

**Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes
November 7, 2013**

Attending: R. Casner; D. Mathiasen; R. Parady; G. Rucker; P. Simmons (Economic Development Coordinator), F. Weissbach

Absent: J. Albuquerque; P. Rubenbauer.

Guests: S. McKinnon; M. Walter; S. Wheeler

Mr. Casner called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. He sat Mr. Parady for Ms. Rubenbauer.

Ms. Mathiasen reviewed the 2014 meeting schedule with the Commissioners and it was agreed she could submit them to the Town.

Minutes – The Commissioners reviewed the minutes from the October 6, 2013 meeting.

MR. PARADY MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY MS. MATHIASEN TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS WRITTEN. UNANIMOUS AYE.

OLD BUSINESS

Status Reports:

Economic Development Coordinator – Mr. Simmons reviewed several points in his report, a copy of which is attached to and made part of these minutes. There was a general discussion regarding the impact on businesses of the closure of Norwich Road from April-November for DOT work. Ms. Mathiasen recommended a mailing go in January out to all businesses advising them of the planned closure. The Commissioners discussed several ideas of how to communicate information about the closure and detours to businesses and the public. Ms. Mathiasen advised that the Events Magazine for several of the surrounding towns had informed her that EDC could publish a notice about the work in their winter and spring editions.

Mr. Simmons reported on the progress on the first Tax Incentive Program application and noted that he would like to make some revisions to the ordinance after this application is finalized.

First Selectman Update – Mr. Walter stated that it is his goal this term to drive economic development in East Haddam. He stated his focus will be on Moodus, the Village, and the 4-corners section of Town. He advised that tourism and the arts will be a focus for him.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Weissbach, Mr. Simmons advised that he had developed a draft economic development plan for East Haddam which identified gaps and opportunities. He advised that the draft plan recommends a focus on tourism, the arts, agriculture and light industry. Mr. Simmons agreed to recirculate the draft for the Commissioners review and feedback.

Commercial Use of Transfer Station for Municipal Solid Waste – Mr. Walter reported that the hopper had been repaired and that the Transfer Station would be re-opened to the commercial haulers on November 13th. He advised that Mr. Casner was appointed to replace Mr. Odell on the Transfer Station Committee and that the Committee is charged with developing a long-range plan for the commercial use of the Transfer Station.

Sewer Extension Feasibility Evaluation Rte. 82/151 – Mr. Walter reported that the State would not approve the installation of a sleeve under the Norwich Road bridge; however, he was advised that the State would approve the installation of a line after the bridge work was completed.

East Haddam Business Association – Ms. Mathiasen reported that the Business Association's tag sale was cancelled because they did not have enough vendors sign up. She advised that the election of new board members is planned and Ms. Pagnano will not be running for a position this term.

Other Businesses Updates/New Businesses/Events/Tourism:

Gillette Castle Shows/Humanities Grant – final report and survey analysis – Ms. Mathiasen advised that the final report had been submitted to the Humanities Council and noted that EDC and East Haddam had been mentioned in multiple communication vehicles used by the East Haddam Stage Company. She stated that 1700 people had attended the weekend

performances and the Commissioners reviewed the findings from the surveys the audience completed.

In response to a question from Mr. Weissbach, Ms. Mathiasen stated that she did not know if the East Haddam Stage Company would pursue a grant from the Humanities Council next year. Mr. Simmons advised that he has been brainstorming other groups in East Haddam that could benefit from a Humanities grant and the Commissioners agree that EDC should continue to pursue Humanities Council grants to support the arts and tourism in East Haddam.

Directory Signs – Mr. Walter reported that the owner of the property in Moodus where the EDC directory sign is located has asked to have the sign removed and that Public Works will remove the sign and store it. Mr. Parady stated that the cost to refurbish the signs was prohibitive and the Commissioners discussed whether or not there was still a need for business directory signs. Mr. Casner stated he would like to form a sub-committee at the December meeting to develop a recommendation regarding EDC sponsored business directory signs.

Chowder Cook-Off Event – Ms. Mathiasen provided some background on the ten years of the Chowder Festival, stating that it has gotten increasingly difficult for EDC volunteers to get commitments from participants, secure health district approvals, and to organize the event. The Commissioners discussed the pros and cons of the festival and agreed that, while it was a successful event that drew a good number of people to the Village, the participating businesses outside of the Village, did not generally benefit from it. Consequently, they discussed whether or not it merited EDC sponsorship going forward. Mr. Casner suggested that after ten years, the EDC could turn its attention to another event or activity that might provide a greater impact. Ms. Mathiasen mentioned that EDC might consider something like a “Restaurant Week” promotion where eateries could benefit from people coming to their establishment, rather than an off-site festival.

Ms. Mathiasen advised that she had informally inquired if there was any interest in the Business Association taking over the event and agreed to draft a letter to the Association board to ask if they would like to sponsor/organize the Chowder Festival. The EDC would be willing assist any group that wanted to take over the festival.

MS. MATHIASEN MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY MR. RUCKER, THAT THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION WILL NO LONGER SPONSOR THE ANNUAL CHOWDER COOK-OFF FESTIVAL. MR. WEISSBACH ABSTAINED FROM THE VOTE AND IT PASSED WITH A MAJORITY OF AYES.

NEW BUSINESS

Town Economic Development Strategy & Proposed Professional Projects – Mr. Casner identified the following projects that EDC is and will continue to work on: Town Office Site, Sunrise Resort, Sewer Extension Norwich Road, and tourism. He requested that the Commissioners submit any other economic development ideas they have for consideration. Mr. Simmons stated that he would redistribute a list of projects and sub-committees that he had identified to move an economic development agenda forward for the Town. He advised that a planned strategy for economic development has a better chance of success than a reactionary approach.

The Commissioners discussed potential collaboration opportunities with Gillette Castle State Park. Mr. McKinnon provided an update on the agriculture program at the Harris property and Mr. Walter and Mr. Simmons encouraged the Commissioners to stay involved with the project. They stated that they believe the agricultural incubator has the potential to significantly contribute to the Town’s future economic foundation.

CERC Site Finder - Mr. Simmons reported that the Town is now up and running on the CERC Site Finder and he is in the process of listing the Brownell property on the site. The Commissioners brainstormed a list of potential non-Town owned commercial properties to list on the site.

EDC input – Old Middle School Conversion Public Hearing – Mr. Walter requested the EDC Commissioners attend the November 14th public hearing on the Municipal Facilities Advisory Board’s recommendations. In response to a question from Mr. Weissbach, Mr. Walter confirmed that he is committed to moving this project forward.

EDC Ordinance – There was no update on this agenda item.

Mail Received – Ms. Mathiasen advised that she had received a release about the State of CT’s marketing grants program for 2014DM; she stated that the program continues to be out of the reach of small towns because of the minimum \$7,500 .grant request with 1 to 1 matching funds required.

Public Comment/Other – There was no public comment at the meeting.

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL BUSINESS TO DISCUSS, MR. PARADY MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY MR. RUCKER, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/ Sharon R. Wheeler
Recording Secretary