

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

September 5, 2012 7:15 pm

Trumbull Town Hall

I. Attendance

Commission: Chairman Ralph Sather, Gary Bean, James Abraham, Scott Wich, William Haberlin, Jack Berg, Tom Ginis, Beryl Kaufman, Evelyn Zmary

Town Staff: Dan Nelson, Ed Lavernoich, Jamie Bratt

Public: Paul Griffith, Karen DelVecchio of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and Trumbull Chamber of Commerce

II. Old Business

Mr. Sather called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM. He passed out the agenda, the July meeting minutes for review, and other materials to go with discussion items on the agenda. Mr. Haberlin made a motion to approve the July 18, 2012 minutes which was seconded by Mr. Bean. The vote was unanimous in favor of approval.

III. Plan of Conservation and Development Update

Mr. Lavernoich stated that Mrs. Bratt, the Town's Director of Planning and Development, had been asked to provide the E&CD Commission with a status report on the POCD update process. Mrs. Bratt reviewed the selection process that was undertaken to identify and hire Avon-based Planimetrics, Inc. She stated that the firm not only received the highest score of the four firms that submitted qualifications, but that it also offered the lowest price of the two firms that were asked to submit proposals. She stated that the P&Z Commission's ultimate vote was unanimous. She noted that members of the E&CD Commission had participated in the initial review of the qualifications statements that were submitted by the four firms. She explained that because the contract was executed prior to July 1st, a portion of the firm's fee would be paid out of funds left over from the fiscal year 2012 budget due to personnel/ salary savings from having certain positions vacant for a portion of the year.

Mrs. Bratt discussed the initial kick-off meeting of the P&Z Commission and Planimetrics, and the subsequent bus tour of certain areas of town the P&Z Commission and some members of the public took the consultants on; she described several commercial, industrial and other areas that the consultants were shown. She informed the E&CD Commission that there would be a public workshop with the consultants on September 24th from 7:00-9:00 PM at Madison Middle School. The workshop is intended to solicit public input on

the needs of the Town. She described the outreach effort that was underway, including a website, flyers, lawn signs, local television and newspapers. Mr. Haberlin suggested that Mrs. Bratt reach out to the Trumbull Chamber, the Rotary Club and some other local organizations, which she agreed to do. Mrs. Bratt stated that she will be organizing focus groups, and the total process to create the updated POCD was expected to last approximately 15 months. She stated that she felt the POCD would be an important part of the Town's business development efforts in the future, which is why the E&CD Commission's input was requested through the distributed questionnaire and participation in the September 24 event.

IV. New Commission Business

Mr. Lavernoich asked Mr. Sather if discussion of the grant applications could be taken out of order and discussed earlier because Mrs. Bratt was to play a part in the discussion; then she would be able to leave the meeting. Mr. Sather asked if there were any objections; there were none. Mr. Lavernoich informed the Commission that the Town had submitted a Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant application to the State in early August. He described the STEAP program, which is meant to fund local capital improvements. He explained that the decision was made on very short notice to apply for the grant, for which the proceeds would be used for paving and related work on Corporate Drive. He mentioned that a copy of the completed application had been e-mailed to the Commission prior to the meeting, and he handed out two copies of the application for those that had not seen the application before the meeting. The contents of the application were discussed, including the photos that were taken and the support letter that was obtained from Robert D. Scinto, Inc., the owner of multiple buildings on the street and the owner/ developer of a parcel at 50 Corporate, where a new 95,000 square foot office/ light industrial building has been proposed. Mr. Nelson explained that the Town had plans to pave the area, but this would allow the paving to occur earlier than scheduled and other work to be undertaken. Mr. Wich asked whether the offer of the Town to provide a match of only \$8,000 to the \$500,000 requested, as shown in the application, would make the application less competitive than it might be with a larger local match. Mr. Lavernoich discussed the regional importance of the companies on the street, and how he felt that if the State liked the project but was not satisfied with the match amount offered, the State was likely to contact the Town and ask for a modified financial structure of the proposed project. Nelson mentioned how it would be beneficial to get money from the State, which would allow the Town's bonding to be saved or used for another purpose.

Mr. Lavernoich described the State's Main Street Investment Fund Program (MSIF). At his request, Mrs. Bratt gave an overview of the project concept that was being pursued for the Long Hill Green area, with the intent of making

it more like a village, with pedestrian connections between the residential base, the existing and future commercial activities, and the outdoor recreational areas, including Indian Ledge Park and the Pequonnock River Valley Trail. She discussed the endorsement of the application that was obtained from the P&Z Commission. Mr. Nelson discussed the approval of the plan that was being sought from the Town Council, which would be voted on the next night (9-6-12). Mr. Lavernoich and Mr. Nelson described how any funding from the MSIF program would be only a part of the funding needed to fully connect the entire area. Future applications to the STEAP program, the use of the State's Local Capital Improvement Program (LOCIP) funding, and the Town's general obligation bonding were all discussed as potential sources of funding for future phases of the project. Mr. Wich asked whether Trumbull Center had been considered for the MSIF program. Mr. Lavernoich stated that it had been considered, but that the owners of the property were considering the demolition of two or more buildings and changing the layout of the property; for this reason it was determined that until the owner's plans became more certain, the area was not an ideal candidate for the MSIF program. Several of the Commissioners expressed concern that the recent Long Hill area zoning changes had not yet resulted in new projects by the property owners.

Mr. Lavernoich reviewed the Directors report for the month of September and gave an update of 112 Quarry Road, 80 Monroe Turnpike, 100 Quarry Road, 20 Nutmeg Road, 80 Merritt Boulevard. Mr. Lavernoich discussed the level of development activity and how the municipal bond rating agencies had recently reviewed the Town's finances and been impressed by the activity, given general economic conditions. He updated the Commission on construction progress for 41-51 Monroe Turnpike and stated that Firestone will no longer be a tenant in the project. He stated that the foundations for the Fitness Edge were in place. Mr. Lavernoich stated that the owners of Trumbull Center are also continuing construction and will have a restaurant space with outdoor seating in the upper terrace of the property, where Dunkin Donuts was previously located. The Sound Development/ Bridgeport Hospital project at 5520 Park Avenue was discussed; Mr. Lavernoich stated that the developer's goal was to begin construction of the parking garage portion of the project in early 2013, subject to the approval from Bridgeport's Inland Wetlands Commission.

Mr. Lavernoich discussed the latest draft of the tax incentive ordinance, which had been e-mailed to the Commission. He reviewed the logic behind the changes to the version of the proposed ordinance that he had been given, and discussed the collaboration with the Town Attorney on creating the language. Mr. Nelson confirmed that it was the First Selectman's intention to introduce the ordinance to the Town Council in the fall for its consideration.

Mr. Lavernoich discussed his intention to finalize a draft of the language with the Town Attorney and then request that the Tax Partnership Screening Committee convene to consider the ordinance. Mr. Bean expressed his concern that the ordinance proposed specific benefits for applicants, but that it was potentially misleading because the Town Council could still vote to deny a tax incentive for an applicant that met all the requirements of the ordinance, while potentially approving a tax incentive for another, similar project. He explained that this was unlike his previous experience on the P&Z Commission, and that he wanted to recommend something that reduced the chances that similar projects with similar benefits to the Town would have different outcomes in the tax incentive approval process. Mr. Lavernoich discussed the possibility of adding a section to the ordinance that would require the Town Council to make certain "findings" regarding the proposed project and benefits to the Town when approving a tax incentive. Mr. Bean also expressed his concern about a passage in the current draft of the ordinance that would prevent a property from paying less in property taxes than it paid for the previous year. He offered a scenario where the investor might have to demolish a large existing building in order to build a newer, smaller building, suggesting that in such a case the requirement might limit the effective use of the ordinance. Mr. Wich suggested that if the passage regarding the prior year's taxes were to remain in the ordinance, "due" or "owed" could be substituted for "paid". Mr. Sather discussed the thinking of the committee that had worked on the ordinance in the past, particularly in regard to evaluations of proposed tax incentives being made on the basis of geography and the desirability of the project. Mr. Lavernoich discussed the benefits he feels there are of having a standard schedule for the entire town, with the flexibility of being able to consider and address the specific needs of a difficult project if the investor was willing to make certain financial disclosures. Mr. Wich asked about the provision in the current draft of the ordinance requiring the principals, members, etc. of the applicant to be current on their obligations to the town, inquiring whether any thought had been given to including other single-purpose entities doing business or owning property in Town that the individual may be part of. He expressed a concern that was shared by others on the Commission that the tax incentive program might be seen as benefitting individuals that were not meeting their obligations to the Town on other properties. Mr. Lavernoich discussed the concern that investors might have if they could be subject to penalties or termination of their incentive based on all of the business dealings of their partners on other properties/projects. It was requested that Mr. Lavernoich bring back the ordinance in its proposed final form for the October 3rd meeting, at which time the Commission could consider an endorsement of the ordinance for the consideration of the Tax Partnership Screening Committee and the Town Council. Mr. Abraham asked Mr. Lavernoich to prepare a brief summary of the ordinance for the October 3rd meeting.

V. Discussion of Marketing Plan and Commission's Role

Mr. Sather began a discussion of what the role of the Commission should be and how each person's talent can be beneficial for the Town and Mr. Lavernoich's efforts. He asked Mr. Lavernoich to provide the Commission with his thoughts about the role. Mr. Lavernoich stated that the creation of a marketing message, and how to spread the message were the way that the Commission could best contribute, referencing the municipal code and the primary role it envisions for the Commission. Mr. Sather reviewed the documents that were passed out which outlined how the current "Working For You" message was developed. It was decided that there should be a 2013 marketing plan developed. It was decided that the creation of the marketing plan would be the task of a committee which would bring the plan back to the Commission for its approval. Mr. Sather and Mr. Ginis volunteered to serve on the committee, and would arrange to meet with Mr. Lavernoich to discuss the plan. Mr. Lavernoich stated that he would assemble whatever current marketing materials existed for the committee's and the full Commission's consideration.

VI. Other Commission Business

Mr. Wich let the Commission know that a local company, Sun Products, had donated products to the third graders of Frenchtown Elementary School. There was discussion of how the Town/First Selectman could formally acknowledge these types of donations, expressing appreciation to the person, business or entity. The respective impact of a personal letter from the First Selectman, and/or a press release regarding the donation, were discussed.

Mr. Sather announced that he was unable to attend the scheduled October 3rd meeting. Alternative dates were discussed, but it was determined that the meeting should remain on the scheduled date, and that Mr. Bean, as Vice Chairman, would run the meeting

VII. Community Input

Members of the community in attendance were asked if they wanted to provide any input for the Commission's consideration; there was no input.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Abraham made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:43 PM which was seconded by Mr. Sather; the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn.

