

**Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 13, 2008**

Attending: R. Casner; M. Gionta; D. Mathiasen; R. Scherrer; D. Sloan; P. Stricker, M. Ziobron (EDC Coordinator)
J. Albuquerque (7:40 p.m. arrival)
Guests: Z. Belcher; J. Kamen; S. Kelly; D. McMahon; T. Quinn; K. Simon; M. Walter

Mr. Scherrer called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and asked the guests to introduce themselves. Ms. Kelly, Mr. Kamen, Ms. Belcher, Ms. Quinn, Mr. McMahon, Mr. Simon, and Mr. Walter stated their names and business affiliations.

MINUTES

The minutes of the February 7, 2008 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Scherrer asked Ms. Wheeler to revise the minutes to report First Selectman Walter's discussion topics, currently noted under agenda item "Project Status Reports, 1. Goodspeed Properties", under a new heading titled "Selectman's Discussion".

In response to a question from Mr. Scherrer regarding a concern raised at the February meeting, Ms. Ziobron confirmed that the Town Ethics Policy had been revised appropriately. Mr. Scherrer also asked if any further action was needed regarding the Open Space communications. Ms. Ziobron stated that an acknowledgement of the decision made by the Open Space Commissioners would be appropriate.

MR. CASNER MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 7, 2008 MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MR. SLOAN AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

INTRODUCE BUSINESS ATTENDEES

Ms. Ziobron noted the attendance of Ms. Susan Kelly and Mr. Jay Kamen at the meeting, stating that they are new business owners in Town. She asked each of them to give the Commissioners an overview of their businesses.

Ms. Kelly stated that she had recently purchased the property at 3 Norwich Road and has plans to make it into an upscale coffee house. She advised that cosmetic and business code renovations are planned and she hopes to be open for the summer. Ms. Kelly also noted that her hours of operation will be from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. and that she is planning to host a number of special events at the coffee house. Mr. Scherrer confirmed that her application had been approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission and welcomed her to the Town.

Mr. Kamen introduced himself and advised that his business imports wood, metal, and plastic products and mainly sells them to big-box stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot. He advised that the factories he imports from are generally located in Southeast Asia and that his Moodus operation is the administrative arm of his business. The Commissioners welcomed Mr. Kamen to East Haddam.

OLD BUSINESS

Economic Development Coordinator Update

Ms. Ziobron distributed her monthly report and highlighted the following items:

- She updated the Town Office Site Re-Use timeline to reflect current action items.
- She completed three federal grant applications for the reallocation of the Mobility Project federal funds. Although the Town was given a very short timeframe to complete the applications, they were submitted on time.
- She and First Selectman Walter met with the Town Attorney and discussed options for setting up committees to (1) manage the allocation of the remaining \$250,000, and (2) manage the Village revitalization project.
- She met with various Village residents and business owners regarding the Town Office Site Re-Use and Goodspeed projects.
- She is working with Mr. Sloan and Ms. Mathiasen to gather factual information concerning the positive contributions of the Goodspeed to the Town (i.e. amount of taxes paid, number of jobs created, etc.).
- She has been working with Ms. Klinck to secure a tenant for the empty building in the Moodus Village Plaza.
- She and Ms. Mathiasen attended the CT Business Day conference and spoke with the aides for Rep. Orange and Sen. Daily's, as well as Rep. Orange, herself, concerning the East Haddam Village and Brownell projects.
- She attended the Midstate Regional Planning meeting.

Ms. Ziobron also stated that she had received a number of historical documents from the owner of Brownell and displayed several of the items. She noted that she will work with Brownell family members to determine what should be donated to the East Haddam Historical Society.

Ms. Ziobron also informed the Commissioners that she attended the February 26th Planning and Zoning Commission meeting and went on record concerning the following topics: (1) the need to involve the business community in any discussions concerning a lighting ordinance, (2) including language in the Plan of Conservation and Development stating that the Town should explore a tax incentive program, and (3) a need to address the fact that septic system problems at most vacant commercial sites has made it difficult to attract new businesses to Town. Mr. Casner noted that the septic issue is a significant problem in Moodus and stated that there are local sewer system alternatives that the Town can explore.

Ms. Ziobron concluded her report by advising that she will not be working on Fridays during the months of June, July, and August.

There was a general discussion concerning tax incentive programs. Mr. Walter encouraged the Commissioners to research the programs offered by surrounding towns and what impact they have had on attracting businesses.

In response to a question from Mr. Scherrer, Ms. Ziobron advised that the asking price for the Swan property has come down, however, most businesses interested in the property would be required to make a significant additional investment to upgrade the existing septic system.

The Commissioners discussed the possibility of the Town drafting a lighting ordinance and Mr. Walter agreed to inform EDC when work begins on that topic.

Mr. Scherrer stated that, in consideration of Ms. Quinn's schedule, he would like to move the discussion of the Swingbridge Arts Festival up on the agenda. The Commissioners agreed with Mr. Scherrer's suggestion.

Events/Tourism

Swingbridge Arts Festival

Ms. Quinn stated that she is the director of the Town Recreation Program and is working with Ms. Cassella to organize a juried art show in the Village. She advised that the show would be a two-day event and they are expecting approximately 50 vendors. She stated that they have been considering a September timeframe for the show, however, they were recently encouraged to consider holding the show in August. Ms. Quinn noted that the August dates would create parking conflicts because the Goodspeed will be operating and the group brainstormed possible parking alternatives. Ms. Quinn stated that she is looking to EDC to direct her to any business contacts that might be helpful in organizing the event and/or willing to make financial or in-kind donations. She invited the Commissioners' to an Open House being hosted by Parks and Rec on April 26th at the Elementary School and noted there will be a table with information on the Arts Festival. Ms. Ziobron offered to assist with the coordination of support issues.

Ms. Quinn also advised that the Parks and Recreation Commission is coordinating the Music on the River concerts. She stated that they hope to schedule six concerts this year and noted that Candy Nero is reviewing CDs from a number of possible participants.

Mr. Scherrer stated that Ms. Quinn will need volunteers to help at the events. Ms. Stricker and Ms. Mathiasen confirmed that they will continue to liaison with Ms. Quinn on the both events.

Project Status Reports

Goodspeed Properties

Mr. McMahan reported that the Goodspeed has scheduled two meetings with Town residents to view concept plans for the actors' housing project. He distributed a copy of the invitation for the March 26th and March 30th events. He stated that the March 30th viewing will also include a tour of the sites where the proposed housing will be built. The Commissioners confirmed that there would be representatives from EDC at both meetings. Mr. McMahan also advised that they are about to sign a contract with an engineering firm for the project.

In response to a question from Mr. Scherrer, Mr. McMahan advised that the Goodspeed must complete the engineering work and cost out the construction before their board can vote to move forward on the project. He stated that he feels it will take 60-90 days to complete the engineering work and possibly another 30-days to cost out the project. He advised that the \$3M

grant approved by the State is for a costume storage facility as well as the actor housing project and is based on a dollar-for-dollar match.

The Commissioners and Mr. McMahon discussed the public's perception of manufactured houses and it was recommended that Mr. Pinnell include some comments on the quality of the housing-product the Goodspeed will be using. Mr. McMahon stated that the Goodspeed is also working on a fact-sheet to handout at the meetings and that would be good information to include on the document.

Ms. Ziobron noted the arrival of Ms. Klinck and requested that her discussion of a potential new business in the Moodus Village Plaza occur at this point in the meeting. The Commissioners agreed with her request.

Ms. Klinck thanked the Commissioners for their consideration and advised that she has negotiated a long-term contract for a Dunkin Donuts in the vacant building in the Moodus Village Plaza. She stated that the contract is contingent upon the potential to upgrade the septic system at the site and the Town's willingness to grant an Zoning regulations exception to allow a drive-through window.

The Commissioners expressed their general support for a Dunkin Donuts at that location and there was a general discussion regarding how to accomplish a special exception for a drive-through. Ms. Ziobron stated that she had talked with Attorney Bennett about the request. She stated he advised that the Planning and Zoning Commission may be able to create a special regulation limited only to that location and recommended EDC speak with the attorney for Planning and Zoning about the matter.

Mr. Walter voiced his concern that the exterior of the building should continue to fit in with the rural character of Moodus. Ms. Klinck stated that the owners have 40 or more stores with a broad range of styles and she felt they would want the building to conform with the local character.

Mr. Scherrer noted that Ms. Ziobron would continue to be the liaison on this project and thanked her and Ms. Klinck for their efforts on finding a well-suited tenant for the property. He added that it was another key accomplishment for the Economic Development Coordinator.

Town Office Site

Mr. Gionta recapped February's activities regarding the recovery of the Mobility Grant and acknowledged Ms. Ziobron's exceptional efforts in completing and submitting all of the paperwork on time. He reported that a request was submitted for a \$12M earmark for the 2009 season. He noted that it is not realistic to expect full-funding of that amount, however, they were advised that the Town could continue to pursue additional funding in subsequent years.

Ms. Ziobron reported that she and Mr. Walter had met with Attorney Bennett and discussed how to structure a Village revitalization committee. She advised that Atty. Bennett had recommended that the Town create a small advisory committee to manage the allocation of the outstanding \$250,000. She noted that such a committee would not require approval at a Town Meeting. A larger committee, which will require approval at a Town meeting, should be established to manage the Town Office Site Re-Use project. Mr. Walter noted that some or all of the advisory committee members could transition over to the Village Revitalization Committee.

There was a general discussion regarding potential members for the Village Revitalization Committee. Mr. Walter noted that the committee will be established through the Board of Selectmen and Atty. Bennett will draft the charge after EDC and the Selectmen set out the goals of the committee. Mr. Gionta and Ms. Ziobron agreed to draft the goals for the Village Revitalization Committee.

Mr. Walter recommended that advisory committee make safe mobility in the Village the priority for the use of the remaining \$250,000. He noted that sidewalks and signage need to be improved and suggested that the Town should investigate a less-frequent schedule of bridge openings.

Mr. Gionta observed that there are several parallel plans coming together at the same time and questioned how the Town and EDC could best manage all of them. He stated that, in addition to the Village project, it appears that Moodus is on a track to becoming the business center of East Haddam, and he noted that changes are also occurring in the light-industrial area. Ms. Stricker provided a brief update regarding the status of the work being done by the Middle School Conversion Committee. She noted that she did not feel the Middle School would be ready to accommodate the Town Offices until 2010.

Mr. Scherrer stated that Mr. Bertoli a developer interested in the Town Office Site project, is working on a project in Essex and is willing to meet with the EDC Commissioners to discuss this project. Mr. Scherrer will follow-up with Mr. Bertoli to set a time for a meeting.

In response to a question from Ms. Ziobron, Ms. Belcher advised that geo-technical tests on the Town Office site could not occur until a development design is accepted and the architect submits a conceptual plan. There was a discussion regarding the preferred ownership of the Town Office Site property and it was noted that residents prefer that the ownership remain with the Town. Mr. Simon confirmed that his development group would welcome a long-term lease arrangement. Mr. Walter confirmed that he will need direction regarding the preferred ownership of the site before the Revitalization Committee is established. Messrs. Casner, Gionta, and Sloan agreed to research ownership and make a recommendation.

Johnsonville

Mr. Sloan reported that he received an e-mail from Mr. Jabara stating, in part, that MJB is in the process of either finding a development partner for the property or selling it. He stated that Mr. Jabara indicated he is in discussions with Simons Real Estate in West Hartford. Mr. Sloan advised that he had tried to contact Mr. Simons, but he is out of the office until March 17th.

In response to a question from Mr. Walter, Mr. Sloan advised that the buildings at Johnsonville need attention to prevent them from further deterioration.

Banner

Ms. Stricker reported that she had called Mr. Lewis to see if there any update to report to EDC but did not receive a call-back. Mr. Sloan provided an update on sales of the units and noted that the Community Center is near completion. He noted that the developer is working with the Town to get approval to rehabilitate the existing cottages. Mr. Walter advised that there are a number of Building code issues that need to be addressed before work can start on the cottages.

Other Business Updates

a. Plan of Conservation and Development next steps

Ms. Mathiasen stated that she has not heard anything further about the Plan of Conservation and Development. Mr. Walter advised that he does not have any additional information on the status of the draft Plan. Ms. Mathiasen agreed to follow-up and update the Commissioners via e-mail.

b. Process Flow Committee

Ms. Mathiasen reported that the Committee is working on identifying the process steps of opening a new business in Town. She stated that she will codify and document the process flow.

c. Business Signage In The Village

Ms. Stricker reported that she had reviewed the Town's signage regulations and noted that neon signs are prohibited in the Village area. She reviewed several sections of the regulations and the Commissioners expressed some concern that they were possibly too restrictive for a commercial district. They discussed possible options for the Carriage House dealership and it was generally agreed that the only option available was a change in the regulations.

Ms. Ziobron noted that First Selectman Walters is an ex-Officio member of the Planning and Zoning Commission and, as such, could recommend revisiting the signage regulation. Ms. Stricker and Mr. Casner offered to draft new signage regulations for the Planning and Zoning Commissioners consideration.

d. Other

Ms. Ziobron suggested EDC consider e-mailing its agendas and approved minutes to local businesses. Ms. Mathiasen agreed to bcc any interested business in on her agenda e-mails.

Events/Tourism

Chowder Cook-off and Eagle Festival Wrap-Up

Ms. Mathiasen reported that net proceeds from the Chowder Cook-Off are \$1,763. She noted that that is double the amount that was raised last year. Ms. Stricker advised that the LaVita's patio is starting to get too small for the event and the

Commissioners discussed options for expanding the event at the same site. It was also noted that a generator should be rented next year.

Ms. Mathiasen recognized the Rotary, the Sportsmen's Club, the Fish Sisters, and the Carriage House for their assistance and contributions and advised that she had sent thank-you notes to all of the organizations that contributed to the event.

The Commissioners discussed how to distribute the proceeds and considered several options.

MOTION WAS MADE BY MR. CASNER TO DISTRIBUTE THE NET PROCEEDS FROM THE 2008 CHOWDER COOK-OF AS FOLLOWS: \$500 TO MUSIC ON THE RIVER, \$200 TO THE SPORTSMEN'S CLUB, \$400 TO RAY OF LIGHT FARM, \$200 TO LITTLE LEAGUE FOR A SIGN ON THE OUT-FIELD FENCE, AND \$463 TO THE EAST HADDAM FOOD BANK. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY MS. MATHIASEN AND APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Mathiasen advised that Mr. Harris will do the financial reporting for the event and she will draft a thank you letter to the editor regarding the event and the donations. The information will also be in the next East Haddam Events magazine.

Mr. Scherrer noted that, prior to organizing the 2009 event, EDC should discuss the issue of how the fee for the band should be handled.

NEW BUSINESS

Mail received

There was no discussion under this agenda item.

Other

a. Tax Incentives

There was no discussion under this agenda item.

b. East Haddam Events Magazine April Ad

Ms. Mathiasen reported that the publisher of the Town's Events Magazine has offered to run a quarter-page ad, free of charge, in each edition.

c. EDC Website

In response to a request from Ms. Ziobron, Ms. Mathiasen agreed to look into having a category selection of "All" added to the website's listing of businesses.

d. Business Listings

The Commissioners discussed Toni McCabe's request for a copy of EDC's business list. Ms. Mathiasen agreed to follow-up with Ms. McCabe.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon R. Wheeler
Recording Secretary