

Joint Board of Selectmen and
East Haddam Economic Development Commission
Meeting Room 1
November 13, 2018
Special Meeting Minutes

Attending BOS: E. Lyman; R. Smith
Absent: S. Link

Attending EDC: D. Bergeron; R. Casner; J. Fennema; I. Haines
Absent: J. Albuquerque; R. Parady; S. Smith; F. Weissbach

Guests: E. Blaschik; L. D'Aquila; D. Dill; E. Dill; D. Faipler; Z. Jezek; S. Knauf; D. Mitchell; J. Stone; A. Tierney; J. Ventres; S. Wheeler

1. Call to Order: Mr. Lyman called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Attendance: The Selectmen and Economic Development Commissioners introduced themselves and the public stated their names and relationship to Chatham Health District and/or the Town. Mr. Casner sat Mr. Fennema for Mr. Weissbach and Ms. Haines for Ms. Smith.

2. Chatham Health District Discussion: Mr. Casner thanked the attendees for coming out to participate in the discussion regarding the Town's relationship with Chatham Health District (CHD). He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss EDC's recent letter to the Board of Selectmen regarding the Town's contract with Chatham Health District.

Mr. Casner advised that the EDC Commissioners first started discussing their concerns about Chatham Health District's service to the Town's business community in October of 2016 and, in October of 2018, established a sub-committee to look into alternatives available to the Town. He noted that East Haddam pays an annual contract fee of \$105,000.00 to CHD and CHD collects approximately \$24,000.00/yr. in service fees from Town residents and business owners.

Mr. Casner stated that some of the primary concerns referred to EDC were related to food service inspections and the lack of a regularly scheduled sanitarian in the Town office.

In response to Mr. Casner's request for information regarding the standard rotation for food service inspections, CHD Director Mitchell advised that the frequency of inspections is generally driven by the classification of the food service vendor. He stated that, while all of the CHD staff are certified food service inspectors, there is only one staff member who is dedicated full-time to do those inspections. He noted that the new sanitarian hired by CHD has experience in food service inspections.

There was a general discussion regarding certifying food trucks for special events in Town and Director Mitchell advised that if a food truck vendor has received a certification from CHD, that certification can be used in any of the five towns in the district. Sanitarian Knauf further advised that he had recently attended a meeting with participants from several CT health districts where the standardization and regionalization of food truck certifications was discussed. He noted that, if their recommendation is acted on, a certification from any one of the districts would be good in 85% of eastern CT.

The group discussed the need for public education about common health issues such as radon, clean drinking water, and other environmental issues. Mr. Knauf noted that CHD would like to be educators and not just regulators but the classes they have offered in the past were sparsely attended. Mr. Casner emphasized the importance of fostering a collaborative relationship between CHD and local building contractors, and of educating realtors about environmental issues that could impact a transfer of property. Selectman Smith suggested CHD might consider offering classes that satisfy continuing education requirements for realtors.

Commissioner Haines noted that CHD has been aware of the Town's concerns for quite a while and asked for an update on what the organization has done to address those concerns. Director Mitchell reviewed the challenges all districts are having in filling sanitarian positions. He noted that CHD had received no responses to its recent posting of an open sanitarian position; however, they had been successful in filling the position after actively recruiting an experienced individual.

He also stated that he recently met with a representative from UConn where they discussed creating a minor that would qualify students for a Public Health certification. Director Mitchell advised that CHD is much more financially sound than it was three years ago.

CHD Board Chairman Tierney stated that the district is undergoing a re-organization and that Director Mitchell will be retiring; however, during the transition to the new Director, he will continue to work as a sanitarian. In response to a question raised by Mr. Smith, Director Mitchell confirmed that when the new sanitarian is on-board, they will be fully staffed.

In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Fennema, Mr. Knauf offered to provide a presentation on the scope of services provided by CHD.

3. Public Comment: The following public comment was discussed at the meeting:

- Land Use Administrator Ventres advised that on most projects his office is able to maintain contact with the sanitarian who initiates a project and he feels the process runs smoothly.
- Ms. J. Stone provided background on her business experience and involvement with the Town's business community. She stated that, as president of the East Haddam Business Association, she would like to be pro-active about providing business owners with public health information and how it may affect their business. She offered to meet with

representatives of CHD to learn more about what businesses need to know about public health requirements, inspections, etc. and how to keep community events in compliance with CHD prerequisites. She noted that she has received feedback from some business owners about the disrespectful attitude of some of CHD's staff.

- In response to a question from Mr. Smith, Mr. Tierney advised that the state is promoting regionalization and towns can expect more consolidation of health districts. There was a general discussion regarding the variances among health districts and Director Mitchell noted that the state sets the minimum public health standards and provides template forms; however, towns and districts can, and do, modify both to meet their own needs.
- Mr. Z. Jezek advised that, until recently, he owned the Gristmill Market in Moodus. He stated that, over time, he had developed a strong relationship with CHD and noted that he felt they had greatly improved their staff's customer service skills.

Mr. Casner agreed that the staff's customer service attitude is an important factor and noted that some sanitarians are better than others at working with the public. He advised that it is EDC's role to attract and promote business in East Haddam and stated having consistent office hours for the Town's sanitarian and good customer service was critical for the businesses.

Mr. Lyman acknowledged that, over the past several years, CHD has not always provided a regularly scheduled staff person in the Town offices and agreed that the Town needs that consistency. He noted, however, that a great deal of good field work still occurred. He reviewed several letters of support from community groups who had positive, on-going relationships with CHD.

- Ms. L. D'Aquila, Chairman of the Board of the East Haddam Volunteer Ambulance Association, noted that the Town receives mutual aid from the other towns participating in CHD and stated that she would be concerned about exiting from that support system.
- In response to Mr. E. Dill's stated recommendation that the Town hire its own full-time sanitarian, there was a general discussion regarding the cost of doing so. Mr. Knauf stated that the state would have to approve that change and noted that CT is pushing for more regionalization and consolidation of health districts. Mr. E. Dill suggested CHD pro-rate its charge for staffing the sanitarian's office on part-time basis.
- In response to a question raised by Mr. Casner, there was a general discussion about CHD's fee structure. Director Mitchell advised that approximately 15% of CHD's revenue comes from the state in the form of grants and a direct subsidy. He confirmed that CHD's fee structure is comparable to those of the surrounding health districts and that it supports CHD's financial stability. Mr. Mitchell noted, however, that the fees are currently being reviewed and he anticipates some minor increases. He also confirmed that CHD is doing away with the septic system pump-out fee.

The participants discussed the potential impact of a town withdrawing from CHD. Mr. Tierney stated that East Haddam should make a decision about their future participation in CHD based on what is best for the Town; however, he confirmed that a loss of any of the member towns could potentially have a dire impact on CHD.

- Mr. E. Blaschik stated that he felt the meeting had been very helpful but commented that he would like to have a similar session with the alternative health districts. Ms. Haines supported his recommendation and stressed the need for good customer service from CHD in order to attract new businesses to Town. Mr. Blaschik also agreed with Mr. Fennema's recommendation that a definitive scope of CHD services should be drafted for the Town.
 - Mr. J. Ventres expressed his frustration that, as a Town department head that works with CHD on a daily basis, EDC had not looped him into their discussions earlier.
 - Board Chairman Tierney stated that he had thought CHD had previously resolved the Town's concerns; however, he learned from the evening's discussions that there were still several issues that need to be addressed. He promised that he and Director Mitchell would immediately look into the grievances raised at the meeting.
4. Adjournment: Mr. Lyman and Mr. Casner thanked the participants for attending the meeting and for their open communication.

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL BUSINESS TO DISCUSS, A MOTION WAS MADE BY MR. LYMAN, SECONDED BY MR. SMITH, TO ADJOURN THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING. UNANIMOUS AYE.

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL BUSINESS TO DISCUSS, A MOTION WAS MADE BY MR. BERGERON, SECONDED BY MR. FENNAMA, TO ADJOURN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MEETING. UNANIMOUS AYE.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Recorded

Respectfully Submitted,
Sharon Wheeler