BLOOMFIELD TOWN COUNCIL
LAND USE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

There was a regular meeting of the above referenced subcommittee held on Tuesday, October 19, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom remote meeting.

Committee Members present were: Deputy Mayor David Mann, Councilors Rickford Kirton, Patrick DeLorenzo and Danielle Wong

Also present were: Stanley D. Hawthorne, Town Manager, Jose Giner, Director of Planning and Economic Development and India Rodgers, Clerk of Council

Guest: Denise Robidoux, Goman & York Consultants

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

Old Business

Discussion and Status Update regarding Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Timetable, Marketing/Promotion and Administrative Plan

Mr. Jose Giner, Director of Planning and Economic Development provided a brief update of the TIF District Program and Timetable. The Town adopted the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Plan and Policy and is open to receiving applications from developers. The new Town Council will need to appoint a TIF Advisory committee that will review any requests for benefits in each TIF District and provide guidance to the Council on individual applications.

Mr. Giner asked our Economic Development advisors, Goman & York to further refine our application process (forms, fees, etc.) and provide a framework for the marketing of the TIF Districts. The Town will receive any requests on a case by case basis according to the adopted policy.

Mrs. Denise Robidoux, Goman & York stated that they are in the process of developing a one page worksheet for each of three TIF districts. They will continue to review other TIF district websites for some direction and guidance on form development. Goman & York will go to the industry and make initial contact through their network.

Discussion

Deputy Mayor Mann mentioned the importance of marketing and promoting this TIF District program in all three districts.

Councilor Kirton stated that the Town should advertise in the Hartford Business Journal and highlight the Town Manager to promote our community in the media.
Mr. Giner mentioned the attendance of the Mayor at the Commercial Real Estate Event, in which 150/200 developers were in attendance.

Councilor Wong inquired about Hooker Brewery and some parcels for retail and light industrial, however they were flagged at State Level relative to Environmental Justice concerns.

Town Manager Hawthorne gave brief remarks regarding the latest status updates and marketing of new initiatives.

Councilor Kirton recommended that all information is funneled through Council. It was noted that Council feedback is to be incorporated with these communications. The Town should provide a more diligent effort to communicate to the Council, sooner than later.

Deputy Mayor Mann also suggested contacting the property owners on what the TIF Program is and what they offer.

**Discussion and Status Update regarding 15 Douglas Street – RFP for sale of Town-Owned Property**

Mr. Giner drafted a preliminary Request for Proposals (RFP) and have a meeting scheduled with the Purchasing Agent to refine it. Once the final draft is completed, it will be distributed to subcommittee members.

**Discussion regarding Plan of Conservation and Development Timetable, changing demands on our community**

Mr. Giner gave a brief overview of the next steps in the Plan of Conservation and Development Timetable. This is a Town Plan and Zoning Commission driven process. The Commission will discuss the timetable and makeup of the steering committee to guide their work. The Council has allocated $45,000 in the current Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget for the POCD with an additional $15,000 proposed for the next fiscal year.

Discussion

Mann – vacant land being consumed, redevelopment with existing properties (higher density in the right location), future build out of Bloomfield, look at in a much broader context, comparing environment loss with tax gain, Economic Development review – what is best? How will citizens benefit? Appealing, attractive, to developers. Increase citizen partnership, must implement the plan that is developed

**Discussion regarding Commercial Zone for Cottage Grove Road**

Mr. Giner noted that the proposal for 696 Cottage Grove Road was withdrawn by the applicant with citizen opposition. There have been no further discussions regarding implementing a Commercial Zone since the withdrawal.
Discussion

Deputy Mayor Mann asked how the application for the Ryefield Hollow Easement be submitted when it was against the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) must be considered, not required. Mr. Giner stated that the opposition must state why it does not conform and reasoning to the POCD. It was also noted that discussion about changing the plan should be done prior to accepting a zone change.

Public Comment

1. **Councilor Kevin Gough, 5 Bear Ridge Drive** stated that POCD should be addressed first and the commercial zone not a bad idea. The zone change should not arise from the developer, should come through the TPZ or citizens desire and the TPZ should present this to the community, not developers.

Follow-Up Next Steps for TIF Timetable, 15 Douglas Street, Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)

**Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Timetable**

- Development of the Advisory Committee – no process, but consult language from the policy as a guide.

**15 Douglas Street**

- Request for Proposal (RFP) to be sent out this week.

**Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)**

- Request for Proposal (RFP) in progress of development.

**Discussion and Status Update regarding Roundabouts for Town Center**

- The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) informed the Town in June that there has been a significant increase in traffic volume in the intersection from the original CTDOT counts in 2016, especially in the north and south directions. The result is that the original concept will not work. The needed changes are beyond the scope of the design unit. The design unit has handed the project back to the concept unit to work up a new concept.

The subcommittee recommended to the Town to ask for an updated Traffic Signalization System for this area in the Town Center.

**Discussion and Status Update regarding Blue Hills Avenue Complete Streets Improvements**

Mr. Giner gave a status update of the Blue Hills Avenue Complete Street Improvements program.
• Phase I of the project extends to the Town Line with Hartford to Elizabeth Avenue, and is funded by a Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTCIP) grant administered by the CTDOT. During Phase I the roadway was restriped with physical changes made to the curbing.

• Phase II extends the project improvements north from Elizabeth Avenue to Britton Drive; and is funded by a recently awarded Urban Act Program (UAP) grant administered by CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). The subcommittee discussed type of improvement such as: granite curbing, brick treatments, lighting, etc.

• Phase I project was in final design when the UAP grant was awarded. Both grant agencies agreed to merge the two phases into one project. The consultant has been actively incorporating the Phase II scope into the project final design. Utility reviews of the final design are currently underway. Once the comments are incorporated, final design packages will be submitted to the agencies for their review prior to bidding. Construction is anticipated to begin next year 2022.

Discussion

Councilor Wong asked if there were plans for a public forum on the completed design for Blue Hills Avenue Complete Streets. She also asked about the feasibility of burying utility lines.

Deputy Mayor Mann reiterated the importance of the Complete Streets Program. There are 18 corridors in Town, with a design handbook committing the Town on an annual basis to allocate funding sources for all corridors, to improve mobility of Bloomfield citizens.

Discussion regarding Planning and Implementation for next steps of East Coast Greenway Development

Mr. Giner gave a brief overview of the planning and implementation for next steps of the East Coast Greenway Development.

• Simsbury-Bloomfield Connector Project – Towns/Consultant are finalizing construction details with CTDOT. Project bidders expected early next year, with construction to follow. Construction expected to take 18 months.

• Bloomfield – Greenway – Route Study – The Capital Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) is ready to advertise a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a study to finalize the East Coast Greenway route through Bloomfield and Hartford. This study is expected to be completed in 2023. This will be a regional and comprehensive study, it is expected to essentially set the final route.

It was suggested to collaborate with the City of Hartford to assist with funding the connector piece.

Councilor Wong inquired about the amount allocated to support this completion by 2023. The Town remains optimistic with a request in the state’s budget to fund this section of the greenway. She also asked to review the recent budget initiatives from the Council.
Deputy Mayor Mann asked about the status of design and update on repairs to the Greenway.

Councilor Kirton suggested the possibility of utilizing ARPA funds to allocate for small projects with long term improvements for quality of life and infrastructure.

**Discussion and Status Update regarding Ryefield Hollow Easement**

The Town has reviewed the deeds and had communications with a CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) representative without being to determine the following:

- Any restrictions on whether the Town can grant an easement over this piece of property.
- Difficult to identify due to grant programs that were utilized to help fund the purchase of this portion of the LaSalette property.
- DEEP Representative indicated that there are different requirements for the different sources of funds that may or may not have been used.
- Lack of response and delivery of written confirmation from DEEP

**Discussion**

Deputy Mayor Mann strongly recommended that the Town receive written confirmation from DEEP. He also inquired about the increase in housing units and adding value – should the Town benefit from that?

**Public Comments**

1. **Councilor Kevin Gough, 5 Bear Ridge Drive** – see comments attached.

**Staff Reports**

**Development Inquiries and Project Updates**

Mr. Giner noted that he had a brief conversation with the owner of Wintonbury Mall. He noted that there was an inquiry for

- Proposal inquiry for Drive-thru Popeye’s Chicken Restaurant
- Metlife Building – new buyers met
  - Restrictions by Cigna on property
- Ruby Tuesday’s Plaza – application submitted for medical building

**Discussion**

Deputy Mayor Mann asked about a status update regarding Butler Construction. It was noted that there is a Stipulated Agreement being reviewed by the Town Attorney. The Council voted to approve a tax abatement, per the written agreement, which has not been completed as of yet.
Other Business

Councilor DeLorenzo inquired about a status update for the Lease on Reservoir #2. It was noted that there is no signed agreement as of yet.

Councilor Kirton expressed his frustration on sending miscommunications and messaging to the investor and the business community. He cautioned the subcommittee members to review and assess infrastructure needs when entertaining developers. He noted that the TPZ signed off on the Ryefield Easement, however Council is holding up the process.

Councilor Wong is very concerned about the Ryefield Easement going through the neighborhood and Public Park. She spoke briefly about industrial construction and maintenance.

Deputy Mayor Mann informed the subcommittee that the Economic Development Commission (EDC) have been discussing their future role and relation to the Land Use & Economic Development. He also would like to expand the roles and responsibilities of the Design Review Board.

Public Comments

1. **Councilor Kevin Gough, 5 Bear Ridge Drive** stated that he is surprised that the TPZ approved this easement and disregarded the Planner recommendation.

Public Comments

Public Comments were noted through the course of the meeting on various topics.

Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Councilor Kirton, seconded by Councilor Wong and voted unanimously to approve the minutes of September 21, 2021.

Adjournment

It was moved by Councilor DeLorenzo, seconded by Councilor Kirton and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.
To: Land Use & Economic Development Subcommittee

From: Kevin Gough, Town Councilor

Date: October 19, 2021

Re: Potential Ryefield Hollow Easement – Discussion at October 19 Meeting

I wish to enter the following comments on this item into the record.

- Per the Planner’s Memo (dated 10/15/21): I agree with the Planner that, before Council takes any action on this request, the Town must determine whether or not there are any restrictions as a result of the use of state funds in acquiring the LaSalette property. This would apply to a) whether or not an easement for emergency fire access could be granted and/or b) whether there could be recompense (to Town and/or state) for such an easement.

- As I’ve noted, I believe that Planning & Zoning Commission (TPZ) acted inappropriately in “conditionally approving” the proposed Ryefield Hollow subdivision. Approval was conditioned on obtaining said emergency fire access easement through LaSalette Park from the Town Council. I believe that the potential developer should be required to obtain the easement first (i.e. “have all their ducks in a row”) before approval. By TPZ granting a conditional approval, the project gains forward momentum, making it more difficult for the Town Council to objectively consider the easement.

- As a general principle, the Town should not allow easements of this sort through park land. Our POCD and the Master Plans for our major parks (Farmington River, Wilcox, LaSalette, Filley, and Samuel Wheeler Reed) should state that these lands are “off limits” to development activities that do not enhance the park.

- Accommodating developers by using park land potentially defies impacted neighborhoods that may not support the proposed development. The desires and opinions of impacted communities must be considered by the Council.

- Finally, should the obstacles above be overcome and the Town Council considers ‘granting’ this easement, I believe that the Town must uphold its fiduciary responsibility and charge the developer for the easement. As I have noted in discussing this easement and an earlier request for an easement (or sale) of Town land at the end of Pent Road, the easement needs to be valued like an option: if granting the easement dramatically increases the adjoining property value, the Town needs to be recompensed for it. In this case, if the proposed Ryefield Hollow development cannot occur without the emergency fire access easement through LaSalette, then the easement has a very high value and Bloomfield taxpayers should be paid accordingly.