

Town of Bloomfield
Economic Development Commission Meeting
800 Bloomfield Avenue, Conference Room #5
DRAFT MINUTES
TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2016

Present: Jerry Long, Bonnie Bercowitz, Harold Harper, Michelle Bononi, Fred Hesketh, and Jerry Katrichis.

Also present: Director of Planning and Economic Development, José Giner, Town Manager Philip Schenck, Mayor Joan Gamble, Dave Driver, Mike Goman, Deputy Mayor Syd Schulman, Councilman Joel Neuwirth, Dale Bertoldi, Dick Hughes, Mark Saunders, Chip Caton, Marty Geitz and Laura James, Recording Secretary.

1. Chairman Long called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

2. **Minutes**

Commissioner Bononi made a motion to accept the minutes of February 16, 2016 with corrections, Commissioner Hesketh seconded the motion, and passed unanimously.

3. **Staff & Commission Member Update**

- a. **Niagara Bottling**, Mr. Giner stated Niagara Bottling applied for building permit. The initial review was complete and comments were sent back. He reported that a preconstruction meeting was held a few weeks back and that the company will probably start to move dirt around soon.
- b. **Town Center Apartments**, Mr. Giner stated they will be beginning to start demolition soon. He noted that the utilities have been cut off.
- c. **Wintonbury Mall**, Mr. Giner stated he received a call from Mr. Bidsal, and he was interested in the Prosser Library at the Wintonbury Mall. Mr. Giner stated he gave Mr. Bidsal the contact information for Roberta LaMonaca, Library Director and Mark Weisman, Chairman of the Library Building Committee. Mr. Goman stated he will be meeting with Mr. Bidsal later today. He noted that when he spoke with Mr. Bidsal his primary interest was if the Wintonbury Mall was a suitable site for the Prosser Library. Mr. Schenck stated he spoke with Kurt Smith, State Farm Agency, and Mr. Smith stated how pleased he was with the Business Energy Solutions program and how well it worked for him.
- d. **Tax Abatement Policy**, Mr. Giner stated some of the sub-committees are going to be looking at drafting a policy on how to proceed with reviewing Tax Abatements. Mr. Giner and Rich McDermott attended a CCM workshop in Norwich. Mr. Giner stated that the workshop went over basic tax abatement statutes and also TIF. He thought there were some good leads as to what other towns are doing which have implemented tax abatement policies. He noted that Simsbury has a three person screening board who looks at it before it gets to the Town Council. Mr. Goman stated Don Poland is leading the effort in looking at what other municipalities are doing and will probably have a report by next EDC meeting. Mr. Giner stated he would contact Mr. Poland in order not to duplicate efforts. There was further discussion of the differences between Tax Abatements and TIF.
- e. **Filley Park**, Mr. Giner stated they should be completing 1st Phase now that the weather is changing. The 2nd Phase is going out for bid and the Town is going through the capital budgeting process which will determine how much can be done this Fiscal Year. He stated that some environmental permits may limit the times when we can dredge and do other work in the pond and stream. Mr. Schenck stated that the 2nd Phase is the most expensive and is scheduled this coming year. The cost will be close to 1.2 million dollars. Mr. Schenck reported that the Town has \$500,000 to \$600,000 dollars in reserve from funding received over past several years. Within the capital improvement program budget going forward, the presentation on the budget will be held this Thursday, March 10, 2016 in the Council Chamber and will be televised. There is an additional

\$500,000 in the capital improvement program to be added to the balance of the money that the Town already has in hand. Hopefully, this will come close to meeting the requirements to remove the dam, dredge the pond, and construct the fish ladder. He stated that the issue that Mr. Giner brought up is that we have look at the construction schedule taking into account any permit restrictions. Mr. Schenck further stated the Town has all the permits and they are good for another year, but there are restrictions within the permits concerning timing and when the work has to be done. Therefore, we are waiting to see how the bids come, the schedule of the work, and how much the financing covers. The 2nd Phase may have to be done over the next two years. Mr. Schenck noted that the Town Council Sub-Committee on Administration and Education recommended to the Council that \$5,000 be appropriated to the Filley Park Committee to assist them in coming up with a flyer or pamphlet that would assist with fund raising for Filley Park. Mr. Schenck stated he believes their goals are reasonable. They are looking to come up with a significant amount of donations for bricks and paving, flagpole, and trees. He stated that donations are expected to be in the five figure area for bridges and other improvements as we move forward. Mr. Schenck further stated the budgeting process is not over and there may be some adjustments as we go along. There will probably be another three phases such as redoing the parking lot, and pavilion. This is a significant commitment by the Town and people who are involved with the donations.

f. **Goman & York
Marketing**

Mr. Goman stated that Phil Schenck had asked him to put together a proposal for alternatives expanding the marketing efforts for the Town and how to attract new industry. Mr. Goman stated they turned that over to Mr. Schenck. Mr. Goman stated he will speak with Mr. Schenck later in the week to decide which direction to proceed.

Bloomfield Center Business Alliance

Mr. Goman stated the Bloomfield Center Business Alliance is going well. The meetings have been well attended. Mr. Goman stated they are working on expanding the geography of the BCBA that it covers. Mr. Goman stated they will be expanding their marketing going forward.

Etc.

Mr. Goman stated he had an active discussion with owner of the property of the Jerome and Wintonbury Ave old railway yard who has a plan for a mixed use of some kind.

Mr. Goman stated he met with the new Director of Community Development for the City of Hartford, Shawn Fitzpatrick. He noted he has a couple new hires who are very talented and one thing on the agenda is interest in working on Hartford portion of Upper Blue Hills Avenue which will complement what Bloomfield is looking to do with Lower Blue Hills Avenue. It was his impression that Mr. Fitzpatrick is quite interested in that project.

Mr. Neuwirth stated they rented a bus from the Senior Center and took 20 University of Hartford student leaders, three staff people, Mayor, Town Manager, and Town Planner on a tour of Carbones, Ginza, Isaacs, Yogurt shop and they got a taste of what is available to Bloomfield. Mr. Neuwirth stated it was an opportunity to expose the students to what Bloomfield has to offer and will help with students coming into Bloomfield instead of going to West Hartford.

Mr. Schenck stated Carbones is hosting a fundraiser event for the Hartford Children's Medical Center on June 23, 2016. The Town is looking to help out with a tent rental. This event, in conjunction with Leisure Services Concert on the Town Green, will bring in many people to the Town Center. The Town will be manning a table to promote local business efforts.

Mr. Schenck further stated the VFW building and 1874 Victorian House was sold at tax sale and that the six month time frame for the previous owner to retain the property by paying the tax bill

was almost over. He anticipates that the new owner will be actively engaged in removing those two structures. The successful bidder was the next door business.

Mr. Schenck further stated he received an email from Rep Baram who spoke positively about the possibility of the State Bond Commission approving a \$500,000 bond to fund the streetscapes improvements for Lower Blue Hills. We hope to hear next month or month after if we were successful in getting those funds. Mr. Schenck said that \$30,000 was included in the budget to hire a consultant to start preliminary planning for the streetscape. Fuss and O'Neill has been retained for the process of completing the study of the preliminary area.

Mr. Goman stated that the International Council of Shopping Centers spring convention starts tonight at the Convention Center, hopefully Shawn Bidsal will be there

g. Public Participation and Information Issues

Commissioner Bononi stated the group was to make a decision regarding public comments on the agenda, the placement, and how many times the public is allowed to speak. Should public comment be once or twice on the agenda? Chairman Long stated he did not understand why we would need to see it twice on the Agenda. Commissioner Bercowitz stated if a citizen comes to the Commission with a specific item to discuss and if you allow citizens to state their questions at the beginning of the meeting, the Commission can address those questions. She stated that there may be other issues that come up during the meeting that people may wish to comment on during the second Public participation item. Chairman Long asked Mayor Gamble how the Council handles public participation. Mayor Gamble stated at the beginning of the meeting with Citizen Statements and Petitions. Chairman Long asked can the Commission make this a policy or rule to the agenda. Mr. Giner stated he can start adding to the agenda ahead of time and at some point the Commission would need to update their bylaws. Commissioner Bononi stated the Commission can institute whatever rules they want. Chairman Long stated that he would like to stay consistent with what other governing bodies are doing. There was further discussion regarding the placement of public comments on the agenda, whether once at the beginning or having it twice on the agenda the beginning and the end.

Commissioner Bononi made a motion to have public comment at the beginning and the end of the meeting agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bercowitz and the motion passed.

Mark Saunders, 13 Pinney Road, stated he attended a Windsor Town Hall meeting which allowed for petitions at the beginning and the end. Mr. Saunders stated it was a great experience and you do not have to sign up. Mr. Saunders stated the meeting was very welcoming and that he spoke at both times. He was able to comment on issues brought up during the meeting. It would be wonderful if the Town Council had the same policy, because it's not about how long it takes. Mr. Saunders further stated he would like the Commission to also look at the Towns that do not use abatements for business incentives, such as Town of Glastonbury, and ask them why.

Mr. Chip Caton, 59 Duncaster Road, stated if meetings will be limited to comments or will there be an exchange. Mr. Caton stated the Town Council meetings are not always productive if you can't interact. It has been frustrating to bring issues up and the Council refuse to respond. Chairman Long stated that the Economic Development Commission has never had a closed meeting and further down the road the Commission will articulate its policies. Chairman Long further stated the EDC believes in transparency and wants everyone to be heard. Commissioner Bercowitz stated that we are just trying to find a structure that allows interaction but doesn't allow some of the things that has happened at other meetings. Commissioner Bononi stated the public comments and public participation is not intended to be a presentation. A request needs to made

to get on the agenda to make a presentation and that way the Commission will know you are coming and then have a meaningful discussion.

Mr. Martin Geitz stated that the Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce will holding a legislative breakfast on Tuesday, March 29, 2016 at First Cathedral from 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Joe Brenan President of CBIA will be present along with the Town's State legislative contingent. He stated that all Commissioners were welcome to attend.

h. Other Topics

Mr. Giner stated that the State DECD and CERC were having an economic forum on Wednesday, March 16, 2016 at Goodwin College auditorium. He stated that at the last TPZ meeting the Commission approved ABB Robotics for the property located 131 Phoenix Crossing in the old Culbro Tobacco building.

Mr. Giner and Mr. Driver also conducted some business visitations. One was S & S Centerless Grinding. Mr. Giner noted that the owner stated that the tax abatement for his expansion was a big help in keeping the business in Bloomfield. The owner stated that he gets material to move to Massachusetts almost every week, but he wants to remain in Bloomfield.

Mr. Driver, Mr. Giner and Mr. Schenck also visited Absolute Machine which is a two person business.

Mr. Driver, Mr. Giner and Mr. Schenck also met with the Vice President of Cigna and came away with guarded optimism that that Bloomfield continue to be a major focus for the company after it merges with Anthem. Mr. Giner reported that they have been spending a lot of money on improvements.

Mr. Driver, Mr. Giner and Mr. Schenck also visited a new business, Total Wall Systems, last week and met with Steve Levesque who stated that he was very happy to be here. The Company received some tax incentives from State because of Enterprise Zone program.

Commissioner Bononi stated she was happy to see the industrial marketing plan starting to come forward. Commissioner Bononi asked at what point will it come to the Commission to have discussion and input. Mr. Goman stated he sent some budgeting plans to Mr. Schenck and will be set up meeting to discuss. Mr. Schenck stated that he was in the process of developing, price tags on alternatives to include in budget as we go forward. Mr. Schenck stated there was already some discussions regarding billboards, and other things. Commissioner Bononi asked Mr. Schenck at what point will the EDC budget be looked at. Mr. Schenck stated the budget is pretty static in terms of what was done in the prior year or two. Mr. Schenck stated that funds for retaining Goman & York are at the same amount and some funding for other activities are included. Commissioner Bononi stated it's very important the Commission is apprised of that. Mr. Giner stated he will email Commissioner Bononi the budget items. Mr. Schenck further stated they were looking at possibly budgeting monies for social media, banners, website and other advertising. Mr. Schenck stated the budget will be pretty much complete by the end of the month. There was further discussion regarding the budget and the Commission being a part of the budget process. Commissioner Katrichis stated it's never too early to start the next budget cycle.

4. Adjournment

Commissioner Bononi made a motion to adjourn at 9:30 a.m. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Katrichis and passed unanimously.

The Next EDC meeting is Tuesday, April 12, 2016 at 8:30 in Conference Room #5 of the Town Hall.