

**Economic Development Commission
Special Meeting
March 10, 2011**

Attending: R. Casner; E. Odell, G. Rucker, P. Stricker, M. Ziobron (EDC Coordinator)

Guests: J. Bucko, C. Day, T. Furrer, P. Govert, E. Lyman, P. Maxwell, M. Poole, S. Rocco, R. Scherrer, J. Ventres, M. Walter, S. Wheeler

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Ziobron called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and noted that the East Haddam Economic Development Commission had called a special meeting to discuss the proposed Haddam land-swap and related development plans of the Riverhouse partners.

The participants introduced themselves and Ms. Ziobron invited Mr. Rocco to provide the attendees with an overview of the proposed project.

PRESENTATION REGARDING PROPOSED LAND SWAP – HIGGANUM/HADDAM

Mr. Rocco thanked EDC for the opportunity to speak with them about the Riverhouse's proposed development plans. He provided some historical background on the land-swap and noted that the idea first came up in a discussion with DEP officials in 2005. He stated that the DEP representatives had indicated that the State had no interest in retaining the 17 acres of industrial zoned land that encompassed three sides of the Riverhouse property. Further discussions with State representatives resulted in the idea of a possible land-swap with the Riverhouse partners.

Mr. Rocco stated that in 2008 the partners identified an 87 acre parcel of land adjacent to Cockoponset State Forest as being ideally suited for a land-swap with the State. He noted that the parcel is currently privately owned and had been approved for a sub-division but has not been developed.

Mr. Rocco stated that there have been numerous rumors and misunderstandings regarding the parcel of land that the State proposed for the swap. He went through a slide presentation and advised that he wanted to clear up the misconception that it was part of the riverfront Eagle Landing Park and pointed out that the parcel under discussion is 700' from the riverfront and totally landlocked.

Mr. Rocco presented a slide of the architect's conceptual plan for the site which included a hotel just south of the Riverhouse and, below that, a walkable village area with a large anchor tenant. He noted that in the previous legislation for the land-swap deal Goodspeed's second theatre was included as the anchor tenant; however, he advised that the State had pulled the funding for that project and the Goodspeed was not a part of the current plan.

Mr. Furrer noted East Haddam's plans to revitalize the Village area and stated that the Riverhouse group would like to partner with East Haddam to develop both sides of the river as a tourist destination. He pointed to the example of Groton and Stonington and the development of Mystic Village as a successful partnership that benefited both towns. He noted the need for critical mass and talked about a footbridge and/or ferry service between Tylerville and the East Haddam Village.

Ms. Ziobron thanked the Riverhouse partners for their presentation and opened the floor for questions. The following questions were addressed:

- Questions from Ms. Stricker: Mr. Bucko advised that their plans call for an independent hotel with 30-70 rooms. There was a general discussion of expanded use of the Essex Steamtrain and a Rails-to-Trails proposal. The partners stated they believe the proposal to extend the railroad lines for freight use will not go forward. Mr. Rocco advised that none of the offers from former DEP Commissioner McCarthy for a land-swap with the Riverhouse are in writing.
- Questions from Mr. Odell: Mr. Rocco provided background on proposals to re-write the zoning regulations for Higganum and Tylerville and noted that Haddam's First Selectman is committed to moving forward on revisions to the regulations for Tylerville. He acknowledged the Gateway Commission's preference is to have the new regulations for Tylerville in place before voicing support for the landswap; however, he feels there are alternatives to securing new zoning regulations. The issue of acquiring a long-term solution to Tylerville's sewer and potable water issues were discussed.

- Question from Mr. Govert: Mr. Rocco advised that they are sensitive to East Haddam's concerns regarding the Goodspeed but noted that, since they lost the funding from the State, their second theatre is not a part of the current development plans. He stated that he cannot guarantee that they will not build a second theatre across the river in the future but also advised that it was never in the Goodspeed's plans to close the Opera House.
- Question from Ms. Stricker: The Riverhouse partners stated that their plans are still in the conceptual stage and that nothing has been presented to Haddam's Planning & Zoning Department.

Ms. Ziobron stated that a concern for East Haddam is that the Riverhouse project will draw all of the foot-traffic away from the Village businesses. She noted that she has been working with Representative Courtney's office on potential ways to address that concern, including reviving plans for a footbridge spanning the river. There was a general discussion regarding a potential footbridge, ferry service, and/or a trolley service between the two villages.

Mr. Furrer noted that their plans call for a \$60M project that would provide numerous construction jobs and an estimated 300 full-time post-construction jobs.

Mr. Ventres reviewed the history of several of the projects discussed during the meeting and noted that there is a public-trust issue that will need to be overcome. He also stated that any project done by the Riverhouse partners' will have an impact on future projects proposed along the CT River.

In response to a question from Ms. Ziobron, Mr. Rocco stated that he did not know the status of the State's lease agreement with Lady Catherine Cruises. Ms. Ziobron noted that the individual who had drafted Haddam's Plan of Conservation and Development had also written the Executive Summary for potential use of East Haddam's Town Office Site. She noted the State's focus on regional revenue-sharing projects and pointed out several synergies between the Tylerville and East Haddam Village projects. She suggested the Riverhouse partners consider attending some of the East Haddam Village Revitalization Commission meetings to familiarize themselves with what is being planned for the Town Office Site.

Mr. Govert again expressed his concern that the Goodspeed would build its primary theatre across the river which has the potential to negatively impact the East Haddam Village business community.

In response to a question from Ms. Stricker, Mr. Rocco advised that under the original land-swap legislation, the State was going to sub-divide the 17 acre site between the Riverhouse and the Goodspeed; however, the current plan is that the Riverhouse will acquire the entire parcel.

In response to inquires from Mr. Scherrer and Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Rocco reviewed the slide that mapped out the 17 acre parcel and stated that DEP acquired the property through negotiations with Mr. Robinson, the owner of Camelot Cruises. He advised that the new legislation will be considered by the Government Administration and Elections Committee within a week's time and, if it moves forward, will be voted on during the first week of June. Mr. Furrer stated that, normally, such a project would be handled administratively; however, he does not believe this one will go back to being handled through an administrative process.

Ms. Ziobron thanked the Riverhouse partners for their presentation. Mr. Rocco, Mr. Bucko, Mr. Furrer, and Mr. Poole thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity to discuss their plans with them.

ADJOURNMENT

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL BUSINESS TO DISCUSS, MS. STRICKER MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY MR. CASNER, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING, UNANIMOUS AYE.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon R. Wheeler
Recording Secretary