

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
SEPTEMBER 3, 2015 – 4:45 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Dowling, Obrey, Hatcher, Preka, Legnos, Mathanool (4:59 p.m.)
Excused: Cote, Vignato, Young
Other: Valente, Frink, Smith,
Staff: Clarke, Bronk, Gilot

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:55 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES of special meeting of August 6, 2015

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the August 6, 2015 meeting as amended.

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

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Carroll Gothie – The Chair noted a letter was sent by the commission to Ms. Gothie acknowledging her issues with the town. A copy of the letter was enclosed in the agenda packet.

Brendan Woolrich discussed his business, The Sandbox (indoor beach volleyball). He is building a 15,000 sq ft building located on Route 184 where he plans to reopen after relocating from Mystic. A discussion by the Commission about indoor sporting/entertainment theme in Groton ensued.

IV. REPORTS

1. Chairperson – Chair's report was previously submitted by email for review.
2. Strategic Planning Subcommittee – The Chair submitted a report with the agenda packet.
3. Staff – Staff's report was submitted in the agenda packet. Staff briefly reviewed her report.

Staff was asked if the movie theater had been pursued. They also asked about William Seely School. Staff did not have any information on either subject.

Staff provided an update on the Thames River Heritage Park and water taxi. The transition team is creating a time line for the transition to a new non-profit and Board of Directors. It is their hope that by Memorial Day 2016 everything will be done and transferred to the new non-profit. It was mentioned that Friends of Fort Griswold are a major support. Preka proposed if staff hears of a business closing, the commission should be notified. This was a result of the movie theater closing. Staff said no indication was made to anyone in the town of the closure but the marketing consultant is aware and will include the information as part of their assessment.

Staff said an exit interview for businesses was discussed at the last meeting. Staff cannot find much information on this and rather than focusing on the negative, it was suggested the town be more offensive, working with new businesses. Business outreach is done daily in the OPDS. When businesses leave it is difficult to find them to interview, it's usually too late, and most times there is nothing that could have been done by the town for various reasons. Business retention was discussed.

Staff addressed the department's goal of prioritization, focus and efficiency, ADZ, and incentives. Outreach and market analysis are the best ways to measure the needs of the community. Obrey feels the town needs to know if a business left, what was the reason, and could the town have done something. The commission members would be interested in being liaisons between the businesses and the commission. Business caravans were discussed. Individual interaction with business owners by the commissioners could be helpful.

Clarke left at 5:45 pm.

Staff discussed the Tees Plus building. Hatcher said the value of the loss to the town should be assessed when doing business outreach.

The Commission discussed business outreach, businesses closing in town, assessing the value of the loss to the town, and the impacts on surrounding businesses. The commission should deal with the business leaving. Real estate analysis, business analysis discussed.

4. Liaisons -

Groton Business Association- The GBA report was emailed to the commission prior to the meeting for their review. Valente provided a brief update.

Downtown Mystic Merchants – Valente provided updates on upcoming events: food festival, looking for volunteers, Pirate Invasion, October 16th fundraiser.

Obrey said vendors/businesses are needed for fall festival, especially food vendors.

Preka left at 5:56 p.m.

Town Council – No report

MOTION: To accept the reports presented.

Motion made by Legnos, seconded by Obrey, so voted unanimously

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Market Analysis and Zoning Audit Update – focus group meeting planned in October. The market analysis draft should be submitted to staff for review by early next week. The Chair encouraged all commissioners to attend the next meeting.

2. Strategic Planning – The Top 6 priorities were included in the agenda packet. It was discussed at a previous meeting that a workshop may be preferred, and a facilitator hired. The Chair thought it might be better to wait until the draft of the analysis comes out. It should be the entire group participating, maybe on a Saturday morning, or after a regular meeting hold a facilitated meeting after the next market analysis meeting.

MOTION: To hold a special strategic planning workshop meeting after the market analysis is completed.

Motion made by Hatcher, seconded by Legnos.

Obrey asked if the experts would provide information during the meeting. Staff said they will provide a preliminary draft of their findings to the focus group.

Motion passed unanimously.

Cote would like to hear suggestions from staff on how to organize or make progress on the top 6 priorities. He suggested changing #2 to say the commission would actively participate and take action.

The Chair said she is looking for information to put in the Economic Development Commission's annual report to the Town Council. Staff will email an old report that the Commission can use as a template.

Obrey recommended a book on tape that she would be happy to share, "*That Used to be Us*" by Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum.

Smith asked about the progress of the POCD update. Staff did not have an update available. Smith commented that a survey done by Archie Swindell ranked the issues of the RTM the same as the POCD.

The Commission asked staff to invite the Chair of the Planning Commission to attend the October meeting, and the Parks and Recreation Director to the November meeting.

Staff said there is a joint meeting of the Town Council, RTM, and Board of Education next week, and he hoped to do a PowerPoint presentation on Economic Development administration.

Staff asked the commission to partner with them in soliciting for the Town's official federal designation, nominated by Congress, as "The Submarine Capital of the World", as part of the 100th year birthday of the Navy. The designation would provide a marketing asset to the Town. Staff would like it on the agenda for the next meeting for a formal endorsement. Obrey said she would talk to Betsy Gibson, who was involved with the initial designation. Valente said there is a 100 year celebration meeting tomorrow.

MOTION: The Economic Development Commission move a resolution designating Groton as the Submarine Capital of the World and to move forward with seeking that official designation.

Motion made by Hatcher, seconded by Legnos. Motion passed unanimously.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Other Business – None

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 6:28 pm made by Hatcher, seconded by Obrey, so voted unanimously

Tom Vignato, Secretary
Economic Development Commission

Prepared by Debra Gilot
Office Assistant III