

Town of Wethersfield
Economic Development and Improvement Commission
Minutes of the March 11, 2004 meeting

Attendees: Members Tony Camilliere, Joan Hughes, Chris Lyons, and John Breglio as well as Julie Montinieri and Andy Adil (Town Councilors), Paul Courchaine and Phil Knecht (committee liaisons), Peter Gillespie, Bonnie Therrien, Marie Massaro and Christine Paul (staff).

Chairman Tony Camilliere called the meeting to order at 11:45 p.m. He introduced Councilor Julie Montinieri and welcomed her to the EDIC. Peter Gillespie introduced Christine Paul, who is working as a temp on the targeted development sites project.

Tony skipped over approval of the February meeting minutes due to a lack of a quorum. He asked the subcommittees to provide updates.

Marketing/Communications subcommittee report

Chris Lyons said the subcommittee is focused on the business visitation program (BVP). There will be a meeting with Todd Andrews of the Metro Hartford Alliance on the 15th at 8 a.m. Postcards will be mailed to targeted blocks, first on the Silas Deane. Letters asking for meeting dates will be sent to the top taxpayers and to those who requested a meeting in the Chamber survey. The committee reviewed the survey documents. In response to Phil Knecht, Chris said visitations are scheduled to begin April 7. The goal is to visit 30-50 businesses a week, but it depends on how many volunteers there are. Peter Gillespie noted Wethersfield Life would do an article about the program appearing the week before training begins. Phil suggested high school students as possible volunteers; Julie suggested the Wethersfield Studies class at the high school, taught by Ms. Jordan. A packet of information will be left with each business owner, including the monthly economic development report, Chamber of Commerce information and the new Tourism Commission package. There will be a mandatory training session for anyone interested in conducting business visitations, on March 30 at 5 p.m. in the Police Dept. Community Room.

Tom Grottke and Joe Cornelio joined the meeting at 12:15.

Chris said John Breglio will head the realtors breakfast to be held in the second quarter. Andy Adil noted that Curt Clemens/Century 21 is very interested. Phil suggested holding the breakfast at a site with lots of recent development activity.

Finance Subcommittee

Tony Camilliere said the Finance subcommittee did not meet this month but continues to work on the loan program. There is one more meeting with local banks, and they are looking at the April EDIC meeting to report on progress and get approval to proceed. They would then present to the Council in May.

Tony stopped the subcommittee reports to ask for approval of [the February meeting minutes](#). Tom Grottke made a motion to approve and Chris Lyons seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

Development Subcommittee

Tom Grottke and Peter Gillespie discussed the meeting held with representatives of the Silas Deane Highway Revitalization Committee, Planning and Zoning, Council members and others. They discussed the SDH Master Plan, and Peter said he was following up with the SDHRC to review the plan and update work that's been done, items no longer relevant, etc. Peter said the review needs to move quickly and reflect input from all stakeholders, including boards, commissions, and especially merchants and property owners.

Paul Courchaine reported he met with Mike Turner, Carmela Moore, Senator Fonfara and a representative from the

State DOT. They obtained approval to put up a sign, stone walls, plantings in dividers and do stamped concrete in turn lanes on the Silas Deane. The plan costs \$1 million but needs \$200,000 in Town commitment. Up to \$800,000 of Federal funds could be available.

Tony stated this sounds like a positive development but asked if we should wait until the SDH plan is reviewed and prioritized. Tom asked if we had \$800,000 for development, what would we choose to allocate it toward? Paul said the money was raised in terms of a very specific project; changing the scope could jeopardize the funding. Tony suggested waiting until the plan was reviewed, since State legislators at the Summit said the Town needs to speak with one voice. Paul noted this is Federal funds, and the State could be approached for something else. Bonnie noted that the STP funds could be eliminated soon, and they have very specific requirements on where they can be used.

Tom thanked Christine for working on identifying 25-30 underperforming parcels that project a poor image of the Town. She is gathering information on current owners, taxes and assessments, and building a database. That will hopefully lead to a dialogue with owners. Two sites have been selected for this initial effort: Progress Drive and the Puritan Furniture site. Peter will be contacting the owners. John Breglio asked if contacting these 25-30 property owners would duplicate the Business Visitation program outreach; Chris said it would not since BVP is reaching out to business managers. Most of the underperforming sites have absentee landlords.

Tom said this effort could be the beginning of a redevelopment authority, and Bonnie said the Town attorney can be helpful in terms of researching legal requirements. She also encouraged the EDIC to begin talking publicly about the RDA concept, since it will require a strong public education process.

Jon Vining joined the meeting at 12:30.

Julie Montinieri complimented Tom and his subcommittee on their efforts. Andy agreed with Julie's statement and said we need to help property owners understand the real value of their holdings.

Town Manager's reports

Bonnie discussed the Wethersfield Life article about the new owner of the former Town House motel, Mr. Patel. Patel believes he can tie into Adriaen's Landing and provide moderate priced lodging; Bonnie stated we need more people with this type of initiative and foresight. Bonnie also took a moment to thank the EDIC, saying it's energy and focus over the past year has been very positive.

On a more somber note, the grand list increased only .038% once revaluation is netted out. This makes the work of the EDIC even more critical. The loss of Northeast Utilities will be significant, particularly in personal property taxes. Peter mentioned the owner of the NU property is based in New York, and the lease is good through 2007. They do not seem concerned with the property being vacant; we're putting requests to meet with them in writing since they're not returning phone calls.

Andy said he believes EDIC needs to move forward with "phase 2" of the Economic Development summit, and suggested the facilitator who worked with the Council and Board of Ed at their recent retreat. He also said that Spring 2005 might be the time to put a redevelopment authority to referendum. He stated Julie would fill in for him if he couldn't attend EDIC, and both are interested in doing business visitations.

Peter reviewed his monthly economic development report. There is a prospective purchased for the old Weight Watchers building (1000 Silas Deane), and some parties interested in the Fun Zone who've retained architects. He also said there have been several false starts with both sites, and both are very preliminary efforts. There will be a hearing on Tuesday for the Mozzicato bakery proposed for the Silas Deane Highway at Wells Road. Main Street Creamery is also working through P&Z and the Historic Commission on an addition to Paula Larsen's home. The Chamber of Commerce is interested in convening all Boards and Commissions in town; Peter does not have all details of this meeting yet. The Cumberland Farms on the Berlin Turnpike is demolishing and rebuilding its store. There is also interest in 61 Arrow Road, which has been available for a long time. However, building inspectors visited the site with the prospective buyers and found numerous code violations, which would need to be resolved before going forward.

Advertising for the part-time secretary position generated 52 applicants. After interviewing seven people in the first round, two finalists will be interviewed next Tuesday. Jon Vining offered to sit in on these interviews representing EDIC.

Phil Knecht noted there will be a public hearing on May 26 regarding the new zoning regulations. Hopefully they will be finalized shortly after that meeting.

Bonnie stated she is working on developing the final budget and will incorporate EDIC's requests into that process. Peter stated the manager of Bennigan's is interested in being the Silas Deane merchant representative to EDIC. Reps from Old Wethersfield and the Berlin Turnpike need to be identified.

Paul Courchaine stated he needed clarification on whether EDIC would review the Silas Deane Highway Master Plan as a finished product or whether it would collaborate with the SDHRC to review the plan jointly. Tony stated he was disappointed in the Hartford Courant article that appeared several days after their joint meeting, and felt it did not correctly characterize the tone or outcomes of the evening. Chris agreed, stating the article created an impression that there were several factions fighting over who had responsibility for the SDH revitalization, when he didn't believe that was the case.

(Tony Camilliere left the meeting at 1:05 and Tom Grottke chaired remainder.)

Tom stated the SDHRC is a good activist group but as an ad hoc committee, it does not have authority from the Council or Manager and needs to report back to them or someone representing them. Bonnie stated the goal over the next 45 days is to update the plan, bring it back to the Council, decide priorities and assign responsibility for implementation. Andy agreed, stating some representatives of the SDHRC may be part of a new committee, which would also include merchants and property owners. Tom stated EDIC needs to have a voice on this new committee. Peter said he would be meeting with Paul's group very soon, and identifying action items at that time, in order to meet the 45-day review deadline.

Tom asked for a motion to adjourn. It was made by Chris Lyons and seconded by Joan Hughes, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.