

TOWN OF WETHERSFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting of December 11, 2003 At Village Tavern

Members present: Tony Camilliere
Frank Frago
Joan Hughes
Cindy Ramirez-Jacobs
Chris Lyons
Betty Rosania
Jon Vining

Also present: Andy Adil, Town Council 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

Minutes

Tony Camilliere called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. He asked for approval of [the November minutes](#). Betty Rosania made a change to the page 4 statement about the Tourism Commission requesting additional funding. Frank Frago made a motion to pass the amended minutes; Betty seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman's Report

Tony shared a memo from Kathy Bagley and Carmela Moore dated December 9th, asking for \$500 for the Showmobile. A motion to discuss the request was made by Frank and seconded by Jon Vining. Chris Lyons provided background on the project, saying area businesses are being solicited to do lettering and signage, with donors listed on the inside of one of the doors. He did not think it was an appropriate use of EDIC funds. Bonnie Therrien noted the price is very competitive. Betty Rosania asked why the Town was not funding this, saying EDIC gets funded by the Council and ends up giving the money back. Jon Vining asked if a grant paid for the Showmobile; Bonnie said yes. Chris noted the Chamber already gave money for the sound system, a generator, handicap ramps, etc. It's portable and used for events such as the Cornfest and summer concerts. Tony asked how much the committee needed to raise overall. Chris stated it was \$5,000 from various sources. Tony asked for a vote on donating \$500 from EDIC to the Showmobile; it was unanimously defeated.

Tony said the D'Esopos sent a nice thank-you note for the Salute to Business event. He also noted the Chamber sends out a six-month calendar of upcoming events, and suggested EDIC do something similar. All agreed this was worth pursuing; Marie Massaro will draft a preliminary version for members to review.

Subcommittee Reports

Marketing and Communications - Chris Lyons stated the subcommittee met last Friday. Todd Andrews from the MetroHartford Alliance will conduct a training session on December 16th at 4:00 p.m. in the Community Room at the police station. The session will focus on business visitation programs; 46 volunteers from the Council, the Chamber and other groups are invited. EDIC will be the central repository of the information generated by business visitations; Todd will help the team clarify goals and develop a consistent approach.

Betty Rosania noted that EDIC business cards are ready. Peter Gillespie said they could be used for business visitations, but a leave-behind packet also needs to be developed.

Finance - Frank Frago said members of the subcommittee met with Mark Walker of Fleet Bank to discuss a business loan program. Proposed changes made to the initial draft include lowering the rate from 5% to 2% to be more competitive. The goal is to raise \$160,000 from the 8 banks in town, plus \$40,000 from the Town. The subcommittee hopes to arrange a breakfast or lunch meeting with all banks to garner support for the program.

The tax incentive policy is on the agenda for the December 15th Council meeting, at which there will be a public hearing and a vote. Betty asked if the rest of the EDIC could get more specifics on the policy prior to the meeting; Tony suggested this would be a good idea and give EDIC members talking points in case they want to support the policy at the public hearing. Peter will do a PowerPoint presentation before the meeting, part of which indicates other towns that have similar policies, and that this policy is part of the Town's strategic plan.

Frank noted that Marie Massaro will develop the grants and loan program clearinghouse that will be a resource to businesses in town. He also mentioned that they'd like to have representatives of the three major business districts (Silas Deane, Berlin Turnpike and Old Wethersfield). Betty noted the Chamber made a similar effort but got little response, and suggested we develop a press release to generate contacts. Frank then noted that he will be away from January 13 to late April, and Ken Rizzio will be co-chair of the subcommittee.

Frank asked each subcommittee to develop a draft budget for next year, and submit to him by December 18th. In addition to subcommittee work, members should think about broader EDIC needs such as the Salute to Business, staff support and possible consulting fees. Tony asked Jon Vining to relay the budget deadlines to Tom Grottke. Betty asked about expenditures for this year, such as the Marketing committee's \$5,000 request. Peter gave details, saying the current budget had categories set aside for staff support, public service contributions (e.g. Cornfest, Tourism), copying/binding, and consulting services.

Cindy Jacobs-Ramirez asked to backtrack to Finance's proposed façade improvement program, and whether that would complement or undermine the Design Review Committee. Tom noted the DRC is not in place yet. Frank noted EDIC policy will state that funds can't be allocated without town approval. Peter agreed that we'd work with Town departments to ensure any dollars we distribute support their guidelines. Joe Cornelio asked if there will be background check on a business's financial health before making loans or grants; Frank said the process would be similar to a bank's lending process. Bonnie asked if the banks were truly interested; Frank stated that credit unions can't participate and not all banks would, either. Many want to see the Council put up its share of the money before committing.

(Ken Rizzio joined the meeting at 12:45.)

Paul Courchaine stated he met with Tom Grottke to clarify the Silas Deane Revitalization Committee's role, and said it is not interested in meeting with developers, but is interested in aesthetics.

Reports of the Town Manager

Bonnie Therrien gave the Town Manager's report. She has been working with the new Council, which is very supportive of EDIC. The Council's next major initiative is the budget. Andy Adil noted that the election focused on significantly improving economic development in town, addressing issues raised at the October summit. He and other Councilors will be looking at other towns such as East Hartford, and whether or not to create a redevelopment authority. Paul asked whether the EDIC was a de facto redevelopment authority; Bonnie and Peter both stated their interpretation of State statutes is that EDIC is a development authority, not a RE-development authority. Tony welcomed Andy Adil on behalf of all EDIC members, and encouraged him to spend some time with each subcommittee.

Peter Gillespie gave his report. A sample of the monthly report he now provides to the Town Council was handed out. He stated he wants to establish a consistent format that gives the Council a way to measure progress. New items since EDIC's last meeting include an antique shop moving into the former Indian Motorcycle site, a tax business moving into Goff Brook Shops, IHEPA creating new elderly housing sites using HUD funds, and a preliminary meeting with

the owners of the Fun Zone property who are looking at various options for the site.

Tony asked Peter if there were ways EDIC could help move projects forward. Bonnie suggested EDIC members might present the monthly report, and/or attend Council meetings to answer questions and be more closely connected to Council's interests and concerns. Marie will develop a schedule of EDIC attendance at Council meetings. Peter added that Planning and Zoning has adopted the pre-application preliminary review process, which familiarizes them with projects prior to meetings, and allows applicants to address initial concerns.

Old Business

Tony met with Carmela Moore from the Chamber to discuss logistics of the Salute to Business. As the event grows, it may need to move to a larger space such as the Community Center or the Country Club. Costs are always a consideration. Bonnie stated the program was a bit too long; Tony suggested the Salute might be strictly an awards ceremony, with a second type of event to discuss EDIC goals and objectives. Paul suggested the annual business survey could be done as a handout rather than a presentation.

Correspondence

Tony asked Peter about the CERC Market Research Analysis proposal; Peter said it was preliminary but CERC might be a way to supplement some of the staffing gaps. Betty stated she supported the idea of getting a comprehensive proposal and not doing "bits and pieces." Cindy asked for a general sense of what CERC is being asked to do. Peter stated it would entail a detailed analysis of market conditions, regional issues, what Wethersfield's niche is. The work would be most relevant to the Development Committee. Peter will discuss in more detail with them. Bonnie suggested that the dollar amount (\$14,500) could require doing a request for proposal.

Tony mentioned the CBIA Economic Outlook conference in January, and whether EDIC members should attend. It was agreed EDIC will purchase a table of 10 for \$900 and extend invitations to Town Council members. The motion was made by Betty, seconded by Jon Vining, and unanimously approved.

New Business

Peter stated that Northeast Utilities is considering consolidating operations at several sites including Wethersfield and western Massachusetts. Its Bloomfield site is a strong contender because of its central location for affected employees. This would be a very negative development for Wethersfield, as it's the biggest taxpayer. Peter is working with them to see what options we have.

Ken Rizzio stated he attended the meeting on the tax incremental financing (TIF) and asked if all EDIC members were up to speed on this. Bonnie stated it should be added to the January agenda.

Tony asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made by Betty and seconded by Frank. The meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.