

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
July 6, 2017 – 4:45 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Dowling, Preka, Melin, Young, Cote, Hatcher (4:55), Mathanool (5:02)
Absent: Legnos, Brooks
Other: Nault, Valente, Obrey
Staff: Bronk, Eisenbeiser, Post

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:52 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

July 6, 2017

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the July 6, 2017 meeting as amended

Motion made by Dowling, seconded by Melin; so voted unanimously

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS- None

IV. REPORTS

1. Chairperson – The Chair report was submitted via email for review. Preka stated that he meets with many people throughout the month whether it is one on one, group meetings, or a function. Preka picked a new business this past month to visit; he has known the owner for many years. He went and spoke to them to see how they are doing and if they need assistance. Preka encouraged the commission to do the same. People appreciate when you take the time to meet with them. Melin stated that the commission could have dual purposes if there is a logic as to who they are reaching out to. They were waiting to address it with the subcommittee once Cote was present. Melin stated with a purpose they could accomplish two things, one is the goal of outreach and the second would be whatever it is they decide is useful to the economic development commission. Cote stated that they intentionally focused on the WRPD and the turnout was reflective of the effort and that they need to refocus back on the list we have and how to move forward.

2. Staff– Staff report was previously submitted by email for review and was reviewed by Bronk.

Marketing/Website – Bronk stated that we plan on launching the website by fall 2017. There will be pictures and video that will make an immediate impression. Having professional video taken can be costly, GMTV will do one video for us and we may also be able to obtain some drone footage. Staff continues to work with Camion on marketing materials for new business packet.

Logo/Branding Contest – The selected logo and slogan were brought to the Town Council. Council did endorse the logo and it is now being refined by a graphic designer.

CT Next/Innovation Places – Groton and New London were successful in being designated as one of four innovation place communities. The award is up to \$900,000 there are caveats and matching requirements. One of the efforts that was focused on internally was the undersea technology consortium located at Avery Point.

Nautilus Dock Extension – Staff was successful in securing \$730,000 for the Nautilus Dock extension; Eisenbeiser did most of the work on that grant submittal. Town of Groton was instrumental in securing that funding and will be the contacts for that in the future.

Wayfinding Signage – Staff and Beta had a kick off meeting for this initiative. When all is complete there will be a complete wayfinding signage plan for Groton.

Mystic Education Center – There will be a public meeting held on July 22nd. Bronk reported that this is not a real estate transaction it is a redevelopment project; there are significant differences between the two. Staff wants the best development for the location. Overall the project is going well and an RFP will be released in the fall. Bronk noted that there is a landing page on the website where interested parties can obtain information.

Seely School – A new sign will be going up promoting the development opportunity for Seely School. Staff will begin to market this property as well.

CDBG – The application for an \$800,000 grant has been submitted. The state is reviewing the application.

Bronk added that he and Eisenbeiser participated in a Webinar dealing with business outreach. One of the comments that he keeps hearing from the commission is should we be broad or should we be targeted. Bronk states that this is a national debate and communities all over struggle with it. Those in favor of taking a broad approach state it isn't always about an outcome it is about building relationships and to get out there and listen and engage with different sizes and sectors. The other side is to be targeted and objective oriented maybe choosing a particular sector or new businesses only, it's a philosophical discussion. Bronk stated it was good to see that other communities are wrestling with the same philosophical discussions that the EDC is.

Preka thanked staff for doing a phenomenal job with all of their efforts. Young congratulated staff on the awards they have received; Not only the projects themselves but obtaining that amount of money for grants, especially in this day.

3. Liaisons:

Groton Business Association – Valente reported that the June 29th meeting was at the Submarine Museum. Valente commended Obrey on securing the location. Valente stated that maintaining community relationships with the Navy Base and to recognize and honor them whenever we can is important. The next meeting is on July 19th at the Thames River Heritage Park, there will be a water taxi ride. Valente said to show up by 5 pm for a nice summer fun evening.

Downtown Mystic Merchants – Valente reported that DMM is an events driven organization. The swim contest that was scheduled has been cancelled. Mystic has become a mecca of athletic events with the ½ marathon, and the Noank run but this event had a lack of attendees. Hopefully they will try again in 2018 to get it back. The Sabino will be back in the water after 2 years as it leads the Antique Boat Parade. Valente reported good news for the Stonington side of Mystic, there will be a new butcher shop/restaurant/bar called Grass and Bone where the old Cafe 511 was. The steel will be arriving this fall for Central Hall where 6 store fronts on the Groton side with condos above will be constructed.

RTM – Obrey reported that the RTM is quiet this time of year. There is a Charter Revision Committee that is working on changes that they feel need to come to Groton. One of the things they are suggesting is eliminating the RTM which Obrey feels is not a positive thing. Each area of Groton is represented on the RTM, Obrey stated it is probably the fairest larger form of Government. The RTM works very hard on the budget especially and other items that come up throughout the year. Currently the recommendation is to have a smaller 5 person group to make the financial decisions that are recommended to the Council and Obrey states that would be a poor representation to the town. Obrey hopes that people will read what is coming out because it will be going for a vote. Obrey stated that many people don't understand what the RTM is and she is hoping to be able to get tighter to put an educational piece together.

Town Council – Nault reported the new town manager is in Town. Mark Oefinger's retirement party is at the Hilton Garden Inn on July 27th. Young asked where the combining of the planning and zoning was and Nault stated that she believes it is on the agenda for their next meeting.

Groton Utilities – Preka noted that the report was previously submitted by email for review and encouraged the commission to read it.

Business Outreach – Preka stated that a subcommittee was formed for business outreach and states maybe we need some restructuring at this time. Preka asked if Melin and Cote could sit down to give the commissioners an idea of what businesses they can visit. Cote stated he would like some feedback from the group. Cote stated that they were able to create a database with help from Eisenbeiser; we know who the businesses are and who the land owners are. It seems more effective to speak to the land owner because they are networked with multiple businesses. Cote stated that since they have all this data it needs to be prioritized and he would like to have a discussion amongst the commissioners. Preka stated that originally they had picked 10 new businesses from a list provided by the Mystic Chamber via email and that maybe we should do that again. Cote stated that if we do that then we sidestep businesses that already exist in town and if we know of businesses that have potential growth or looking to develop and invest in the town they are prime candidates and the ones we should be talking to. Preka still feels that we should go to the list that is already established and get out to 10 businesses. Cote felt that the Chamber list wasn't the right fit. Melin stated that this ties into the purposes of the EDC. If they knew what their purpose was and what they wanted to be different because they meet they could use that to help with the selection process for outreach which would further whatever their goal is. It would then

be more than just going out to meet people but trying to cause something to happen as a result. Melin used Hartford as an example. They are failing as a place for major companies to want to do business because they don't have a nice place to visit, a nice place to live, all the things that Groton does have. Melin thinks we should be positioning ourselves to be more attractive to larger entities. Melin also suggested that we could also be working with communities adjacent to us so this region takes something on and we support it by talking to companies that might have those interests so we are trying to get something more that furthers the purposes of the EDC. Melin states that it feels like a process without a purpose. Cote stated he felt that there was a purpose and that was simply to increase awareness and communication with the businesses. Melin stated that they can accomplish that no matter what. Nault stated that the reason why she ran for council and is involved is because she wanted to reduce taxes and grow the grand list and she feels it is pretty simple. Nault says that they should be doing things to help businesses grow in Groton. Nault suggested they take a list of people that are applying for permits and go talk to them. See if they have any problems, if they are having trouble, we can help to fix it. Preka stated that the question being asked is what the purpose of the EDC is and he states it's already been done. Preka said he doesn't feel that they should go backwards. Cote said it might be a combination of things when coming up with a list stating they may look at the groups and create a mix amongst the categories of businesses to go visit. Cote said that they will work on some things at the subcommittee level. Young stated that she is comfortable with the subcommittee moving forward. Bronk states that he feels that a subcommittee is the best way to handle how they go about their outreach. In order to get traction it does require more time outside of the one EDC meeting a month. They took a reprieve to focus on the WRPD and that was the right choice. The question that needs to be answered now is, are they going to cast a wide net and do more relationship building or a more targeted approach with clear objectives. There are many approaches that are all very different so they need to figure out at the subcommittee level which approach makes most sense and bring it back to the group. Dowling would like to recommend that the subcommittee focus on a targeted approach. Cote agreed and they will have a subcommittee meeting but stated they would get something out to the commission in the meantime. Dowling asked if we have a welcome packet that is handed out to new businesses. Bronk said they don't but they will soon. When Bronk talks about the hard marketing pieces that are being drafted those are the sorts of things that will be included in the packet. The Doing Business in Groton Guide is nearing completion which will give a step by step guide to the process of opening a business as well.

Hatcher stated that when she wanted to join the EDC her goal was to look at how to grow businesses, attract businesses, and generate more revenue for the town to help offset taxes. She isn't sure that reaching out to businesses and visiting to get their thoughts reaches those objectives. Hatcher also believes in a targeted approach not necessarily a specific industry but something with more of a purpose. She thinks we should target businesses that may be having issues to try to help them overcome those road blocks. Hatcher also states that if we are more attractive then Hartford shouldn't we talk to those businesses up there that might be looking to move and try to get them to Groton. Bronk stated that he refers to the market analysis almost weekly and there is a section regarding outreach. The short answer as to why outreach is important is that the number one rule is to retain your current businesses. If you tend to existing businesses

and make sure they are happy they may grow or may attract other businesses to town. Melin felt that they were talking about two different things, one being how to choose and one being the value of choosing. Cote stated that the input from the commission has been helpful. Young stated that she did do outreach with a business owner and they had expressed some concern and frustration but then suggested that there be a business advocate between businesses and the town. The advocate should follow up and see how things are going as well as a guide throughout the process. She said that while the conversation wasn't necessarily comfortable since the business owner had some frustrations she felt positive just that the interaction was made.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. General Discussion – Young stated that we now have a vacancy in the EDC. Since we now have a new town manager we should proceed with filling the vacancy. Preka stated that he would reach out to John Burt on behalf of the EDC; he is looking for recommendations from the EDC so that he can present the town manager with resumes. Preka stated he will email Burt and forward resumes that are received. Young was disappointed that Denno wasn't able to continue with the EDC as he added a military voice.

Obrey asked if we have talked more about a joint EDC meeting with the City. Melin stated that he reached out to the Vice Chair. They are open to meeting but summer is not the right time and they currently don't have an official chair. Melin is happy to continue as a point of contact. Melin suggested when they do have a meeting that the agenda is dedicated solely to the joint meeting.

2. Facebook – Preka has created the page but hasn't moved forward with it yet. In the meantime Preka asked the commission to email Preka or Post about what the commission members would like to see posted on the Facebook page. Young questioned if it was checked that they could have the page as indicated in the minutes from the previous month's meeting. Eisenbeiser said that it was. Hatcher thought we were checking with legal about any risks there might be having a Facebook page to ensure that they weren't violating any rules of the town. Bronk will check and get back to the commission.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Combined Planning and Zoning – Bronk said that the market analysis recommends having a combined planning and zoning commission. The proposal before the council is to eliminate the zoning commission and shift the duties to the planning commission. Bronk said having a combined planning and zoning commission is common nationwide. Bronk stated that it appears that on Tuesday night the Council would take a vote, if not then it would be done on the 18th. Hatcher asked if there was support to combine the commission, Nault stated there was with the current council. Bronk suggested that they look for the council agenda to come out and if it is on the agenda the EDC can come and support it, as it's always helpful.
2. WRPD – Bronk stated that the 100 foot non disturbance area passed. Bronk passed out a copy of an email from Jones with clarification on one point. Buffer isn't the correct term; the correct term is a non-disturbance area. Non-disturbance area means no changes can be made; a buffer is the distance

between the property lines to an area you are doing something on. The email clarifies how they handled it, there was some leniency provided. Any time there is an impact greater than 25% of the gross area of the lot they will relax the non-disturbance back to 50 ft.

3. Zoning Map Amendment – The town is seeking to change the zone for Seeley school from RA-12 to CA-12. This would allow for mixed use, multifamily housing, and limited commercial. Bronk asked if the EDC would provide support for this change. Bronk stated that staff believes this will help to expedite the development of the parcel and increase interest in the property by developers. There will be a public hearing on this on August 2nd.

MOTION: For the EDC to submit a letter of support for the zoning map amendment for 91 & 105 Walker Hill Road and 55 Seely School Drive from R-12 to CA-12 made by Hatcher, seconded by Young; so voted unanimously.

Hatcher left a 6:37 pm.

4. Marketing – Bronk discussing the website, materials, and branding. Staff needs quotes from business owners that they will use. A letter has been drafted to reach out to businesses requesting quotes. If the commission has names of businesses that they can get a good quote from Bronk requests the commission email it to staff.

V. ADJOURNMENT

1. Motion to adjourn at 6:47 pm was made by Dowling, seconded by Cote; so voted unanimously.

Dave Cote, Secretary
Economic Development Commission

Prepared by Lauren Post
Office Assistant II