

Economic Development and Improvement Commission Meeting Minutes May 13, 2004

Below are minutes of the regular meeting of the Wethersfield Economic Development and Improvement Commission (EDIC) held on Thursday, May 13, 2004 at the Wethersfield Chamber of Commerce conference room at 860B Silas Deane Highway.

Members present:

Anthony Camilliere, Chairman
Andy Adil
Joe Cornelio
Frank Frago
Tom Grottke
Joan Hughes
Cindy Jacobs
Phil Knecht
Chris Lyons
Ken Rizzio
Betty Rosania

Members absent:

John Breglio
Jon Vining

Also present:

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager
Peter Gillespie, Dir. of Planning and Econ. Development
John Karangekis, Wethersfield Town Council
Rita S
Marie Massaro, Planning and Econ. Development
Susan Mudwilder, Planning and Econ. Development

Chairman Camilliere called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m. and asked for a motion to approve [the April meeting minutes](#). A motion was made by Frank Frago, seconded by Betty Rosania and passed unanimously.

Marketing/Communications subcommittee report: Chris Lyons reported the Business Visitation program is up and running, with interviews taking longer than expected. Mr. Lyons also reported John Breglio organized a Realtors Breakfast the previous week, to discuss what realtors heard both positive and negative about the town. He stated the realtors agreed the schools were the most important factor for buyers, and that the condition of the Town Hall was a very negative influence. Ms. Rosania complimented Mr. Lyons and Mr. Breglio on their work.

Chairman Camilliere, noting there were several new faces in the group, asked for introductions. He congratulated Joe Cornelio on his recent appointment to the Commission.

Finance Subcommittee report: Ken Rizzio reported they met on May 11th, and are preparing to approach 7 banks for contributions to the Express Loan program, with letters going out early next week. He also noted Mark Walker was transferred to a Fleet Bank branch in West Hartford. Mr. Frago noted the Town is committing \$25,000 plus \$15,000 from the EDIC budget, and they will ask each bank for \$40,000. Bonnie Therrien recommended approaching the new Connecticut Bank and Trust. Mr. Rizzio noted that Saving Bank of Manchester had actually cut a check for the past program that never launched. Peter Gillespie stated the program would be up and running in late July/early August. In response to questions about whether EDIC could begin issuing loans without bank support, Chairman Camilliere stated they must first go to the Town Council, and Mr. Gillespie noted that banks should be on board first.

Tom Grottke entered the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

Development Subcommittee report

: Mr. Gillespie said the inventory of available properties would likely be completed by the end of the month. Mr. Lyons noted that realtors were very interested in that effort. Mr. Grottke stated there are many vacant or underutilized sites, which could be targeted. Mr. Knecht noted that Representative Larson is pushing for manufacturing sites and might be helpful if we identify opportunities.

Andy Adil entered the meeting at 12:35 p.m.

Chairman Camilliere noted that Andy Adil has been very helpful on the Redevelopment issue. The Council would like to develop a ballot initiative for November. Messrs. Gillespie, Grottke, Adil and Camilliere will work together on moving this forward. In response to Ms. Rosania, Mr. Gillespie stated he would condense information on statutes and timeframes for creating RDA for the Commission. Mr. Adil noted that Rocky Hill, East Hartford and New London are good models.

Town Manager's report: Ms. Therrien expressed thanks for everyone's work during the budget process, and noted Marie Massaro's hours have increased, and that EDIC got some of what they requested, but not all. She stated a 9% budget increase is great but will not continue; the grand list needs to expand. She will also have a part-time assistant, giving her more time to meet with business owners and developers. She'd like to see the Developers breakfast get going. Chairman Camilliere complimented Ms. Therrien on her support of EDIC and her leadership.

Town Council liaison report: Mr. Adil noted that the Redevelopment Authority effort might require some expertise in terms of educating the public about its purpose and benefits. Mr. Karangekis noted that economic development is critical to the Town's future and the Council realizes this is an important effort. Mr. Adil noted that he would continue to ask Councilors Karangekis and Montinieri to attend these meetings.

Town Planner's report: Mr. Gillespie reviewed his monthly Council report, including status of several ongoing projects such as the new CVS and Mozzicato's Bakery. He noted a New York developer is looking at the Berlin Turnpike for possible market rate condos/apartments, and that a national restaurant chain is looking at several sites on the Silas Deane Highway. There will be public hearing on June 30th about the new zoning regulations. Mr. Gillespie welcomed Susan Mudwilder. Ms. Mudwilder stated she is ready to assist EDIC members as needed.

In response to Mr. Grottke, Ms. Therrien stated she has been directed by the Council to contact the owner of Progress Drive. Mr. Gillespie noted there is a complicated history with this property, and that Tax Appeals recently granted him relief. Ms. Rosania noted Tax Appeals should have all information about a property before making such decisions.

Planning and Zoning liaison report: Mr. Knecht noted that P&Z has been working more collaboratively with property owners to help achieve their goals while guarding the Town's interests. On May 24, he and other EDIC members will tour Park Street in Hartford to see how that area has successfully created a small business oriented district. He also noted a recent report that showed Wethersfield's 12.2% office vacancy rate is better than many towns in the area. Mr. Grottke stated this new collaboration among P&Z, EDIC and the Council needs to be highlighted. The recent appearance by Mr. Gillespie, Mr. Adil and Mayor Morin on Channel 14 was noted as one way of sharing this story; Ms. Rosania suggested contacting Joyce Rossignol. Mr. Gillespie will speak with her.

Old Business: The EDIC budget approved by the Town Council increased from approximately \$53,000 to \$84,000. Marie Massaro asked for volunteers to represent EDIC at Town Council meetings. Cindy Jacobs will attend the June 7 meeting.

New Business: Mr. Gillespie reported the names of individuals selected to serve on the Silas Deane Highway Advisory Committee, including Ms. Rosania. Its initial charge is to review the 1987 plan for what's out of date, what's still feasible and report to the Council in early September. Mr. Gillespie mentioned the Economic Development course on June 8th and invited EDIC members to attend.

Mr. Camilliere reminded members of the Chamber's May 19th annual meeting and dinner. EDIC is receiving an award. He noted that some members' appointments are expiring on June 30th and hoped all would continue to serve. He then stated he will not seek reappointment, due to work commitments. He expressed his appreciation for all the Commission members' efforts and his belief that the Commission has great momentum and support.

Cindy Jacobs noted that she spoke with Councilor Montinieri about an agricultural database/inventory, and the need for collaboration between EDIC, the Conservation Commission, and other partners. Agricultural preservation would be more about quality of life than about increasing the grand list. It was agreed to make Agriculture a standing item on future agendas.

Frank Frago made a motion to adjourn the meeting; it was seconded by Joan Hughes and approved by all. The meeting adjourned at 1:35 p.m.