

East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee (VRC) Meeting
Wednesday, March 28, 2018
Minutes

DRAFT

Committee Members Present: Bill Gerrish (Chairman), Melanie Kolek (Secretary), J.T. Smith (for Mr. Gionta), Bob Casner, Randy Dill, Jim Curtin, Will Brady (arrived 7:57 p.m.)

Others in Attendance: Irene Haines, Rob Smith, Patrick McMahon, Emmett Lyman, Robert Moresch

Absent: Mike Gionta, Mark Walter

Mr. Gerrish called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm. He appointed J.T. Smith to replace Michael Gionta as a voting member.

Approval of agenda
Curtin/Dill

MOTION CARRIED

Approval of minutes from February 28, 2018 meeting with changes
Casner/Kolek

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. Casner noted that it was the town that donated the property. David Chapman changed to David Nelson.

First Selectman Update

Mr. Lyman stated that the Board of Finance had accepted the proposed budget. He also advised that an ordinance book was recently passed for which the town had been working on for 13 years.

New Business

Patrick McMahon, President & CEO of Connecticut Main Street Center, presented to the committee. CT Main Street is a non-profit organization to get more investment into Connecticut neighborhood commercial and downtown districts. They were formed in 1995 by then Connecticut Light and Power.

Mr. McMahon discussed the history of the 2015 tax incremental financing (TIF) legislation and purpose of the same. He described TIF revenue is designated and earmarked into a fund designated for a particular purpose with a town or municipality. The steps he described to set up a TIF were as follows: create a district master plan, provide to P&Z before adoption of the district, then have a town meeting to approve the master plan.

There was discussion regarding a credit enhancement agreement/developer's agreement whereby a town can opt to rebate the taxes back to the developer for a period of time, which is different than a tax abatement.

There was also discussion regarding historic tax credits which is the gap between rentals achieved on the property and construction costs to get the property back on the tax rolls. Mr. McMahon stated the state is being asked to contribute more to this as the return on investment is tremendous.

Mr. McMahon stated that there are six essential elements needed to create a healthy, comprehensive downtown development: Place (historical preservation, placemaking, and fun events); inclusiveness (urban equity, cultural values, neighborhoods of choice); economics (support local businesses, innovation, housing jobs and economic vitality); stewardship (managed downtowns, public/private partnerships, community engagement; downtown-friendly regulations); sustainability (smart growth, public health, environment); and transportation (walkable & bikeable, transit, multimodal connectivity, and transit oriented development).

Mr. McMahon's initial observations of the town property were as follows:

- Joint market both sides/towns of the swing bridge. Eagle Landing needs substantial renovation but the train station is a good building block.
- Do not build anything at the top of the hill of the village property. Should be able to scan the entire river.
- There needs to be a community gathering of ideas.
- Regarding existing property structures, development should not touch old town hall as it is on the national register of historic places, restaurant alongside it. Street frontage is critical. Possibly build a building behind it? Garage in the back can be taken down or can be converted into a cool brew pub, for example.

Questions Mr. McMahon suggested that the town consider were as follows:

- How much development should we put on the property?
- How do you keep the New England charm?
- Would a familiarization event be beneficial?
 - Familiarization event is where architects, engineers, etc. get an opportunity to hear about and explore the parcels of land. Akin to a pre-RFP meeting. Presentation by town should include average daily traffic, zip codes of where visitors are coming from, cost of the property, what kind of rents can be achieved, environmental reports including what remediation has already been done, etc.
 - Suffield does something similar to this
- Can we find a way to make it more vibrant? Capitalize on existing theater and restaurants? Build new buildings? Create new jobs?
 - Drone video of downtown
 - Circulate CERC town profile <http://profiles.ctdata.org/profiles/>
 - Add questions to new survey going out to town citizens regarding property development

Mr. Gerrish asked about opportunities for grants. CT Main Street Center has had very successful projects addressing infrastructure issues and grants were obtained to help with those issues. Three different grants are still on the book, albeit with little to no funding:

1. Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP)
2. Main St. Investment Fund (streetscaping)
3. State Dept of Transportation Connectivity Grant (sidewalks)

To be part of CT Main St network, \$500-\$750, which allows the town to be a part of their emails, educational programs, bridge series - networking events twice a year.

Old Business

- A. Environmental Assessment
 - a. This has been put out for bid process per Mr. Lyman.
- B. Lower Connecticut River Valley
 - a. Review of letter rejecting Smith transportation plan. Does not address life span of the bridge.

East Haddam and Haddam to apply again through DOT to put the sidewalk on the bridge as funds become available via the Tiger Grant.

Audience of Citizens

Several audience members provided comment about the presentation and future handling including generating diversity of interest in the property and following through on the proposed familiarization event.

Mr. Brady advised that members of the Historic District Commission want to be included in the committee/process.

Adjournment

Casner/Dill at 9:13 pm.

MOTION CARRIED

Next meeting April 25th at 7:30 pm at the Municipal Office Complex.