

**Economic Development Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
February 1, 2007**

Attending: J. Albuquerque; D. Mathiasen; R. Scherrer; P. Stricker  
Guests: Goodspeed – H. Kittner and D. McMahon, I. Dedusaj (Gelston House)

While the Commissioners were waiting to achieve a quorum, Mr. Scherrer welcomed Mr. Dedusaj and stated that many people are looking forward to having the Gelston House open again. He noted that work to re-open the restaurant appeared to be progressing smoothly; however, he offered the Commission's support and advocacy if needed at any point in the future.

Mr. Dedusaj thanked the Commissioners for inviting him to their meeting and stated that he was very appreciative of all the support he has received from the people in town. He advised that he expects the Gelston House to be open for business in late March or early April. He also noted that they plan to renovate the six guest rooms and they should be available in late spring. In response to a question from Ms. Stricker he advised that he had not yet been contacted by the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Scherrer called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m.

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the January 4<sup>th</sup> meeting were reviewed and Mr. Scherrer advised that, subsequent to the January meeting, he and Ms. Mathiasen had discussed Mr. Fielding's offer to pay for business cards for the Commissioners and agreed that the expense should be incurred by the Commission. He noted that the January minutes had been updated to reflect that decision.

MS. MATHIASEN MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE JANUARY 4, 2007 MEETING MINUTES. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MS. STRICKER AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Town Office Site:**

1. Access Road and Appraisals – next steps

Mr. McMahon advised that the Goodspeed's appraisal had come in at \$425,000.00 and they are waiting for an appraisal on an easement as proposed by the Town's appraiser. Mr. Scherrer reported that he had met with First Selectmen Parker and they both agreed that no further action could be taken on this issue until a master developer provides input. There was a general discussion concerning the "shelf-life" of appraisals but there was no resolution to that question.

2. Master Developers – how to review letters of interest, who/when to meet with EDC

Ms. Mathiasen stated that she had received calls from two interested parties, however, to date, no letters of interest have been submitted. Mr. Albuquerque advised that the developer of Banner Lodge had expressed an interest in the Town Office Site project and Ms. Mathiasen agreed to send him a copy of the letter that had been sent to several of the other potential developers. At Mr. Scherrer's suggestion, Mr. Albuquerque stated he would inform the developers of the February 13<sup>th</sup> deadline for submitting letters of interest.

Ms. Mathiasen agreed to copy any letters of interest that were submitted and distribute them to the Commissioners for their review.

3. Public Acceptance

The Commissioners discussed a proposal to schedule a public meeting in March. Ms. Mathiasen advised that EDC has received no additional feedback from the Town's other Boards and Commissions. There was a general discussion concerning the timing of the public meeting and it was agreed that securing the support of all of the Town's Boards and Commissions is critical before holding the public meeting.

4. Financial Assistance

Mr. Scherrer reported that First Selectman Parker has scheduled a meeting with Congressman Courtney to discuss reinstating the Mobility Study grant.

Ms. Stricker advised that she had found information on Community Development Block Grants that may be applicable to the Town Office Site Re-Use project. She noted that the grants are sponsored jointly by the State of CT and HUD and are for affordable housing, as well as municipal and other community related projects.

5. Other – Committee to Manage the Project

Mr. Scherrer reported that Mr. Parker supports EDC's recommendation to establish an independent committee that is not bound by the terms of the Town's elected officials. He added that Mr. Parker had not yet reconciled the two different committee structures as recommended by Atty. Bennet and Mr. Harrall. The Commissioners felt that it would be premature to set-up a committee at this time and agreed that they should get feedback on the viability of the project from some master developers first.

Ms. Kittner advised that the Goodspeed has made good progress evaluating their existing properties and they expect to have a draft plan to share with EDC at their next meeting. Mr. McMahon referenced a recent newspaper article about the State re-allocating a \$3M grant to the Goodspeed for housing, expansion of the Stillman Production Center, and to construct a warehouse building to store costumes and other items. He noted that the statement in the article about the construction of a 30-40 unit apartment building for actor housing was incorrect and that their current plans for actor housing are more in scale with the Village setting.

**Johnsonville:**

6. Mr. Scherrer stated that Mr. Sloan had provided him with a report on the status of the Johnsonville project and he provided the following summary:

Mr. Sloan reported that Mr. Jabarra and Mr. Sweeney are aware of all of the problems involved in trying to hook into the sewer line. He stated that they are frustrated because they had invested in additional studies to investigate the Town's suggestion to connect to the sewers and now State mandates indicate that it is not a feasible option. In spite of their frustration, they are now engaged in efforts to purchase additional land on which they can engineer a septic system large enough to accommodate the development.

Mr. Scherrer noted that Mr. Parker had advised him that the property the developers are considering buying, Klarcrest Resort, is currently under contract with a third party but he feels that, due to the length of time that has passed, there is a reasonable chance that the sale will not go through.

There was a general discussion about whether or not the developers would have to go through another Inland/Wetlands approval process for the new septic design. It was noted that, at the January 3<sup>rd</sup> Board of Selectmen meeting, Mr. Dill had stated that the original Inland/Wetlands approval was conditioned upon getting the State's approval of a septic design to support the number of units proposed. Consequently, the next step for the project is to get Planning and Zoning approval.

Mr. Scherrer stated Mr. Sloan feels that the developers will get some push-back from Planning and Zoning on the issues of suitability of design and density. Mr. Scherrer expressed his concern about that stalling the project and there was a general discussion about how best to address those concerns. Ms. Stricker stated that any incentive the Town might offer the developers would have to be voted on at a Town meeting. She noted that if the vote was positive it would send a clear message to Town officials that the public wanted this project to go forward. Ms. Mathiasen suggested that the developers undertake a PR effort for the project.

Mr. Sloan also reported that the developers appreciate EDC's support and that they would like to meet with EDC before their next meeting with the Board of Selectmen scheduled for mid-February. Mr. Scherrer noted the tight timeframe, stated that he did not want to delay the developer's meeting with the Selectmen, and advised that he had asked Mr. Sloan to try to arrange some possible dates when representatives from EDC can meet with Mr. Jabarra and/or Mr. Sweeney.

## Events/Tourism:

### 7. Eagle Festival hospitality, distribute programs/posters

Ms. Mathiasen reported that there will be a hospitality suite in the River House for Eagle Festival visitors on Saturday (2/17) from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Sunday (2/18) from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. She noted that Liberty Bank employees will cover one of the shifts, and Selectmen Govert and Parker will cover others, but that coverage is needed for the Sunday 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. shift. Mr. Scherrer offered to provide coverage during that time. She also noted that she and Ms. Stricker will distribute copies of the Eagle Festival booklet and Chowder Festival posters and she will contact Mr. Parker and make sure the property is clean prior to the event.

### 8. Chowder Cook-Off – participants, volunteers, suggested groups for donation

Mr. Scherrer, Ms. Stricker, and Ms. Mathiasen agreed to assist with the set-up and breakdown of the tents for the Chowder Cook-Off. They will also be available during the event to sell mugs and provide any general assistance needed.

Mr. Scherrer suggested donating proceeds from the event to the Sons of the American Revolution construction fund for a new barn/visitors' center. The Commissioners all agreed that the SAR should be on the list of potential recipients to be voted on at the March EDC meeting.

## Business Support:

### 9. Business Liaison Position – job description and budget

Ms. Stricker distributed a copy of an updated job description that had been reviewed previously via e-mail. She noted that a number of years ago the Town had had a Community Development position which was responsible for researching grants for the Town as well as a number of other financially related tasks. She noted that, over time, the position had evolved into the current Finance Director's role.

The Commissioners reviewed the draft job description and recommended several revisions. They agreed that the job description covers two main functions: (1) a liaison role which will assist new/existing businesses navigate Town regulations and commission oversight, and (2) an ambassador role to attract new business and encourage appropriate economic development in East Haddam. There was a general discussion concerning oversight of the position and the Commissioners agreed it should report to EDC.

The Commissioners discussed salary ranges and Ms. Stricker reported that her research indicated that salaries for such positions ranged from \$30,000.00 to \$100,000+ and noted that some towns offer an incentive-based salary. Mr. Scherrer stated that Mr. Parker feels that it will be difficult to persuade the Board of Finance to approved another salaried position. Ms. Stricker pointed out that Mr. Govert was in favor of creating such a position for the Town; she read the e-mail he had recently sent to the Commissioners recommending EDC include, "...a +(-) 10 hour/week business development officer in [its] upcoming budget". The Commissioners agreed that the position should be part-time initially and noted that the Town Office Site Re-Use project would be the logical first project. Mr. Scherrer recommended including \$10,000.00 in EDC's 2007-08 budget to fund the position of Economic Development Coordinator for East Haddam with its expenditure contingent upon EDC first justifying the position.

The Commissioners discussed next steps and agreed on the following:

- Ms. Sticker will research how much tax revenue such positions usually bring in;
- Ms. Mathiasen will research how many and which CT towns have a similar salaried position;
- Ms. Stricker will poll surrounding towns of similar size and make-up to determine if they have a similar salaried position, job responsibilities, and pay ranges;
- Determine if there are any seed-grants available to fund such a position;
- Ms. Stricker will coordinate a meeting with Mr. Govert to discuss what kind of justification the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance will need to approve the position;

Mr. Scherrer stated that he would like to have input from all of the Commissioners regarding this issue. He advised that he will recap these discussions for Commissioners Sloan and Gionta.

Ms. Stricker noted that she had also researched tax abatement programs and had found a good deal of information. Mr. Scherrer agreed to copy and distribute the package of information Ms. Stricker had printed out. The Commissioners noted that developing and recommending an appropriate tax abatement program for the Town would be the role of the Economic Development Coordinator.

## 10. Business Updates

Ms. Mathiasen reported that Susan's Haircare Center had recently held an open house and First Selectmen Parker had attended. At Mr. Scherrer's recommendation, she agreed to send Ms. Pagnano a welcome letter.

Mr. Scherrer reported that First Selectman Parker had advised him that the Town's grand list has increased 3% as a result of the Banner Lodge development. This increase more than offsets the loss of property tax resulting from the State of CT raising the exemption of machinery and equipment valuation from local property tax to 50%, and demonstrates the value projects like Banner Lodge brings to the Town.

## 11. Town Graphic Progress

Ms. Mathiasen reported she and Ms. Stricker had met with a representative from Town Square Graphics and approximately 25 local businesses have agreed to participate in the East Haddam tourism map. After confirming how municipal buildings, such as the schools, libraries and Senior Center, would be handled with Selectman Parker, she noted that Town facilities can participate, if they choose, with funds from their individual budgets. She stated that she will recommend Town Square Graphics approach the Goodspeed again, now that a significant number of businesses have signed-on. The Commissioners expressed some concern that potential contributors might be confused that EDC has hired the Town Square Graphics firm or is more involved in the project than is actually the case. Ms. Mathiasen is handling phone calls about EDC involvement on an individual basis.

The Commissioners discussed what content to include in the informational pages of the brochure/map and it was agreed to generally follow the content on the EDC website.

## 12. Streamline New Business Process

Ms. Mathiasen reported that she had spoken with Mr. Thomas who stated he plans to coordinate the multi-department meeting to discuss opportunities to improve the process of opening a business in town. She noted that, even though he is no longer on the Board, Mr. Thomas expressed a desire to maintain an informal contact with its activities. She stated she will send him a copy of the draft Economic Development Coordinator job description for his comments.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### 1. 2007-2008 Budget Request

Ms. Mathiasen distributed copies of the draft 2007-2008 EDC Budget and advised that the 2006-2007 Accomplishments and 2007-2008 Goals sections need to be finalized. There was a general discussion regarding the Goals section and Ms. Mathiasen agreed to make several updates. Mr. Scherrer suggested e-mailing the updated draft to all of the Commissioners and request a turnaround time of two days for final input.

Mr. Scherrer distributed a copy of the town's profile that had recently been published in the Hartford Courant.

On February 13<sup>TH</sup> Ms. Mathiasen circulated a draft budget via e-mail to all Commissioners for their review and comment.

**MOTION BY MS. MATHIASEN TO APPROVE THE EAST HADDAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION BUDGET REQUEST FOR 2007-2008. SECONDED BY MR. SCHERRER. APPROVED BY A MAJORITY OF AYE VOTES.**

### 2. Mail Received

Ms. Mathiasen reported that EDC had received the following mail:

- A copy a CT Association of Water Pollution Control Authorities publication – CAWPCA Notes
- A solicitation to purchase ad space in the "What To Do In CT" publication. The Commissioners agreed not to place an ad at this time.
- Applications from John Short and Chris Miner for the vacancy on the EDC Board.

3. Other

Ms. Mathiasen collected information from the Commissioners needed to finalize the order for EDC business cards. She also noted that the local Prevention Council in conjunction with Youth and Family Services is holding a public conversation in February. She noted that invitations were mailed to town residents at random and that she had received an invitation and plans on attending. Ms. Sticker noted that the event is an open meeting and even if the Commissioners had not received an invitation, they can still attend.

The Commissioners reviewed their calendars and, due to a previously discussed conflict, agreed to reschedule March's meeting to February 28<sup>th</sup>.

THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO DISCUSS, MS. STRICKER MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MR. ALBUQUERQUE AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon R. Wheeler  
Recording Secretary