



## **Economic Development Commission**

### **MINUTES**

February 20, 2024

Newtown Community Center  
Multi-Purpose Room 3  
8 Simpson St

**Present:** Jeffrey Robinson, Nick Roussas, Bruce Walczak, Barbara Snyder, Fran Pennarola, Tracey Pertoso, Steve Matiatos, Bryan Atherton

**Absent:** Valerie Fallon

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

### **Public Attendance:**

A large number of people were in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Barbara Snyder made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from November 21, 2023. Bruce Walczak seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

### **Public Participation:**

- 1) Charles Zukowski, 4 Cornfield Ridge – Mr. Zukowski told the Commission that he is a member of the Bike and Trail Committee. He asked that the EDC does not forget the important trails in the area of the Town owned property, and that the Town ensures easements are secured legally in the deed.
- 2) Dave Ackert, (*no address provided*) – Mr. Ackert introduced himself as being from the Newtown Conservation Coalition. He began by telling the Commission that he has done research including looking through last 18 years of EDC minutes, reading the Town Charter and Chapter 132 of the Connecticut General Statutes. Mr. Ackert began by noting that at the time the State of CT deeded the property to the Town, he felt they didn't understand how environmentally damaging such development would be to the Town's drinking water, natural trout habitat and species living there. He then provided a brief history of the process the property has gone through. Mr. Eckert highlighted his concerns with the inconsistencies he found between the development plan process in comparison to the Town Charter and State Statutes. He continued to highlight what he found to be difficulties the Town encountered to make the property developable, and the 2024 POCD heat map where he said residents identified the property as



receiving the most comments to leave for open space. Mr. Eckert informed the Commission that at a public hearing, State delegates said they would be willing to work to remove the deed restriction on 6 Commerce Rd.

- 3) Jenny Hubbard, 3 Owl Ridge – Ms. Hubbard introduced herself as President of the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary. She asked that the Commission carefully consider the usage of 6 Commerce Road and solicit public input before making any decisions. Ms. Hubbard explained that for the past 11 years the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary has worked to deliver their mission that all animals live free from harm in their homes and habitats. This is done through providing direct care to animals, education and habitat restoration and preservation efforts. The animal sanctuary has focused on restoration and preservation efforts as guided by the University of CT wildlife experts, Town natural resources inventory and recommendations by DEEP. Finally, Ms. Hubbard told the commission that the Sanctuary has been accepted into the International Living Future Institute - Living Building Challenge which will enroll the sanctuary into one of 70 sites worldwide. The buildings must meet standards that reduce environmental impact and exceed performance standards. Ms. Hubbard closed by asking the Commission to carefully consider seeking input from its constituents before making any decisions on 6 Commerce Rd.
- 4) Dan Holmes, 2 Spring Rd – Mr. Holmes began by bringing attention to the large number of people in attendance for a good reason. He explained that the property, environmentally, is an incredibly impacted area considering the sole source aquifer and being so close to the banks of the brook. He is not opposed to economic development and recognized it is needed for the tax base. Mr. Holmes implored the Commission to think very carefully about putting any impervious surface in that space. He asked them to consider preserving the land in its current state to provide space for pollinators. Mr. Holmes implored the group to think long and hard before proceeding with any plan of economic development that would require construction and major development in this impact zone.
- 5) Jessica Kurose, 105 Walnut Tree Hill Rd – Ms. Kurose stated that she did not want there to be any development at 6 Commerce Rd. The property should be preserved and protected as seems to be in alignment with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. Development would cause significant environmental burdens to the property and neighboring property. She noted that this development could potentially impact the water supply and Deep Brook, which is one of 7 natural wild trout spawning locations in the State.
- 6) Jack Thatcher, 14 Antler Pine Rd – Mr. Thatcher began by telling the Commission that he is a monthly donor to the CVH Animal Sanctuary because he feels it is a very unique and special place for Newtown and the entire State. He finds the property peaceful and



healing. Mr. Thatcher noted the importance of wetlands, not just to amphibians, but also being crucial for flood control. He noted that climate change is causing more torrential rains and increases in flooding events, so there is a need to protect the wetlands that remain. He questioned why the Fairfield Hills campus could not be the focus of development as all necessary infrastructure is already in place, and it is a central location of Newtown.

- 7) Mike Hesick, 16 Grand Place – Mr. Hesick seconded the comments made by Mr. Thatcher. He explained that the property is already being used for passive recreation. Mr. Hesick recommended that 6 Commerce be used for a public garden which would fulfill economic development as gardens requires supplies.
- 8) Dee Davis, 42 Orchard Hill Rd – Ms. Davis began by telling the Commission that over the summer she obtained 1,773 votes to save the 6 Commerce property. She noted the wildlife on the property and that Fairfield Hills is a better location for development.
- 9) Saori Adams, 13 Silver City Rd – Ms. Adams introduced herself as the owner of Your Huckleberry Farms, a poultry farm in Newtown. She explained that when natural resources for wild animals are developed, the wildlife seeks their food on local farms. This prevents farmers from being able to provide cost effective organic options. Farmers must spend more time on pest and animal management.
- 10) Rhonda Lehman Davenport, 4 Phyllis Ln – Ms. Davenport began by speaking of the urgency brought upon the Town by climate change, and the importance of biodiversity and clean water. Ms. Davenport said that the plan for development of this space to bring in tax dollars can be done many other ways. Newtown is one of the few towns that still has farms and open spaces. She asked that the Commission not think in the short-term for monetary reasons.
- 11) Dottie Evans, 1 Reservoir Rd – Ms. Evans told the Commission that she has lived in Newtown for 25 years and has been in the area for 40 years. In her time working at the Bee she worked with the Town Historian, Dan Cruson. Ms. Evans provided a history of the property as documented by Dan Cruson. She explained that the 6 Commerce property was once a portion of a historically significant larger parcel which was 200 acres in total and referred to as Sherman’s Square Mile. In 1928, the State purchased farms to develop the Fairfield Hills Hospital, including the Sherman’s Square Mile parcel which continued to be used as farmland. Today, the CVH Sanctuary, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Governor’s Horse Guard, Al’s Trail, Animal Control Center, and Newtown Dog Park are all great benefits to the community while enhancing the surrounding environment. Ms. Evans closed by stating that 6 Commerce is a critical parcel and should be preserved.



- 12) Catherine Pepin, 56 Glen Rd – Ms. Pepin explained to the Commission that she volunteered at the Sanctuary and loved the area so much that she and her family moved to Newtown in 2019. She told the group that Newtown currently attracts many younger families in part because of its open spaces. Ms. Pepin expressed that if something is to be built at 6 Commerce it would take away from the property as a whole.
- 13) Mark D’Amico, 7 Tory Ln – Mr. D’Amico told the Commission he has lived in Newtown for just under 20 years. He echoed what others said about the sensitivity of the area. Mr. D’Amico asked the Commission to consider everything that was said tonight, and how Newtown’s open spaces seem to be the reason it attracts younger people to move to Newtown. He added that with residential growth comes potential for economic development in other areas of Town. Mr. D’Amico added that State representative would be willing to influence change on the properties deed restriction.
- 14) Joe Hovious, 3 Leopard Dr. – Mr. Hovious began by informing the Commission of his involvement in the property since 2004. He said that along with the conveyance of the property, another bill was passed to convey a 34 acre parcel as open space. Mr. Hovious spoke to the original development plan named Tech Park and the opposition to the plan at the time, and the same opposition to the proposed Church Hill Farm. Over the years, several bills were passed to allow movement between the open space and the developable parcel, but throughout that time an open space parcel has been required. Since the road has been built, there is more public use of the property. Mr. Hovious asked that history not repeat itself and that there be an open process. He added that it is time for the Economic Development Commission, Board of Selectmen and Legislative Council to listen to Newtown citizens. Mr. Hovious closed by reading the Commission with the statement, “Newtown open space, once gone lost forever”.
- 15) Debbie Zukowski, 4 Cornfield Ridge Rd – Ms. Zukowski told the Commission that she knows what it feels like to be public official. She recognized the contentious and difficult time for the Commission. Ms. Zukowski thanked members for their service and asked that they be as transparent as possible, and that they have cooperative discussions amongst the group, public officials, and the public.

After hearing 15 residents, the Chair closed Public Participation.

Jeffrey asked for a motion to propose the next item on the agenda be moved to after the executive session.



Barbara Snyder motioned to move the next item on the agenda, voting of the officers, until after executive session. Bruce Walczak seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

#### **Executive Session**

Jeffrey asked for a motion to move into executive session for the discussion of the selection of a site or the lease, sale or purchase of real estate by the state or a political subdivision of the state when publicity regarding such site, lease, sale, purchase or construction would adversely impact the price of such site, lease, sale, purchase or construction until such time as all of the property has been acquired or all proceedings or transactions concerning same have been terminated or abandoned.

Barbara Snyder made the motion. Bruce Walczak seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

The Commission entered into Executive Session at 7:57 p.m.

The Commission returned from Executive Session at 8:32 p.m.

#### **Election of Officers**

Jeffrey opened the floor for the nomination of a Chair.

Barbara nominated Jeffrey Robinson. Bruce seconded.

Jeffrey asked for a vote.

Jeffrey Robinson was unanimously elected as Chair.

Jeffrey nominated Barbara Snyder as Vice Chair. Bruce seconded.

Jeffrey asked for a vote.

Barbara Snyder was unanimously elected as Chair.

#### **Economic and Community Development – Staff Update**

Director of Economic and Community Development, John Voket, provided a staff update. (See Attachment A.)

#### **Adjournment:**

Jeffrey asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Tracey Pertoso made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 p.m. and was seconded by Nick Roussas. All members in favor.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*

## Attachment A

EDC progress update 11-23-23 - 02-20-2024

*Note to EDC: Kimberly Chiappetta continues to be a respected and highly valued resource to our office, and remains connected to many of the activities we are supporting. She also is the lead member of our department on a good number of the projects and initiatives below. She additionally continues to assist and educate me in regard to department duties, responsibilities and project particulars and we continue to function as a team addressing new and ongoing activities and challenges related to the ECD Dept.*

Since my last report to the EDC in Nov. 2023, I have been engaged with the following activities. This list is a sampling and does not represent all of the activities and engagements I have been participating in as part of my day-to-day responsibilities:

Continuing to grow into the role and handling or delegating requests for service and/or info from the ECD office including:

Organizing and producing ribbon cutting activities for four new businesses: Compco (Apple Auth. service center), Radzwillas Kitchen & Bath, Herbs Love + Yoga in Sandy Hook Village, and Pixie Dust (event space) in Plaza South.

Organization and collaboration with the regional chamber to host their annual Manufacturers Breakfast, planned for Curtis Packaging on May 14, which will bring 60 - 75+ regional manufacturing leaders / reps to the community.

Organization and collaboration with the Fairfield County Commercial Brokers Network (FCCBN) to host a luncheon meeting in town at either the Community Center or location TBD. This event typically attracts several dozen commercial brokers and will provide an opportunity to tout recent ED activities and showcase commercial opportunities at FFH and in town.

Engaging in ongoing training and related networking toward anticipated CT Municipal Official certification through CCM.

Met with Regional Chamber leadership to discuss mutually beneficial programs, activities and support including upcoming Heart of Women Award event honoring Newtown nonprofit founder Linda Jones.

Represented Newtown at installation of resident and former selectman and LC Chairman Will Rodgers into the CT Veterans Hall of Fame.

Working with Town Clerk and Asst Town Clerk Renee Weimann in concert with Kimberly and our web vendor to create appropriate email linkage between the public visiting the ECD page at newtown-ct.gov and EDC Chair and Vice-chair.

*continued*

## Attachment A

Continuing support including calls, meetings, and email correspondence related to:

- 7 Glen Rd. pocket park and related parking / sidewalks / ADA access;
- 28 A/B Glen Rd. - shadowing town staff collaborating on ongoing environmental cleanup and future development process including attending recent bid review;
- 6 Commerce Road;
- 3 Main Street;
- Batchelder brownfields site - working toward contracting analysis and reporting ahead of initiating further grant and funding requests to support the next phase of clean-up and eventual utilization of part / all of that parcel for possible green energy / transportation / agricultural utilization.
- Continued discussion and collaboration with the State DOL and regional workforce development agency to host job-finding events for large local workforce employers. Working toward hosting at least 2 events between April and October.
- Met with a local nonprofit leader to brainstorm on and possibly co-sponsor an event honoring local women business, community and volunteer leaders planned for early summer at ETH that should bring several hundred visitors utilizing local businesses and food establishments.
- Continuing meetings and correspondence with more than a half-dozen local prospects seeking to expand or build and open new businesses in town or at Fairfield Hills.
- Worked with reps from Winn on finalizing state approvals and Federal Historic designation for Fairfield Hills tied to mixed-use development plans - including conferencing and corresponding with Winn project manager.

Continuing to support recently completed ownership, responsibilities, and content of developing new ECD website ([newtown.org](http://newtown.org)) - the EDC pages will be part of the improvements.

Continuing occasional posting of interesting news and outreach on our EDC social sites (Facebook / Instagram)

Continuing to develop, research, design, publish and distribute "Developing News" EDC e-newsletter - de-duplicated several separate mailing lists to streamline distribution, removed approx 20 duplicate recipients and further expanded the recipient list by approximately 100 new subscribers since December.

*continued*

## Attachment A

Worked with First Selectman and Finance Director through several meetings developing f/y 2025 EDC Dept budget

Concurrently engaging in ongoing meetings around definition of duties and responsibilities between ECD Director and E&C Dev. & Fairfield Hills Coordinator - with support for a proposed change in job designation (Class) for the E&C Dev. & Fairfield Hills Coordinator.

Engaged substantially with the newly-created Fair Rent Commission including consulting on matters involving several cases, correspondence with individuals appealing and defending, pending legal action, and recruitment and retention of a new member to fill the seat of a member who failed to attend any meetings and was subsequently removed by BOS.

Supporting the E&C Dev. & Fairfield Hills Coordinator and assisting with planning for expanded memorial sites and features around the FFH Campus, including the creation of a location map and additional options for survivors beyond previously only offering commemorative benches and tree plantings.

Attended orientation meeting with AdvanceCT - a private nonprofit economic development organization that drives job creation and new capital investment in Connecticut through business attraction, retention, and expansion, in close cooperation with state, regional, and local partners. Outcome resulted in Newtown being targeted for possible major business relocation.

Met with local nonprofit regarding development and beautification of Sandy Hook foot bridge as a component of the developing SH trail network and related development.

Attended workshop for new municipal officials at Capital and attended workshops w SOTS on new voting initiatives; Freedom of Information training; Municipal Ethics; cybersecurity; municipal roles & Responsibilities; grants and resources for general and targeted grants, loans and funding.

Met w Community Center Director regarding support for new / expanding features including new playground and splash pad.

Met with EDC Chairman and E&C Dev. & Fairfield Hills Coordinator on utilization of Business Incentive Plan.

Attended networking 'Lunch & Learn' with Southbury EDC on using social networks to enhance business marketing and related initiatives.

Became Newtown appointee to the Western CT Regional Tourism Board and attended in-person meeting and networking with approx 40 regional representatives, business, and rec/entertainment representatives.

*continued*



## Attachment A

Conferenced with CT Green bank on new and ongoing projects, grant opportunities etc for local residents and businesses.

Attended UConn Public Service Executive Leadership Collaborative training on “Manager Essentials in the New World of Work”.

Met with commercial lending VP and local branch manager at M&T Bank discussing services / support for new and growing businesses.

Met with the new Municipal Outreach officer at Newtown Savings Bank discussing services / support for new and growing businesses.

Attended 1st of 4 virtual Sustainable CT Virtual Equity Training Series (toward CCMO certification).

Attended COST annual Town Meeting and met briefly with Governor, Lt Governor, two dozen individual service and support vendors, and heard presentations from CT DOT, CT DAS, Comptroller Scanlon, DEEP, and participated in election of 2024 COST leadership.

Conferenced with CEO of Women's Business Development Council (WBDC) on new and existing opportunities and support for WOBs in Newtown.

Coordinated on design and placement of Site Finder advertisement on CT-focused edition of the national magazine.

Assisting with development of updated “Video Tour of Newtown” that will be re-installed on municipal website (newtown-ct.gov) upon completion this spring.

Assisted in coordination and funding for replacement signage for Taunton Cemetery.

Assisting in coordination of no parking signs and related enforcement at Fairfield Hills.

Ramping up support for “Recovery-Friendly Community” and related workplace initiatives originating with Newtown Prevention Council.

Continuing to monitor various channels and solicitations for grants pertinent to specific departments and projects and ensuring related leadership are aware of the grant opportunities and deadlines.

Continued to act in support of the EDC Strategic Plan and its directives.