

Town of Bloomfield  
Economic Development Commission Meeting  
800 Bloomfield Avenue, Conference Room #5  
APPROVED MINUTES  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2015

**Present:** Bonnie Bercowetz, Michele Bononi, Fred Hesketh, Rich McDermott

**Also present:** Director of Planning and Economic Development José Giner, Town Manager Phil Schenck, Deputy Mayor Joan Gamble, Councilman Joel Neuwirth, Dale Bertoldi, David Driver, Jonathan Vasnarungruengkul and Don Poland.

Vice-Chair Bercowetz called the meeting to order at 8:37am.

**1. Minutes of September 8, 2015**

*Ms. Bononi made a motion to accept minutes of the September 8, 2015 meeting. Mr. Hesketh seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

**2. Update on Wintonbury Mall**

José Giner, reported that the successful bidder for the Wintonbury Mall was from California and that he had briefly met with a representative with the Town Manager, Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Phil Schenck stated that he had spoken last Friday with Shawn Bidsal, and Ed Silberman who were the new owners along with Laurie Wood who was the new property manager from Colliers. He reported that they were cooperative and seemed to be interested in talking to the existing merchants and Town personnel to ease any fears about the transition to new ownership and management. He also felt they were open to ideas from the Town regarding the future of the Center. Phil had mentioned to them the opportunity to participate in the Town Green lighting activities that was coming up on December 3.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if the new ownership was contributing to the recently formed Center Merchants group. Mr. Schenck replied that not yet but that their new property manager, Laurie Woods from Colliers, intended to be at the November meeting.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if they had indicated any plans to renovate the property. Mr. Schenck stated that not specifically but they broached the subject of new signage with Mr. Giner. Mr. Schenck did not believe that they had any long-range plans at this time for the property. He sensed that, being from California, they were not too familiar with the New England marketplace.

Ms. Bononi asked if we had looked at the shopping center portfolio of the new owners. Donald Poland stated that Goman + York was looking into it. Phil said that he knew of some centers that they owned in California, Arizona and possibly Florida but was not aware of anything in the northeast. He said that they were going to make some improvements but mostly of the existing infrastructure such as HVAC, roofs, and electrical. Mostly items that had been neglected during the foreclosure proceedings.

**3. Filley Park Update**

Mr. Giner stated that work was proceeding on Phase 1 and the hope was to be substantially completed by the middle of December. He also stated that the invasive East European Water Chestnut had been sprayed this past week and that we should be seeing some improvement on the surface of the pond. This was only a temporary solution and the more permanent solution would come when the pond was dredged and the roots torn out during Phase 2. Mr. Giner stated that Fuss & O'Neill were working on the bid documents for the next Phase which hopefully will be ready for next year's construction season.

Mr. Schenck noted that Commissioner Hesketh had been able to shed some light on the history of the pond area when we discovered some evidence of past dumping during the current construction. Mr.

Hesketh was able to research the history to indicate that in fact there had been some kind of town dumping area in the vicinity of the pond.

Ms. Bercowetz stated that it would be a shame to do the Phase 1 streetscape improvements and not go forward with the rest of the improvement plan. Mr. Schenck stated that we have most of the funds needed for Phase 2 and that we would be putting the balance into the proposed capital improvement budget for next year –subject to Council approval. Mr. Schenck summarized the remaining phases of the Filley Park Plan.

#### **4. Staff and Commission Member Update on Various Topics of Interest**

##### **a. Niagara Bottling.**

Mr. Giner stated that various Town and Utility representatives had met with Niagara Bottling Company personnel on October 13. Although they had not yet committed to coming to Bloomfield they had identified the target location as being the Sponzo property at 384 Woodland Street. He stated that he was working on an offer of possible tax incentives to bring before the Town Council. Mr. Giner stated that there was another possible location outside of Bloomfield and that they indicated that they would be making a final decision in the next thirty to forty days.

Mr. Hesketh asked where this was to be located. Mr. Giner replied that it was directly opposite Mucko Road in the back where there was an existing sand and gravel operation.

Mr. Hesketh inquired as to what was going on just south of Mucko Road. Mr. Giner stated that it was the construction for Deringer-Ney's 100,000 s.f. new facility. Niagara would be across the street to the rear of the existing buildings owned by Mr. Sponzo.

##### **b. Town Center Apartments**

Mr. Giner reported that the Apartments had received Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency approval on Monday and that they should be applying for final Site Plan approval shortly.

Mr. Hesketh reported that he was impressed with IW Agent Peter Castaldi's analysis for the wetlands agency.

Ms. Bononi asked if the report indicated any issues with the water quality that would be discharged into Wash Brook from the project. Mr. Hesketh said that the town staff had done a thorough report in addressing those issues.

Mr. Schenck noted that one of the homes on Bloomfield Ave. might have some architecturally historical worth and that Paul Butler was willing to allow someone to move the house if it was done in a timely manner. He stated that someone from the University of Hartford's Architecture College was involved in possibly studying the architectural significance.

##### **c. Goman+York**

David Driver of Goman+York gave a presentation on marketing Bloomfield industrial buildings and sites. There was a PowerPoint presentation and handouts that summarized the strategy that G+Y was recommending that Bloomfield follow. The handouts listed the currently available Industrial Buildings and sites in Bloomfield.

Ms. Bononi stated that the report was very helpful and that the EDC needs to discuss how to proceed with the Goman+York recommendations.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if the available space would be classified as Class "A" or Class "B". Mr. Driver replied most likely Class "B" since there Bloomfield had no direct access to the Interstate Highway system.

Don Poland stated that we should not make too much of whether we were a Class A or Class B. he felt that Bloomfield had a good concentration of industries and a beneficial location between Hartford and the airport.

Ms. Bononi stated that she was concerned about the unemployment rate and how to promote job growth and that this study could be used to initiate the discussion of Bloomfield's unemployment rate.

Ms. Bercowetz asked for a consensus on how the EDC wished to follow up on this. All members were favorable to adding a "Next Steps" discussion to the November 10 EDC meeting Agenda.

d. **Other**

Mr. Schenck noted that Budget season was soon approaching and that the EDC could recommend appropriate items be funded to promote Economic Development. He noted that one of the focal points next year would be the lower Blue Hills Avenue area.

Ms. Bononi would like some input from staff regarding internal staffing issues. Also she would like staff to keep the EDC informed about budget timelines as well as how to join the CERC Site Finder program for what appears to be a nominal fee.

Dave Driver stated that there had been a similar discussion with the Council's Land Use and Economic Development subcommittee suggested that the EDC meet with the subcommittee at one of their upcoming meetings.

Ms. Bercowetz asked Deputy Mayor Gamble if she could schedule this for an upcoming meeting. Ms. Gamble replied that they would place it on one of the Agendas and notify the EDC.

Mr. Giner noted that Dave Driver from G+Y had worked with a firm from Buffalo NY to help save a Metal Improvements business on Filley Rd. that was going to close on November 1. The businessman from Buffalo was able to close the deal on the business before the plant closed which saved 20 jobs from being eliminated.

Ms. Bercowetz stated that she felt that there was a more professional approach evident in our work with Goman+York and Town staff regarding Economic Development activities. She stated that the Town should get the word out with respect to some of these successes.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if we had someone who was dedicated to grant writing. Mr. Schenck stated that there was no one person that wrote grants and that grants were generally applied for by Department Heads who were aware of grants that were available in their respective disciplines.

Ms. Bononi inquired as to the status of their parking recommendations to the TPZ. Mr. Giner said that he had forwarded the recommendations and that the TPZ would like to invite the EDC or its subcommittee members to a future meeting. He suggested December since the November meeting was going to be pretty full with new applications.

*Mr. Hesketh made a motion to accept the Goman+York report with thanks for a job well done. Ms. Bononi seconded and the motion passed unanimously.*

Ms. Bononi asked David Driver whether we had looked at advertising in the Valley Book. Mr. Driver believes that any advertising money was better spent by promoting the Town in the Hartford Business Journal.

Ms. Bercowetz reminded everyone that the **next EDC meeting would be on Tuesday, November 10 at 8:30 a.m. in Conference Room #5.**

**5. Adjournment**

*Mr. Hesketh made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 a.m. Ms. Bononi seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.*

Respectfully submitted,

José Giner, AICP, Director of Planning and Economic Development