

Newtown Municipal Center
3 Primrose Street
Newtown, CT
www.newtown.org



Economic Development Commission

MINUTES

March 19, 2024

Newtown Municipal Center
Shared Meeting Room 3
3 Primrose St

Present: Jeffrey Robinson, Fran Pennarola, David Cervero, Valerie Fallon, Bryan Atherton

Absent: Bruce Walczak, Nick Roussas, Barbara Snyder, Tracey Pertoso

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

Public Attendance:

None

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

Approval of Minutes:

Fran Pennarola made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from February 20, 2024. Bryan Atherton seconded. Motion passed with all in favor. Valerie Fallon abstained.

Public Participation:

None.

Chair Jeffrey Robinson asked new members to introduce themselves to the Commission.

First, David Cervero introduced himself informing the group that he works in commercial real estate and owns restaurants. David became a resident of Newtown about 8 years ago and wanted to become more involved in the Town.

Next Bryan Atherton introduced himself informing the Commission that he has been a resident of Newtown for 40 + years and is a graduate of Newtown High School. Brian has a degree in finance and later became involved real estate development. He explained that he understands the need for balanced economies, sustaining an economic base, and the importance of data. Bryan is a member of the National Association of Realtors and joined the EDC because he wants to give back to his community.



Workshop series collaboration between EDC and ECD

Jeffrey began by telling the Commission that Bruce Walczak brought to the Commission's attention a small business entrepreneurs seminar series held by the Southbury Economic and Community Development and sponsored by Newtown Saving Bank. Bruce recommended that the EDC consider holding a seminar series. John Voket said that he attended a seminar regarding using social networks to boost your business. He explained to the Commission that when he accepted the role as the Director of Economic and Community Development, he wanted to do new things. Recognizing the need to connect local businesses with job seekers, John reached out to the Department of Labor and Job Force Board to set-up a job finding session in Newtown. It is estimated that an event will take place by the end of this year. Another new item John is working on is an event to introduce local farms to the public that would be broader than a Farmers' Market. This is something he would like to schedule some time in the late summer or early fall. Members discussed planning for a seminar series and how associated tasks would be handled. Bryan noted that there may be opportunities for the State DECD to hold a seminar to educate the community. John added that holding a session with the Department of Tourism may be another good opportunity.

Chairman and Vice Chairman Reports/Comments

Jeffrey informed Commission members that the Town will be revisiting the process in how the 6 Commerce town parcel is being managed.

Economic and Community Development – Staff Update

John provided a brief overview of key items in his update, and invited members to a ribbon cutting at Popup Bagels on April 3rd. (See Attachment A.)

Adjournment:

Jeffrey asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Bryan Atherton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. and was seconded by Fran Pennarola. All members in favor.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk*

EDC / ECD progress update 02-20-2024 - 03-15-2024

Prepared by John Voket

Note to EDC: Kimberly Chiappetta is the lead member of our department on numerous projects and initiatives below. She additionally continues to assist and educate the Director 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 Feb. 2024, 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:

Latest highlights:

Interacting with Property Acquisition Consultant representing a respected ED and revitalization firm with interest in redeveloping remaining usable buildings at Fairfield Hills. A visit by firm reps is in the works and should be completed and reported on before the next EDC meeting.

Continuing to interact with the liaison for Cascades Specialty Packaging regarding queries our office is receiving about occupying their soon to be vacant industrial commercial space on School House Hill Road.

Evaluating the ECD subscription to Co-Star commercial property information service.

Meeting with local residents interested in fast-tracking Rail to Trail connections between Newtown and Monroe adjacent to Batchelder Haz-Mat site.

Met with liaison to CT DECD regarding upcoming Brownfields information session being held at Newsylum on FFH campus April 5.

Responded to and helped resolve the situation leading to numerous resident complaints about connectivity between municipal website and email delivery to EDC, with special thanks to Asst. Town Clerk Renee Weimann for addressing immediate and successful updates.

Contributed to the Finance Dept. updated report to S&P and conducted brief presentation during tele-conference ahead of bond offering - with successful re-affirmation of Newtown's AAA Bond rating.

Responded to LC committee queries regarding ECD Dept. budget request for 2024-25 f/y.

Updated First Selectman on resident interest in possible new building or re-occupancy of existing building on campus.

continued

Conducted tour and site visit with regional chamber and regional workforce development board reps ahead of ECD office co-hosting annual Manufacturers Breakfast, planned for Curtis Packaging on May 14, which will bring 60 - 75+ regional manufacturing leaders / reps to the community.

Attended Chamber 'Heart of Women' event honoring Newtown nonprofit founder / exec Linda Jones / Families United in Newtown.

Attended Western CT Tourism District Board meeting, introduced myself to new DECD Director of Tourism and began preliminary plans to host her and her team for Newtown visit - possibly including a workshop for local businesses looking to expand activity promotions on CTVisit website and social networks.

Completed 2 of 3 Sustainable CT Virtual Equity Training courses toward CCM / CT Municipal Official certification.

Nominated Newtown Police staff member to First 100 Plus Class of 2024 - hosted by CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence to recognize leaders working across Connecticut to improve the lives of domestic violence survivors and their children.

Submitted written testimony to State Legislature in support of Newtown's Sepe Farms and owner Pete Sepe who is chair of the Fairfield County Farm Bureau regarding conflicts involving his and other similar farms' challenges purveying their own products through their own farm shops and stands.

Held preliminary meeting with video production and marketing company reps regarding the 'Video Tour of Newtown' and related sponsorships currently located on the municipal website.

Attended Cultural Alliance of Western CT informational meeting to learn more about how for-profit and nonprofit arts organizations are contributing to municipal and proximate business revenues.

Met with individual seeking to secure memorial tree planting at FFH - and conducted related meeting with team involved in updating memorial offerings and siting them on the FFH campus.

Attended and advised on final tasks for the 7 Glen Road brownfields conversion to pocket park.

Attended meeting with pertinent officials regarding permeable materials plans for resurfacing and new surfacing at FFH campus.

Attended and advised at initial Safe Streets organizational meeting w agreement to serve as FFH liaison for possible near-future pedestrian safety measures and installations at FFH.

continued

Attended 2nd of 4 Connecticut Age Well Collaborative training to better learn how to challenge negative bias about aging, dementia and disability.

Met with CT Manufacturing Officer Paul Lavoie to learn about various workforce and support programs available to help sustain and grow Newtown manufacturing base.

Met with motion picture and television development consultant (Newtown resident) regarding utilization of Newtown locations for film and TV productions- along with promoting and utilizing Newtown residents for nonunion work in such projects in town and throughout the region.

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

Organizing and/or producing ribbon cutting activities for two new businesses: Pixie Dust (event space) and Popup Bagels in Plaza South.

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;

Continuing to support recently completed ownership, responsibilities, and content of developing new ECD website (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.

Continued support of the Fair Rent Commission including consulting on matters involving 2 remaining appeals.

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.

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

Completed SCORE training session on grant writing. I learned or was refreshed on: What makes a grant proposal, and how it can help; How to write a proposal that aligns with funding applications; Common reasons funding applications get denied; and Valuable resources and sources for finding grants.