was not for a lack of trying by the Staff which is encouraging. Legnos said that also the zoning regulations are cumbersome. Legnos said it is a lengthy process to get approvals which is another big problem when wanting to expand.

4. Liaisons:

Groton Business Association – Valente spoke at the March 29th Town Council meeting to advocate on behalf of the OPDS budget. seCTer has a free software that has questions to ask businesses during visitations. This is a great recourse for business outreach that should be used. The Annual Business Update will be May 19th, you can register at the Chamber's website and the cost is \$20 per person or \$125 for a corporate table for 8.

Downtown Mystic Merchants – Valente reported it is event season for DMMA. Spring Stroll is May 7th, Mystic ½ marathon and 10K is Sunday May 15th and is sold out. They have over 2000 runners. They are applying for a NEIBA Grant for up to \$7,500 to create a visitors app for downtown. Valente also mentioned the new tourism website CTvisit.com. Vignato stated he will use it for his business, the website is very graphic, the content is constantly updated, keeping it current and fresh. Young said it provides information about attractions/businesses as well as events.

Town Council – No report was submitted

Bronk reminded all that seCTer's Groton sub regional SWOT meeting for the 2016 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan is on Monday, April 11th. Attendance is important as the input will be tabulated and incorporated for the final CEDS document for Southeastern Connecticut.

Preka stated that the next meeting was going to be a joint meeting with the city and asked if the members would mind changing the time to 5:30p, all agreed.

MOTION: To accept the reports presented.

Motion made by Dowling, seconded by Legnos, so voted unanimously.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Strategic Planning- Bronk stated that the members have been asking about collaboration efforts with staff. Bronk provided a handout about how they can work together with staff. Business outreach is important, helping businesses find homes by participating in the site selectors that are sent out. Bronk feels the EDC can play a role in helping match people with locations for their businesses. Bronk said the Economic Development fund needs to be reformulated and the guideline packet should be repackaged. Bronk stated he needed assistance with items outside of the monthly meetings. Legnos asked what he would like to start with and Bronk said the Economic Development Fund was a top priority. Legnos agreed to help with that and Preka suggested a subcommittee be put in place to help.

MOTION: To have an Economic Development Fund Ad Hock task force

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

Dowling, Mathanool, Vignato, and Legnos agreed to make up the body of the subcommittee to rewrite the Economic Development Fund guidelines. The goal is to have it done this summer.

2. EDC Brochure- Hatcher prepared a brochure for the committee to review which was submitted via email prior to the meeting.

MOTION: To approve the EDC Brochure with amendments

Motion made my Dowling, seconded by Mathanool, so voted unanimously.

3. EDC Advocacy- Bronk stated that as a priority the EDC wants to advocate for Economic Development, on Tuesday April 12th the Planning Department will present their budget to the Town Council. Bronk requested attendance as they will be asking for \$150,000 to rewrite the zoning regulations and an additional \$60,000 for web site, marketing, etc. for Economic Development. Preka urged attendance from the commission members.

4. EDC Budget- Preka is asking for an EDC budget of \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the EDC to host events, pay for materials, etc. Preka referenced the upcoming "Get to Know Groton" event, there was discussion regarding this item. Hatcher felt that this is something that they should all vote on. Preka asked for input via email about what the budget should include and will create one they can vote on.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. EDC By-Laws- Dowling is proposing that the term lengths be changed in the bylaws to two years instead of one so the person in the role can really learn the position. Preka asked that the discussion on the bylaws be postponed to a future meeting.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 6:57 pm made by Dowling, seconded by Cote, so voted unanimously.

Catherine Young, Secretary
Economic Development Commission

Prepared by Lauren Post
Office Assistant II