

Town of Bloomfield  
Economic Development Commission Meeting  
800 Bloomfield Avenue, Conference Room #5  
DRAFT MINUTES  
TUESDAY, September 13, 2016

**Present:** Jerry Long, Bonnie Bercowetz, Michelle Bononi, Fred Hesketh, and Jerry Katrichis  
**Not Present:** Rich McDermott, Harold Harper

Also present: José Giner, Director of Planning and Economic Development, Phil Schenck, Town Manager, Joan Gamble, Mayor, Syd Schulman, Deputy Mayor, Councilman Joel Neuwirth, Rob Rowson G+Y, Allison Lipsher G+Y, Dale Bertoldi, Mark Weisman, Kevin Gough and Laura James, Recording Secretary

1. Chairman Long called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

2. **Minutes of August 23, 2016 regular meeting**

*Commissioner Hesketh made a motion to accept the minutes of August 23, 2016.  
Commissioner Bononi seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.*

3. **Public Comment**

No comments

4. **Goman + York – update and preliminary thoughts on Town Center Parking**

- a. Bloomfield Center Business Alliance Update: Rob Rowson
- b. Business Visits and Attraction: Dave Driver
- c. Parking and Other Planning Issues: Don Poland
- d. Marketing Update: Mike Goman

Mr. Rowson stated Mr. Goman, Mr. Driver, and Mr. Poland are out of town. Mr. Rowson stated that the in the Center and Mall things are status quo. He announced that the Bloomfield Center Business Alliance was hosting a wine tasting on Monday from 5-7 p.m. at Crystal Wine & Spirit with a short business meeting afterwards. He noticed that Site work is moving along on Jerome Avenue. Mr. Rowson also stated that merchants are looking forward to have 200 units in their backyard. Mr. Rowson stated he did not have a marketing update. The Bloomfield Flyer is developed and at final review and should be available at next meeting.

Mr. Schenck stated that Swift Textile Metalizing on Britton Road was selected at an award ceremony as one of the top 25 firms out of 3500 firms that Lockheed Martin deals with which is a significant honor for a company in Bloomfield.

Mr. Schenck also gave an update on his conversations with the owner of the Wintonbury Mall. He had put forth some issues with the appearance of the Mall especially in the area near the dumpsters along Jerome and Wintonbury Ave.

5. **Staff and Commission Member Updates on Various Topic of Interest (short recap)**

- a. Tax Abatement Policy

Mr. Giner passed out a Handout of the Windsor, CT abatement policy along with other materials and that he hopes to have a draft for the framework for the Tax Abatement Policy to email the EDC soon. He stated he looked at different Towns around Connecticut and the Country. Mr. Giner stated it is important for the Town to establish an abatement policy to handout to prospects and put on the Town website. Mr. Giner stated that the Land Use & Economic Development Subcommittee of the Town Council will meet on Tuesday the 20<sup>th</sup> at

7:00 p.m. Mr. Hesketh stated that he supports the use of abatements as an economic development tool. He suggested that we publicize our success stories with press releases.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if TIF is in place. Mr. Rowlson stated no Town in Connecticut is using TIF currently. Mr. Rowlson stated Mr. Goman will be at the Land Use meeting to possibly speak on TIF. Mr. Giner stated legislation did not take effect with TIF until last October and people are cautiously waiting to see what works.

Ms. Bononi stated if there is a consensus with EDC, Mr. Giner will email the EDC with additional information regarding a draft abatement policy. The EDC can make individual comments, share comments, and put on the agenda for October meeting for discussion. Mr. Giner stated the EDC should attend the Land Use & Economic Development Subcommittee Meeting.

b. New and ongoing construction

Mr. Giner stated the Building Dept. had a record year issuing permits with a total construction value of \$171 million dollars not counting the apartments. Brighton Park is almost finished with its luxury apartments.

There was discussion about getting the word out in the newspaper or doing press releases about the building that is going on in Bloomfield. Mr. Schenck stated the Town is in the process of putting an RFP together for a communications plan for the community. We have a variety of different outlets for the community and will be using to focus on specific messages and themes on things going on in the community.

c. Wintonbury Mall

Mr. Giner stated he had some correspondence with the owner of the Wintonbury Mall. The Owner has stated Mr. Giner is denying him a signage permit. Mr. Rowlson stated the Owner's response is very bitter and negative. Mr. Schenck stated the Wintonbury Mall Owner has filed a Tax Appeal and the relationship has not been congenial. Mr. Schenck stated there is a rising concern over the stewardship of the Mall.

d. Filley Park

Mr. Giner stated they are waiting on the Army Corp of Engineers and will miss this construction season. He reported that the Town is looking at long term solutions for the geese problem.

e. Other topics (economic trends, jobs, unemployment etc.).

Mr. Giner stated that he forwards copies of each month's Connecticut Economic Digest to the Commission. Ms. Bononi noted that unemployment is inching back up again. Ms. Bononi stated the Connecticut Digest is a wealth of information and highly supports receiving the information.

6. Continued Discussion of EDC mission statement and its implementation.

Mr. Rowlson stated that Goman + York was asked to put together a slide presentation for today's discussion. Mr. Rowlson talked about resources and creating a prioritized list of policies that may be coming forward. Mr. Rowlson also stated that there should be a coordinating office for EDC issues and how news and information is being disseminated.

He stated that Businesses should be able to go to the website for abatement policy information because businesses don't necessarily know where to go in Town Hall. Mr. Rowlson further stated

that they are looking at building a coalition with the entire community. Lots of new opportunities come through events within the neighborhood and the more events a Town has the better.

Chairman Long asked if a dedicated Economic Development Director is being considered. Mr. Rowlson stated a public relations person is needed working with the EDC, Board of Ed, Leisure Services - it all goes together.

Mr. Schenck stated that three years ago the Town looked at various models and decided it was better to go with a firm which had multi specialties. That is why Goman + York was chosen.

Mr. Rowlson suggested that the Town may want to hire someone to begin design work on a consistent signage plan. Mr. Giner stated the Town has hired a firm out of Pennsylvania to put together a Wayfinding program. He reported that they are almost finished with their work. Mr. Rowlson stated Wayfinding is good for non-residents to find their way around the Town and to enhance the pedestrian experience in the Center. Mr. Giner stated that he will get a copy of the Draft Wayfinding Plan to everyone and invite Dave Melesko and/or our Wayfinding consultants to a meeting.

Mr. Rowlson also stated that the community image of the educational system is very important for economic development. The perception of what is happening in the community is often times reality for people. Mayor Gamble stated that Bloomfield High School received a \$10,000 grant from AT&T for advancing student scores in SAT's. Bloomfield is a model for other Towns in the State and the Country. She stated that Bloomfield has shown an increase of sixty more students than last year which indicates that people are taking their children out of private schools and opting for a Bloomfield education.

Mr. Rowlson stated that most schools are showing a decrease in students and this is very good news. Mr. Rowlson further stated that growth in population and connectivity and improvements in the Blue Hills Avenue streetscape should be high on the list for EDC.

There was a discussion regarding a possible roundabout in the Center and if there should be some preliminary discussion with the community. Mr. Rowlson stated that there should be a discussion with other communities that have a roundabout. Mr. Rowlson stated that there is an opportunity to make the downtown area pedestrian friendly but will be a budget concern. There was further discussion regarding improvements to the intersection of Tunxis Avenue and Bloomfield Avenue for pedestrians and the walkability of the intersection.

Mr. Schenck stated that the Town is looking at options for the Town Green.

Ms. Bercowetz stated that the EDC needs to have better communication on why things are stalled and what progress is being made on various projects. She felt that people need to know what's going on. There is a perception that nothing is happening. She feels that the Town should consider using social media more to communicate.

Ms. Bononi stated that she looked at different mission statements in Connecticut and across the US. Ms. Bononi stated she came up with three possible suggestions for consideration and the one that stuck out was example #2 from Wilton in the handout that she prepared.

Ms. Bononi stated that the Town of Wilton has a beautiful statement and is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in Connecticut as the best Town to live. Ms. Bononi stated that she took a webinar and they mainly spoke about how the EDC's primary mission is to create economic value. She believes this is influenced by the physical appearance, aesthetics, safety of surroundings and community events.

Ms. Bononi stated that the most important thing she came away with from the webinar was “Do you know what your Council Economic Strategy is and are you clearly understanding it”, and if not, you can’t proceed. She stated that maybe the EDC can get a handle on it at the Land Use ED Subcommittee meeting.

Ms. Bononi also discussed various ways that the EDC can communicate with citizens and one great way is the Town Website. She feels that it should be more dynamic.

Chairman Long stated that knowing the strategy of the Town Council is a very good point and needs to be addressed before the EDC can come up with their own mission statement.

Ms. Bercowetz stated that the EDC doesn’t attend Town Council meetings, but Council does attend EDC meetings. She stated that the EDC could possibly ask the Council for input at Tuesday’s Land Use & Economic Development Meeting regarding its mission.

Mr. Schenck stated that part of the EDC’s role is to look into policies in more detail and recommend changes to the Town Council. The EDC can work on tools of implementation such as the abatement policy by taking in consideration the values of the mission statement. He stated that the EDC can also have discussions with the TPZ which is responsible for the Plan of Development.

Ms. Bononi stated that the EDC can recommend parking amendments to the TPZ.

Mr. Katrichis asked if Town Council actually has a strategy for Economic Development.

Mr. Schulman stated that the Town Council does not have a mission statement that he is aware of. Mr. Schulman stated that they want to and will work with EDC. Mr. Schulman stated that Economic Development is a generic term and most people know what Economic Development is. There is a limited amount of staff and resources for Economic Development. Mr. Schulman also stated that the EDC can work with the Town Planner, Council, and Land Use subcommittee on the implementation of what the priorities are and work together to get it done. He stated that we need to address what kind of business we want to attract in Town. He also feels that the Town needs a design review process.

Mr. Schenck stated that one thing to keep in mind is that the Council works with the whole community. There may be conflicts, but he doesn’t want to complicate things. Ms. Bononi stated nobody likes everyone’s ideas all the time, but creativity goes out the window if everyone is afraid to submit ideas because a person’s feelings might be hurt. Ms. Bononi stated that out of conflict comes meaningful resolution.

Mayor Gamble stated that prior to Mr. Schenck coming on board the Subcommittee met in a vacuum and the perception was that the Council subcommittee was a secretive group pulling strings. Mayor Gamble stated that the last plan of development did not reflect the community and geography of the Town and we want to work toward a better Bloomfield. Mayor Gamble stated that Mr. Schenck has made a major change in the way the Town Council works. Now the doors are open and communication flows and hopefully the communication between the EDC and the Council will make things really move in Bloomfield.

Chairman Long asked the EDC members how they wished to proceed. Ms. Bononi stated that the EDC needs to make a decision on whether or not to have a mission statement. Ms. Bercowetz asked what the strategy of the Council is.

Mayor Gamble stated that some strategies are to grow the grand list by increasing the tax base and work on infrastructure. Mayor Gamble stated that things have changed and that those

changes have not been addressed appropriately. The Council has to balance the cost of government with the cost of improvements.

Mr. Rowlson stated that he will make sure the EDC gets a copy of the five mission statements that are in his presentation.

Chairman Long stated that he felt there was a consensus that the EDC will look at the mission statements from Mr. Rowlson and Ms. Bononi and be ready to vote on a mission statement by our next meeting.

**7. Public Comment**

Kevin Gough, 5 Bear Ridge Dr., stated that people walk diagonally across Tunxis and Bloomfield Ave, and that you get a third of the way across before the timer stops. He feels that there is not enough time for pedestrians. Mr. Gough also stated that he agrees with most of what Mr. Schulman says, but disagrees that everyone knows what Economic Development means and this is the first step that needs to be defined. Mr. Gough stated the Town has been operating on more and more revenue for more and more services and that when that drops off the Town is going to be in trouble. He feels that the problem with the mission statement is using generic terms. EDC needs to look at specifics and have discussion regarding commerce activity.

**8. Adjournment**

*Commissioner Bercowetz made a motion to adjourn at 10:35 a.m. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Bononi and passed unanimously.*

**Next Meeting is Tuesday October 18th**