

Town of Wethersfield
Economic Development and Improvement Commission
Meeting Minutes
December 2, 2004

Members Present

Chair, Betty Rosania, Joe Cornelio, Frank Frago, Chris Lyons, Ken Rizzio, Paul Montinieri, Howard Greenblatt, Kate Mullen, John Breglio.

Also present were, Bonnie Therrien, Peter Gillespie, Christine Paul, Andy Adil, Phil Knecht, Beverly Pierz

Chairperson Betty Rosania called the meeting to order at 12:00 PM.

Minutes

The [minutes of the November meeting](#) were reviewed. The approval of the minutes was moved by Chris Lyons and seconded by Kate Mullen. Vote was affirmative.

Chair Report

Chair Rosania started the meeting by welcoming the newly appointed members Howard Greenblatt and Doug Sachs

Marketing and Communications Subcommittee Report

Chris Lyons summarized the work of the Committee by discussing the Web design efforts for EDIC which will have its next meeting on December 7th. Mr. Gillespie and Mr. Lyons will be meeting with MaGee Marketing to discuss needed advertising and the use of branding; the idea of understanding what people think about an area or idea. Joan Hughes commented that the town needs to ensure that all corridor groups are represented...Silas Deane Highway, Old Wethersfield and Berlin Turnpike. Mr. Breglio mentioned that for the realtor meetings during the next quarter in February the subcommittee needs specific ideas to cover and has the goal of meeting on the same day and cutting down on meeting length. The chair mentioned that she plans to set aside Thursdays for meetings and hopes any meetings could be on that day. Doug Sachs sent information to Paul about potential college student help. Phil Knecht suggested realtor meetings meet at a property available for lease or sale. Chris Lyons agreed and said that is something they are considering.

Finance Subcommittee Report

Ken Rizzo reported on the November 18th meeting. He noted the meeting focused on the designing of a grant program with a possible allocation of 200K in STEAP money. Frank Frago and Ken Rizzio discussed loan programs verses grant programs and the possible use of STEAP funds for the program, but is also considering a matching grant program. More problems may be involved in the loan program.

Rocky Hill and Newington are looking more toward grant programs. At this time the committee is not sure if STEAP monies can be used for loan programs. Mr. Gillespie provided examples of what other towns and cities have done with grant programs. Key is to decide parameters of awards, and determine what it would take to get businesses on board for a matching grant...(for example, for façade improvements). The Tax Incentive brochure is done and needs to get printed. There was discussion about the 40K the town allotted for a loan program, and whether it could be incorporated into a grant program. Frank Fargo asked Mr. Gillespie if he knew the full use of the grant money that Fernando Rosa discussed at the November 18th meeting. Mr. Gillespie said we have to apply to DECD at this point, tell them

specifically what our budget would be and how we intend to use the funds. They would then respond and if approved, we would enter into a contract with them, and then the money would come our way. At this point we have talked with DECD about getting in an application sometime this month with the intent to get the money this spring. The chair questioned the town's resolve. Mr. Gillespie said that is not clear. The big issue is the need to put up the money first and then getting reimbursed by the state. The problem there is: we have to go out to bond which means going through the process of a referendum, which costs us money and time, and an uncertain outcome. However, she did say that if we can demonstrate an immediate need, they could give us 50% or 75% up front. They would like to give us the money if in fact we have contracts set up for some of the projects. The details have to be worked out, but they will work with us on that issue. Frank suggested that before we discard the loan program, maybe both a grant with a match as well as a loan package be made available to businesses. The chair suggested the committee act in good haste but also reminds everyone of the need to get the town manager and council on board. Ken Rizzio mentioned that after speaking to the town manager, he came to the conclusion that 200K was the right amount to start with, and wonders what has to be done to secure the money. Bonnie replied: the resolution that is being introduced to the council on Monday includes a two-step process: 1) Introduction & public hearing (to be held on December 20th) 2) Application. Bonnie suggested choosing projects that can get done quickly and are very visible, so that next year there is an even better chance of getting another 500K. That is also why she told Ken Rizzio she did not want to see a lot of the money used for the loan program, especially since the status of the program is still uncertain. The chair asked if this issue can be tabled temporarily. Bonnie said we can revisit this discussion under Old Business.

Development Subcommittee Report

Representative not present. Mr. Gillespie reported that they have not met since the last commission meeting.

Agricultural Committee

Cindy Jacobs not present.

Town Manager's Report

Bonnie Therrien reported that the 2005 town calendar theme will be economic development and will feature current construction projects. Bonnie reported on the upcoming meeting with CCSU and the CT Workforce Dev. Board working with businesses targeting jobs for the young and disadvantaged. Bonnie will be in charge of the interview process for Mr. Gillespie's assistant, and interviews will begin next week.

Town Council Liaison's Report

Andy Adil reported the Committee is waiting on the Development Group and the Silas Deane Committee to come back with some recommendations. Andy mentioned the 5.2 million dollar bond referendum that just passed for the renovation of the town hall. He said that he is pleased with that, because realtors have made it clear that they will not do their part if we do not get our own shop in order on the rest of the Silas Deane Highway. Progress is being made. The school and the police station are done, and the town hall should be done in about 1 1/2 years.

Plus, the vote of 57 to 43 is a clear mandate to proceed. Andy welcomed new members and their new energy. Chair Rosania thanked the council and staff. Mr. Adil thanked the chair and expressed confidence that with her leadership the committee will have a steady and quick course.

PZC Liaison Report

Mr. Knecht reported that while he attended a People's Bank party in West Hartford recently he heard good things about Wethersfield planning & zoning. We have had many successes and our vacancy rate is only 9.5 % being the lowest in the greater Hartford area, which speaks well of Wethersfield. He suggested going down the street to look at what is happening, and that we have good reason to have our spirits up. Our continued goal should be to make efforts

to get the word out to the public.

Town Planner/Economic Development Manager's Report

Mr. Gillespie discussed his monthly report.

Salute To Business Event

Mr. Gillespie reported that most of his energy during the last two weeks has been spent preparing for the Annual Salute to Business. Planning is complete and award letters have gone out. Mr. Gillespie reviewed order of business for that night.

Forum on Silas Deane Highway Plan

Mr. Gillespie noted that he has spent a lot of time the last two weeks preparing for this event. Letters have gone out to the local businesses and property owners on the Silas Deane Highway. This will be the first opportunity for the public to comment on the work so far by the committee.

Review of New Business Activity

Mr. Gillespie gave his report: UPS open, Bank of America in place of Fleet, CVS, Starbucks, & Quiznos should be done in January or February; Blockbuster will be a little longer.

Age Restricted Housing

Mr. Gillespie reported that the first of probably a couple of age-restricted projects will be going through planning & zoning next week. The developer Bill Bellock is looking to put 14 units at the corner of Folly Brook and Spruce Street. This property is a big open lot, but much of the land is wetlands and floodplain, so the lot would not be able to be developed more substantially. He has been talking to other developers about 55+ housing and acknowledges this is a trend in housing needs.

Meeting with the Post Office

Bonnie Therrien reported that she and the Mayor and Mr. Gillespie met with representatives of the Postal Service in Hartford on November 5 to discuss the potential role the Post Office might have in the redevelopment of the Silas Deane Highway and the Town Center Concept. They did not say no. They are interested in further discussion assuming it doesn't cost them more than they are presently outlaying. Federal representatives from our delegation have been assisting the town in these communications. Lines of communication will be kept open in hopes of some possibilities.

Town Center Concept

Mr. Gillespie reported that the owner of the property at the corner of Silas Deane & Church is looking to do something different, possibly tearing the present building down. That is probably going to be presented to the P&Z committee in the conceptual form very soon. Mr. Gillespie will keep us posted. The importance of that property in the Town Center concept is very important and it is a vital intersection. Close attention should be paid to what happens there. Committee discussed goal and necessary steps to establish a Town Center. Chair Rosania reminded the Committee that the town has lost opportunities in the past to establish a Town Center and therefore recommends timely action to pursue developing a prominent Town Center at this time.

Wethersfield Shopping Center

Mr. Gillespie stated that the shopping center will be getting a Sleepy's Mattress franchise and it will open fairly soon. He is speaking to them now and will probably happen in the next few months.

Berlin Turnpike

Mr. Gillespie reported that the properties that are being considered are from Wells Rd. heading south (east side). This is a serious project in preliminary discussion stage right now.

Town Center/Post Office

The chair inquired about who owns the Carnival property right now because she would hate to see another Dunkin Donuts etc. put there. Mr. Gillespie responded that the developer is working with the property owner but is also considering exercising an option he has on that property. However, Mr. Gillespie stated that to build up that property on its own would not generate a landmark project. To develop that corner properly, the town would need to assemble several properties and tear down buildings.

Chris Lyons asked if the Post Office was looking for us to build them a new building. Mr. Gillespie responded that they talked about several scenarios:

- Improving where they are/better facilities
- Move somewhere
- Their lease has some renewal options - in 5 years or so, they have that ability to discuss it, but this would not happen immediately.

Mr. Gillespie mentioned that he thinks they would be interested in some incentives if we could offer it to them. However, the Post Office has a long list of needed facilities elsewhere and ours is not high on the list right now. Like anybody, they don't want to spend more than they need, but if they could be part of a new development center scenario, and it worked for them, they would be happy to do that.

Frank Frago asked if our goal is to use the Carnival property as part of the Town Center project and would it be used for municipal use? Mr. Gillespie replied that he is not sure about for municipal use. It would depend on what our needs are. At this point it would be private since we are investing so much at the town hall right now. The chair mentioned efforts to establish a town center in the past, and how opportunities were lost, and hopes at this time, it is not once again, taken out of our hands.

STEAP Grant

Mr. Gillespie stated that the town would stay with the original proposal we had when we applied, which was to carve out some money for a grant program and a loan program and then leave the majority for physical improvements, whether that is landscaping or intersection improvements. What the town needs now is a current Master Plan by a landscape architect, and budget numbers. He is currently pulling together budget numbers. Wethersfield is looking to work with Rocky Hill so the look is consistent and both would have a consistent application to the state for money.

The chair inquired if we have heard from any banks concerning the loan programs. Mr. Gillespie says that we have heard from a couple of them but often negatively. We are told we need to figure out exactly what we are going to do and then go back to the banks with some potential leverage. For example, be able to say that the town is now putting in 200K, or whatever the figure, but we need to get details finalized before we go back to them. Mr. Gillespie mentioned the option of the EDIC putting some money toward the grant or the loan program as part of the capital improvement program.

Bus Tour

Bonnie Therrien reported a bus tour will be arranged for only the Town Council and the EDIC to keep it smaller. She

will be getting a few dates out shortly. Vans could be used for transportation if kept to a smaller group.

Strategic Planning Committee

Mr. Gillespie stated that he left the plan out on the table at the last meeting, and to please look at it. He requested committee members give their thoughts to him or to Bill Donahue from the Strategic Planning Committee. They will be having a public hearing in January. Bonnie stated that she will get the date to Mr. Gillespie. Mr. Gillespie strongly advised this committee spend time individually looking at it to ensure our thoughts are well represented in that document. The intent is to use that document this coming budget cycle to factor in the funding of projects. So if we are not in the document, it will be more difficult to get funding for projects. The chair asked if we will be meeting again before they have their hearing. Mr. Gillespie answered affirmatively. "So we can make that an agenda item". The chair agreed the commission should be in on that process and it should be on the agenda at the beginning, and include discussion. The chair asks all members of the commission to attend the next meeting, read the document, and provide ideas.

Tourism Plan

Mr. Gillespie stated that the consultant that has been retained had some preliminary findings for our consideration. Some marketing approaches were discussed. They plan to have a focus group meeting in the next few weeks, before Christmas, so they can also work with the Strategic Planning Committee and get their recommendations in that document as well. No meeting dates are set yet. This committee will probably interview several members on this committee to get their thoughts. The chair asked if there is duplication of efforts and little cross-communication. Mr. Gillespie responds and mentioned that Paul Montinieri is on both committees and that is a good link, and will provide communication that may not have existed before. Paul agreed and said he sees a lot of collaboration and less time being wasted. Andy Adil commented that he hopes we can steer professional offices out of Old Wethersfield in order to try to keep as specialty shops.

CIP

Mr. Gillespie said that there are two items on CIP and both probably need some motions and some action.

1. The last town council agreed to designate the remaining 25K of the original 50K earmarked for the Silas Deane Highway revitalization. That 25K was to go to the Silas Deane Highway Advisory Committee's ongoing work. The wrinkle was that the money would be overseen through the EDIC...so Beverly Pierz is here to discuss their plans & efforts and hopefully get a motion from this committee that will allow them to continue their work.
2. In the past we had requested 50K for the Silas Deane revitalization, so Mr. Gillespie asks the committee whether we want to request money for the loan program through that process or through some other efforts.

The chair then asked Beverly Pierz, chairperson of the Silas Deane Highway Advisory Committee to speak. Beverly reviewed the committee's work so far. They have reviewed the '87 Master Plan and their goal is to make sure the plan is updated and current. They need to get a consultant on board to look at some of their recommendations. Key items on the Master Plan include neighborhood districts, hedgerow landscape concepts, defining town center and a streetscape that they would like to be considered for the loan program. She mentioned that in July 2006 the DOT will be paving the SDH and if we do not have our intersections and our defined hedgerow or landscape concepts at these intersections, we would lose them, as we lost the area from the north starting at Hartford town line and continuing to Nott Street. The committee would like to use the 25K to install at the NorthGate intersection a visual implementation. That would be the planting of trees in the islands that start at the Hartford town line. This would show the public that we are doing something. Beverly mentions that they hope to get money from other sources such as the Chamber and Village Improvement, which has given money already.

The committee discussed the 25K issue for the SDH revitalization. Concerns were expressed about the cost of a consultant (probably 10K), but Mr. Gillespie stated that an updated Master Plan with a current date is mandatory to move forward in any way. Mr. Gillespie also stated that there is \$2,500 left from the money allotted for the NorthGate

sign, and the Wethersfield Beautification Committee has agreed to commit \$3,000 to the NorthGate islands, therefore there is a total of \$5,500 already available. He also mentioned that RFQs are out to get proposals for all the work to be done on the SDH so that later we can use some of the STEAP money for planning too. It will be an evolutionary process.

The chair said she will entertain a motion so can have discussion or questions. Chris Lyons makes a motion that the EDIC approve the 25K to the Silas Deane Advisory Committee. Kate Mullen seconds it. Discussion revealed that if the money is not approved it will be rolled back into the general fund. Concerns about giving up input from EDIC in decisions are discussed. Joe Cornelio recommends that the SDH advisory committee get reports to EDIC each month. Beverly said that should happen naturally since Betty is at the meetings and this is a standing agenda item for EDIC. The chair then asked if we have a motion on the floor agreeing that 25K will go to improvements on the SDH. "Is that your motion?" Chris Lyons "YES". Betty: "No caveats?" Chris: "No". All members present voted in favor.

The chair began discussion about asking the town council for a large capital amount for the loan program. She stated that it must be decided before the December 10th town council meeting. Mr. Gillespie pointed out that it must be 25K or over. Chris Lyons asked how much of the 500K STEAP money would be going to improve the Silas Deane Highway. Bonnie stated that 200K would be going for the loan program so 300K would be left. Chris Lyons asked if the town staff sees the town council putting any more money (aside from STEAP) into the Silas Deane next year. Bonnie replied "odds are, No", not when they are pushed with other projects, because we will try again to apply for another 500K. She said she felt they would more likely make the commitment toward the loan program rather than the streetscape type projects. The committee agreed they should shoot for the sky to see what we can get. Ken Lyons asked if the commission needs to come to a consensus on the use of the 200K. Bonnie stated that the commission will, but not at this meeting because she still needs to firm things up with Peter and with Rocky Hill. The chair then asked if the commission is going strictly focus on Silas Deane, because she does not want us to lose sight of the Berlin Turnpike. She also noted that the commission needs representation from the Berlin Turnpike. Bonnie replied that the commission would have a better chance at the Berlin Turnpike since right now they have nothing. The chair also suggested that when they see we are trying to do something, this could encourage some to volunteer to serve on one of our commissions. Frank Frago brought up the 40K the town allocated already, and asked whether or not it should be designated for areas other than Silas Deane because the STEAP money has to be spent on the SDH. Mr. Gillespie suggested we request it be designated for a commercial revolving loan program for façade purposes town wide. That way, if you needed to supplement the 40K, it would be possible for someone from the Silas Deane who wanted a loan separate from a grant, to be eligible. This would give the town the most options and monies would not get tied up if not used for a specified area. The chair asked if the three areas should be specified. Mr. Gillespie stated that they should make it clear the money would be available for the Berlin Turnpike, Silas Deane, and Old Wethersfield ...and other commercial areas, so none are excluded. After discussion it is agreed that if 60K were asked for that would make an even 100K available. The chair asked for a motion. Frank Frago made the motion that 60K be used for development of the Berlin Turnpike and other commercial areas in town. Kate Mullen seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor.

Resignation letter

The chair stated she received a resignation letter from Ron Angelo. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien mentions that she will be filling that vacancy as soon as possible.

New members for commission

Frank Frago asked if it would be possible to solicit someone from the Berlin Turnpike area. Bonnie states that she can try. Peter mentioned that he has had a brief conversation with Bob Yandow, and can ask him to send you an email if he is interested. The chair asked if anyone else on the commission knows Bob and could talk with him. Chris Lyons, Paul Montinieri, and Ken Rizzio all know him and agree to speak to him.

Wethersfield Live

Mr. Gillespie mentioned that he and Beverly would be on tomorrow night at 9:00 PM discussing the Silas Deane Highway to promote the upcoming SDH town meeting.

Chairperson Betty Rosania adjourned the meeting at 1:20 PM.

Respectfully Submitted
Christine Paul