



Economic Development Commission

MINUTES

November 21, 2023

Newtown Community Center
Multi Purpose Room 3
8 Simpson St

Present: Jeffrey Robinson, David Cervero, Nick Roussas, Fran Pennarola, Tracey Pertoso, Valerie Fallon, Steve Matiatos

Absent: Bruce Walczak, Barbara Snyder

Also Present: John Voket – Director of Economic and Community Development, Kim Chiappetta – Economic and Community Dev & Fairfield Hills Coordinator (clerk), and one member of the press

Public Attendance:

Two members of the public attended.

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m.

Public Participation:

None.

Approval of Minutes:

Fran Pennarola made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from September 19, 2023. Nick Roussas seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Introduction of the Director of Economic and Community Development

John Voket introduced himself as the new Director of Economic and Community Development as of October 20th. John thanked Kim Chiappetta for her assistance in getting a deeper understanding of department activities and responsibilities. In the first few days, John eliminated over 1,400 emails from his predecessor's email box that were unread since her departure at the end of March 2023. During this process he was able to identify 40 priority agencies to which he introduced himself and switched to his contact information. John has met with the EDC chair, visited several businesses and organized ribbon cuttings. He invited Commission members to two ribbon cuttings on Thursday, November 30th; Cosmic Coffee House and Smoothie Bar, and Blue Rock Storage Facility. The new owner of Blue Rock Storage visited John and informed him that he and his team invested almost \$2 million to convert the facility. Another ribbon cutting was held on Sunday, November 18th for Sentimenti Antiques – Consignment – Art Gallery. The owner would like to display and consign or sell local artists work, particularly younger artists. John continued to share with the Commission that he has produced and distributed press releases for the ribbon cuttings, and attended a Fair Rent Commission meeting which has already received two appeals with possibly a third pending. Kim attended a Fair Rent Commission workshop



that provides training to new Fair Rent Commissioners. John also attended meetings with Kim on both the 7 Glen Road and 28 Glen Road projects. John has responded to and engaged with people interested in moving their businesses to town. He attended a CT Main Street Summit in New Haven and was able to engage with the State's new Chief Marketing officer, Anthony Anthony, who provided great information on how towns can become more engaged in statewide marketing efforts. John has updated and circulated the department's eNews letter and is beginning to post more on social media. He met with Kim and Land Use Director, Rob Sibley, to discuss the Fairfield Hills event process and how to more effectively streamline the process for the customers. He has also met with Bob Tait and Dan Rosenthal on the department's budget, and will be working with Kim and Bob Tait on the next budget request. John has engaged with the POCD consultant and will continue to be heavily engaged in the process as a representative of the department. John continued to inform the Commission that he has attended a meeting regarding the Batchelder property to discuss the ideas and progress, and an FHA meeting where he participated in a discussion on the permeable parking grant. He hosted a meeting with a representative from the State Department of Labor and a representative of the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board where he learned about the programs they have available for Newtown businesses. Both representatives like the Municipal Center facility and expressed that it could be a centrally located site for Western CT programs like speed interviews where 3 – 4 local companies could interview a variety of applicants for open positions. In addition, John has met with Western CT SCORE Chapter Chair Will Meikle, the Danbury Regional Chamber, Winn Development to discuss the Fairfield Hills mixed use project, the CT Housing Collective, and attended his first managers meeting. John recently completed NARCAN training and informed the Commission of the Town's commitment to having NARCAN available in all public buildings and to have people trained on how to use it. Next up for John is to attend a tour of the new Nuvance and Regional United Way's Food Farmacy in Danbury next week. The Food Farmacy addresses health issues through healthier food options. As recommended by the First Selectman, John has registered for training to become a CT certified municipal official. John closed out his list noting the administrative work being done within the department to define job tasks between the two roles and how each can support the other. Jeffrey asked for an update on the where Winn is in the process of the proposed mixed use project. John replied that the application for historic designation is in review with the State. Winn's consultant has expressed their hope that the application will be approved by the State in the next month or two, and will then be forwarded to the National Parks Service for historic designation. Jeffery welcomed John to the EDC.

Vote on 2024 meeting calendar:

Valerie pointed out that the January meeting had the incorrect year, and should be corrected to 2024.

Tracey Pertoso motioned to approve 2024 EDC meeting calendar as amended. Valerie Fallon seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Economic and Community Development – Staff Update

Kim updated the Commission that both the 7 Glen and 28 Glen projects continue to progress slowly. The new website is live, and Kim continues to make updates. They have run into a small issue with the Business Directory interface, and a meeting will be scheduled with the web developer for some time



next week. Although the website has been live, there are still final transition items that need to be completed.

Chairman & Vice Chairman Report/Comments

Jeffrey reported that the Strategic Plan has been approved by Board of Selectman. The Board did not have any question, and complimented the EDC on their work. The next step in the process is for the Legislative Council to review the document and hold a public hearing.

Member Comments, Discussion, and Questions

Member Project(s) Update:

Tracey said that she visited Cosmic Coffee and Smoothie Bar and recommended the owner contact Economic and Community Development, and she was glad that he did.

John added that the business owner of Cosmic Coffee and Smoothie Bar, and the business owner of Blue Rock Storage were very complimentary of the Land Use wing town departments.

Business additions resident feedback:

Valerie asked if there was any update on the proposed restaurant that is to move into the remodeled building near Strength and Grace. Fran said that Planning & Zoning approved the use.

Dave told the group that people continue to show interest in bringing restaurants to Newtown. Members discussed the customer base and the difficulties finding employees.

Vacant commercial space and Business Zones Observations:

Valerie asked if there was any interest in the vacant space across from Cover Two. Steve said there is a banner for a kitchen and bath design business coming soon. Tracey informed the Commission that the owner of Boost Cycle told her the business had outgrown it prior space and she was able to find a new, larger space in Sand Hill plaza. Dave asked if anyone had contact with the prior property owner in the past. Jeffrey answered that the former Deputy Director of Economic and Community Development had been in contact with the management company. He then noted the improvements made by the new plaza owners including painting and sidewalk repair.

Other Commissions Observations:

None.

Adjournment:

The Chair wished the group a very Happy Thanksgiving and asked for a motion to adjourn.

Fran made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m. and was seconded by Nick. All members in favor.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*