

East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee
September 26, 2018
DRAFT Minutes

Members Present; William Gerrish (chair), Melanie Kolek, Jim Curtin, Bob Casner, Will Brady, Emmett Lyman, J.T. Smith; Absent: Randy Dill

Mr. Walter was seated as a full voting member in place of Mr. Dill. Mr. Smith arrived at 7:41 p.m. and was appointed as a voting member in place of Mr. Gionta.

Call to order 7:32 pm

Agenda Approval: Motion made by Mrs. Kolek; Seconded by Mr. Brady. Motion approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes (August 22, 2018) Motion made by Mr. Curtin; second by Mr. Walter with amendments proposed by Mr. Brady. Motion approved unanimously. Mr. Gerrish asked Mr. Brady to forward exact corrections to the secretary to incorporate into the minutes.

Chairman's Statement

Mr. Gerrish advised the East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee (EHVRC) was established to oversee the conversion of the former town office site in the East Haddam Village into a commercially viable area. He further advised that the committee is comprised of nine town residents appointed by the town selectmen (seven regular members and two alternates).

Mr. Gerrish said that committee was convened in May 2017 and meets the 4th Wednesday of the month. The committee has reviewed the work of earlier committees, which have been convened over the years. Agendas and minutes are available on the committee's page on the Town website. He stated that the previous iteration of the committee met from January 2009 to January 2013, and developed a vision consensus statement and issued a Request for Qualifications in 2010. No bids were received in response.

Now that the town offices have vacated the village site, Mr. Gerrish stated that the town is preparing to solicit proposals from commercial developers. An Environmental Assessment of the three properties on the 2.8 acre site was recently completed. At least two developers have expressed interested in the property. To help inform the process going forward, Mr. Gerrish stated EHVRC wants to hear from the residents of East Haddam, particularly the following:

1. What is the best use of the town-owned 2.6-acre site?
2. What criteria should be used to evaluate development proposals?
3. How can a revitalized village best serve the town and its residents?

Audience members were urged to speak and be heard on their thoughts. Speakers were also urged to submit additional information and questions in writing to admin@easthaddam.org.

Audience of Citizens

Roni Burson

Her road has become a pass through. Her concern was that we are losing the rural feel of the town. She is a member of the Goodspeed Opera House (“GOH”) guild. What she hears from actors is that they want a convenience store and gift shop, that they are not allowed to walk across the bridge which is problem. She advised that regarding the idea of a brewery, she wants to see something more classy but not like the Gelston House because it is expensive; more like a family orientated restaurant. Parking is also an issue, in particular handicap spaces.

She later stated that the GOH is there all year bringing enormous amounts of people into town. She also urged the town to get plan developers/professionals to assist in putting a plan in place before a contractor is chosen.

Jason Hendry

Mr. Hendry stated that Mr. Donner’s proposal is fantastic pertaining to Steady Habit. They have shown ambition and plans to move to the Village. They want to be the center point of revitalization of the town offices. He described that those who support craft beer are not drunkards; there are local people who are going to frequent the brewery. He made favorable comparisons to other breweries in the area and country where breweries are thriving and locally supported. He said that the town should not focus on development with a focus on only a few months of out of town travelers, stating that no one from the Goodspeed is going to come to the Village property in January or February.

Chris Miller

The town should consider the history of the property in its development pursuits, in particular a Greek revival.

Jesse White-Frese

Since she arrived in town in 1975, she passes the center of town visualizing the things that the center of town could be. Mixed use – how do you bring people into the downtown to make it a vital, thriving place? Chester is an example. Steady Habit is a great idea to bring to Village, with younger people likely to go there, creating a cultural vibe that encourages people to come into the town. She was shocked about the Music on the River success with Essex Steam Train expounding upon that. Her greatest fear is how long it took to get a high school. She feels robbed that she cannot go downtown, have a place to sit or a safe place to walk. She asked that the town be thoughtful; don’t let public concerns be a barrier, make the Village a cultural mecca.

Scott Jezek

He would like to see the town gift the property to the GOH to be put on the tax rolls. GOH drives the events down there. He described a members-only event at GOH which had a full house, standing room only. Only ones he saw there that he knew were employees from town.

Erin Trawick-Smith

She grew up in Meriden, and believes that while the GOH is beautiful and she loves musical theater, as a young property owner who wants to stay in town, the Village is missing somewhere

to go and have a fathering place. She wouldn't expect GOH to do what is necessary to bring in a younger crowd.

She later stated that she is struck about how many interesting professionals we have in this town, stating that it is really smart to incorporate their expertise in the Village project.

Bill Cross

Property that we are referring to is the crown jewel of the town, and has been owned by the town for centuries. We need to be thoughtful and careful about what we do with it. His opinion regarding the property: thoughtful study of leasing v. sale. Macro view – we sell, we lose control; better off leasing it and maintaining control. He also advocated for public RFPs and not those which are only referenced in the town newspaper.

Karin Blashick

She would like the town to retain ownership of the property; it is a crown jewel. Would hate to have the town lose control of the land.

Jeff Miller

With his urban planning background and as a newcomer, he has many thoughts on the property. He is not sure if the Village should have a GOH related use or if a craft brewery would be best suited. RFP process is good to generate ideas, and also having a clear idea of who is proposing what and their financial position (equity and debt financing). Given his background, vehicular and pedestrian crossings need to be addressed; the bend in the road is problematic. Hopefully the RFP process will encourage joint ventures but any plan has to be done carefully.

He later said that following the disastrous Moodus redevelopment, through the RFP process, it is important to vet these proposals, to determine whether they are economically feasible. Hard to add things to the wish list; could die a slow death by adding to development specifications.

Renee Osborne

She asked that the committee consider everything they received tonight with a weighted method and appreciate the needs of the community. She advised that the committee needs to charge applicants with a definition of how they are going to contribute back to this community; create a sense of community, generate revenues, consider the youth and elderly, and notching funds for a broken state that needs to redesign the road. When RFP is developed, she asked that the committee assign value and factor in the things that what we are NOT hearing.

She later asked who is developing the RFP? Has that been set? There are many different interests; economic/commerce v. town interest.

Mary Colpoys

Environment studies done? Take these into consideration.

Andrew Lord

He sees this as a business opportunity for the town not to be waited for. If we have people who want to come to town now, come via lease with defined term while we reach out to others for

possible sale. Given his background in environmental issues, a potential contamination of the property does not have to be an impediment to lease.

Tim **Aldave**

There is no updated value on the property and the environmental results are unknown. Before any decision is made, it should be decided by the town in a referendum.

Ed Blashick

He asked that the committee explore the lease option. The property is the crown jewel, gateway of the community; window and door of East Haddam. With businesses opening and closing and banks gaining control of properties, if we sell the property, we would have no control of that. Lease option is a gift that continues to give. Other properties have gone by the wayside in town; be careful with this property. His comments were made not an employee of GOH but as a citizen of town.

Dave Johnston

One of the reasons he moved here was because he thought that the town would be redeveloped. Only other town that has commercial property on the river is Essex. It is the crown jewel. His thought is that a developer should show in an RFP what market research they have done, e.g. talking to actors, theater patrons, town travelers who travel through and occasionally stop. Ask them: what would attract more people?

Bill Chilton

Impressed by comments made in the meeting. As an architect, he has seen cities across nation. A number of them worked on projects where one project completely changed a district or entire city. Our town is at a pivot point. Everyone recognizes importance but he added that this is a complex architectural problem, need to review this holistically. Look at the property in context of relationship to the river and development that is happening in town. Several issues to address: characteristics and a clarity of vision and set of priorities that all constituents agree upon. The plan needs some criteria and should be a close partnership of private sector and public.

Doug Van Dike

Make sure architecture conforms with rest of town and is not a modern structure.

Brendan Matthews

He has a timber framing company in town and discussed the importance of aesthetics, in particular with keeping in context of Greek revival. He would like to see boutique shops and diverse restaurants which would help town patrons, visitors and actors.

Curtis Rodowicz

He has concerns about the property. The reason he voted for renovation was that he wanted revenue to come back into the town. Town would not be a good landlord. Everyone recognizes that it is the crown jewel. He envisions a hotel/spa with shuttle services. He stated that the town should consider creating a synergy with the other side of the river. Looking at area towns, we need something bigger that is a draw but not a brewery, that would bring money back into the town. He does not advocate for a transfer to non-profit or lease.

Irene Haines

Has worked a lot with Economic Development Commission, stating there are a lot of ideas out there and the comments at the meeting were great. Until the testing comes back, plans still needs to move forward. She stated that we need to think about our beautiful spot on the CT River; include vistas, views, docks, way to reach the river. We have an opportunity here and only one shot at that. She stated that we should not cripple ourselves with everything all at once but should consider incorporating all of the surroundings.

Bob Meyers

Committee should come back and answer questions regarding feasibility about sewer, fire, water. No opinions about brewery and not sure how to service that.

Dolores Tedford

She advised that very good ideas came from the meeting and commended the committee for their good work. Priority should be made that a certain amount of the property be dedicated to the general public, e.g. eagle watching.

Next Steps

Mr. Gerrish advised that this information will be assimilated and reviewed as a committee. The committee will have a role in the development of the RFP. Citizens are welcome and encouraged to attend upcoming meetings. RFP will go out through the town for approval

Written comments will be attached as an addendum to the minutes. (Attached.)

Adjournment 8:38 p.m.

Mr. Casner made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Brady. Motion passed unanimously.