

TOWN OF WETHERSFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting of February 12, 2004 At Town Manager's conference room

Members present: John Breglio
Tony Camilliere
Tom Grottke
Joan Hughes
Cindy Ramirez-Jacobs
Chris Lyons
Ken Rizzio

Also present: Phil Knecht, P&Z Liaison
Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager
Peter Gillespie, Dir., Planning & Economic Dev.
Paul Courchaine, Silas Deane Hwy Rev. Cmte.
Joe Cornelio, resident
Marie Massaro, P&ED, EDIC Secretary

Chairman Tony Camilliere called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m.

Minutes - Tony asked for approval of [the January meeting minutes](#). Tom Grottke made a motion, seconded by Ken Rizzio and approved unanimously.

Subcommittee Reports

Marketing/Communications

Joan Hughes reported they are focused on the Business Visitation program. Questionnaires are being drafted and there will be a mandatory training session with dates to be announced, probably in mid-March.

Finance

Ken Rizzio reported that he, Peter Gillespie and Tony met with Mark Walker, Fleet Bank, to discuss the loan program. One concern Mark raised was that banks could be approached by other towns if they contribute to Wethersfield's program. Next steps are to set up meetings with other banks and firm up commitment from the Council. Tony said the Council seems very supportive, and that loans would focus on beautification and façade improvement primarily on the Silas Deane Highway.

Development

Tom Grottke reported the subcommittee has established a regular meeting date of the first Thursday of each month at 3:00 in the Town Manager's conference room. He met with the Silas Deane Highway Revitalization Committee (SDHRC) to get background and go over the SDH Master Plan. Much has changed since the plan's development in 1987, and it will require updating, taking into consideration the new planning and zoning regulations and the 2001 Plan of Conservation and Development.

Discussion then turned to the design review regulations in the draft planning and zoning guidelines. Tom noted there are no skill set requirements for Planning and Zoning commission members, and he'd like to see that in appointees for the Design Review Board. Peter suggested staggered terms so not all memberships turn over at the same time,

providing continuity. Paul Courchaine asked if the DRB would be a mandatory first step in the planning and zoning process. Peter stated applications would go to the DRB for review but compliance with its recommendations couldn't be mandatory. Tom stated the intent is to streamline the process, not make it more bureaucratic.

Tom stated the subcommittee is considering what the target areas for development focus should be, and is drafting a preliminary list of about 20 sites, including contiguous properties with different owners, and seeing how we can maximize use. He stated the initial research would be labor intensive; Peter noted that some Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) interns may be available. Peter said the property listing may initially be in Excel but ultimately would like to use GIS. Tom stated this work could be the foundation for a redevelopment authority, but there are considerable costs related to researching and proposing such an entity.

Town Manager's Report

Bonnie stated she's meeting with CCSU next week, and ideas on how to best utilize interns are welcome. The application deadline for the part-time secretary position is next week; there was a good response.

Peter reviewed his January Town Council report on economic development activity. The Town House Motel is getting new doors, windows and a sign; the pool has been filled in and may become a retail pad site. Sovereign Bank is doing some interior renovations. Peter referred to the Wethersfield profile in the Connecticut Economic Digest and will provide copies to all members. The Tourism Commission has developed a plan that will market Wethersfield through area restaurants and hotels; Cindy asked if that plan includes tie-ins to the new convention center. He also attended a realtors' reception and said many were interested in the idea of an EDIC realtors breakfast to discuss collaboration with them.

John Breglio asked about developers such as OR&L, and noted that New Boston is a growing presence in the area. Peter stated that if we host a developers' breakfast, they will be added to the list of invitees.

Planning and Zoning Liaison report

Phil Knecht reported there was a meeting among approximately 60 Old Wethersfield residents to discuss the new regulations, particularly grandfather clauses and if/how those clauses transfer with a property sale. They are working to clarify this issue. Hart Seed and Comstock Ferre in particular will need special provisions to address its business requirements.

Phil stated that Scot Haney from WFSB-3 is scheduled to visit Wethersfield in early October; Tony asked the Marketing subcommittee to follow up. Phil also said that businesses are coming to P&Z during the pre-application process, and it's been very positive.

Silas Deane Highway Revitalization Committee liaison report

Paul raised the question of spending money on new signs for the Silas Deane Highway, saying signs are integral to overall capital improvements, and he'd like to use \$5,000 of the \$50,000 allocated to SDH improvements. Tom noted there are many needs, and everyone needs to agree on priorities; his own opinion is that the loan program is a top priority. Tom also stated the original plan is a great starting point but needs to be updated; that can help set priorities.

Bonnie stated Rocky Hill is interested in seeing our updated plan and working with us. Cindy Jacobs-Ramirez asked about the original charge of the SDHRC. Paul said the committee was formed to fill a void because no one was focusing on the SDH. Cindy said her impression was that its focus was beautification, and asked what would be the agenda for the planned meeting between SDHRC, EDIC and others. Bonnie stated it was to get both groups together and discuss how they move forward. Tony stated it requires more than updating the SDH plan, because one message from last fall's Economic Development Summit was to speak with one voice when approaching the State or Federal government.

Bonnie stated the \$50,000 allocated to the Silas Deane Highway needs to be spent by June 30 since it's considered operating funds. Paul stated the State DOT has not given final approval on a number of items including the white

welcome sign and uplighting. Bonnie said Council members are meeting with State legislators and will see if they can get things moving.

Tony circulated the list of Town Council meetings and asked members who had not signed up to attend to please do so. Peter stated the first meeting of the month is the priority. Bonnie and Phil both agreed that Council members notice presence (and absence) of committee members.

Budget

Peter said there was money available to increase Marie Massaro's hours to about 15 hours, and that the secretary will also use some of the remaining funds. Tom asked if remaining funds beyond those two items could be reallocated to the revolving loan program; Bonnie stated they could be. Peter referenced the Tourism Commission's budget in everyone's package; this is a separate line item in the EDIC budget. Tom asked if money from this year's budget could be spent on updating the SDH plan, and Peter said that was feasible.

Ken asked if the SDH \$50,000 could be reallocated to the loan program; its initial wording is somewhat vague, and façade improvement could fall under the initial intent. Tony said having money allocated to the loan program would be helpful in approaching banks, and that next year's budget could include the North End improvements. Tony said 2004-2005 budgets are needed ASAP so these issues can be finalized.

Summit Follow-up

Tony stated that it's been almost six months since the Economic Development summit, and EDIC needs to follow up with the community on its progress. Tom agreed, stating we're asking for additional funding and need to provide some context. Chris Lyons suggested we present in late April, after the business visitation program is underway and before the public hearing on the budget. April 29 is the tentative date for a status update meeting.

Tony asked for motion to adjourn the meeting; it was made by Tom Grottke, seconded by Ken Rizzio and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 1:55.