

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT
MONDAY, AUGUST 8, 2016 – 7:00PM
NEW HARTFORD TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Robert Boyan, Jim Brett, Lori LaMere, Donna LaPlante, Mark Russo; Commission Secretary Debbie Ventre.

ABSENT: Jack Casey, Cindy Donaldson, David Krimmel, Shelley Lloyd, Alternates Bill Baxter, John Burdick

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Bob Switzgable (7:06 pm); Selectman Laura Garay (7:08 pm); Kathryn Boughton (Waterbury Republican 7:15 pm)

Chairman Russo called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES.

No alternates were present to be seated.

MOTION Mr. Boyan, second Mrs. LaPlante, to rearrange the agenda awaiting the arrival of our invited guests. *Unanimously approved.*

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.

June 13, 2016 regular meeting

There were not sufficient members present to approve the minutes.

July 11, 2016 regular meeting

There were not sufficient members present to approve the minutes.

5. SIGNAGE COMMITTEE UPDATE

No members present to provide an update.

7. UPDATES FROM TASK FORCES

Marketing – No Report

Rails to Trails – Mr. Brett advised that an RFP had been issued in June for a segment of the proposed trail heading toward Canton. Members of the committee reviewed the 7 proposals and met at Town Hall to narrow the list to 3 vendors. He mentioned the 3 finalists and explained the committee's rationale for selecting those firms as finalists.

The Committee is meeting again this Thursday to make their selection. In 3 – 6 months they should have a feasibility study on the route options and suggested funding opportunities.

3. VISIT FROM LOCAL BUSINESS – Bob Switzgable – Ski Sundown

Chairman Russo welcomed Bob Switzgable. Mr. Switzgable indicated that he owns Ski Sundown, a winter recreation area. Although they have dabbled in some off season events, their main focus has been winter events.

Mr. Switzgable indicated that they have considered some plans for expansion, but are not prepared to make that investment at this time. One of the obstacles is the need for water for snowmaking. He does not want to be in a situation where they can only make snow for half of their trails. They need to capitalize on the windows they have to make snow. Colder temperatures use more water, but less compressed air to make more snow.

Items that keep him up at night are liabilities and the high cost of insurance. He hates to see his customers getting hurt. He mentioned that his issues with staffing involve being able to recruit good mechanics. That seems to be an issue around the state. Mr. Boyan suggested partnering with the tech schools. Mr. Switzgable indicated that they recognize that the position of lift mechanic is one that needs on the job training but it is difficult to find individuals with the aptitude for that line of work.

A business he would like to see come in to town would be a hotel. However, he does not feel that the requests they receive would keep a hotel in business. They currently send their guests to Chapin Park and hotels in Collinsville.

Mr. Switzgable noted that once the Rails to Trails project is completed, the entire landscape of the town will change. Chairman Russo asked if Mr. Switzgable has spoken with Chris Sayer as yet. Mr. Switzgable responded that one of his employees is good friends with him. Mr. Russo suggested that if Mr. Switzgable and Mr. Sayer started co-branding they could show other businesses how successful it can be and more businesses would be interested in co-branding opportunities. He noted that he has seen spots for Middletown which spotlighted several businesses. Mr. Switzgable noted that it would be nice to do “A Town for All Seasons” with Upcountry Sportfishing.

Ms. Garay asked about Mr. Switzgable’s comments about expanding with an additional lodge and inquired if he had considered opening a hotel. He indicated that he has considered that but does not feel he has sufficient demand to justify it. Mr. Boyan suggested that Mr. Switzgable give one of the state’s TV stations access to one of his cameras for weather updates. Mr. Brett mentioned that he has traveled to Jiminy with friends from Long Island and asked if Mr. Switzgable has considered capturing that market as a shorter drive. Mr. Brett also noted that there is a pub at the base of the mountain. Mr. Switzgable noted that he does not have the height that Jiminy does and some visitors want the height.

Mr. Russo asked if they have considered other events during the off-season. Mr. Switzgable indicated that they are still working on the musical events, but they have been doing a lot of weddings and parties this season. This has enabled him to keep on some staff who are normally seasonal.

Mr. Russo mentioned Paradise City which has spring and fall dates for art shows in different locations such as Northhampton, Massachusetts. These are shows with diverse groups of artists. He suggests that Mr. Switzgable could reach out to them to suggest they could hold their event at his facility. Mr. Russo asked how many cars he has space for and Mr. Switzgable indicated 1000. Ms. Garay commented that the weekend event would have to be coordinated to offer other activities for attendees. Mr. Russo noted that the Fairfield County market that Ski Sundown attracts probably do not travel to Northhampton.

Mrs. LaPlante asked how the changing demographic has affected their business. Mr. Switzgable indicated that he has seen a definite drop as the baby boomers age and stop skiing, but he has seen a tremendous increase in children which does not correlate with the shrinking student population in town. Mr. Boyan noted that the millennial generation is larger than the baby boomers.

Mr. Switzgable shared the family experience of multi-generations visiting Ski Sundown together and having individual activities that they discuss when they gather for meals.

Ms. Garay inquired if he would consider an ice skating rink if the water issues could be resolved. Ms. LaMere asked about an ice hockey rink. Mr. Switzgable stated that he would not want to get into a position where he is competing with himself. Since ice hockey players do not typically ski. He has seen that individuals tend to focus on one sport per season and referenced baseball players who now have year-round leagues.

Mr. Boyan suggested that once Rails to Trails opens that could be a possible Cross Country skiing area while reserving a section for those who wish to snow-shoe.

Mr. Brett recapped that the more traffic EDC can drive to town with name recognition for New Hartford, CT. There is an opportunity for lodging in town even if it is a small scale with just a few units. Mr. Boyan suggested that perhaps an Air B&B arrangement would work especially for snow-birds whose properties are empty in the winter. Mr. Russo noted that if the Hurley apartments are built perhaps some of the units could be transitional units that are rented for short term for possibly higher revenue.

Mr. Boyan shared that Oliver Wolcott is working on a deal to expand and take over the UConn Torrington location.

All members thanked Mr. Switzgable for his time.

6. DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE ACTION PLAN

Chairman Russo indicated that he would really like the input from the Business Council on what they would like to see in the downtown area. If First Selectman Jerram wants to appoint a Committee to work on this, he will need to find someone to Chair it and perhaps there should be a liaison from EDC, Planning & Zoning and the other Commissions.

It seems that this Commission cannot proceed without input from the Business Council. Perhaps Mr. Amenta could bring some of his membership to an EDC meeting for input.

Mrs. LaPlante noted that a lot of what happens downtown is from the Library, the Community Club, the Churches and the Historical Society. She believes that these non-profits need to start to work with the downtown businesses. EDC can encourage the non-profits and the businesses to think beyond their individual scope and improve communication between the groups.

2. VISIT FROM LOCAL BUSINESS – Paul Amenta – New Hartford Business Council

Mr. Amenta will be invited to the September meeting if Mr. Butler will not be ready to present. If neither is able to attend, who should we consider inviting? Members suggested reaching out to representatives from the local non-profits or perhaps Passiflora.

8. CURRENT BUDGET BALANCE

Chairman Russo noted that the Commission should look at the current budget. He would like to consider hiring a marketing consultant on a part-time basis and experiment with some marketing efforts once the marketing packet is put together. He has seen ads in the Commercial Real Estate publications for other towns inviting people to start their business in that town. Mr. Brett noted that it would be helpful to have an update on what Cindy has done so far. He questioned the target for these ads whether the intent is to attract visitors or businesses. Mr. Russo indicated that his intent is to attract businesses to build the grand list.

Mrs. LaPlante noted that many people have home based businesses, maybe we could attract those individuals as a place to raise their kids – i.e. Live Work Play New Hartford. Mr. Boyan noted there is a lot of competition to attract businesses, but suggested that if one is working from home, we need to make the community attractive to them and show what they gain in recreation, schools, etc.

Chairman Russo suggested a co-branding ad with a local real estate company with half the ad promoting the town and the other half current listings. Cindy will be on the September agenda to give an update on the status of the packet. Mr. Brett agrees that funds should be allocated to this, but he would like Cindy's input. Mr. Boyan

noted that doing the shared ad with the realtor would enable feedback from the realtor on how effective the ad was.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS TO PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

Secretary Ventre shared notes from Mary Ann Gunning regarding the Litchfield Hills Triathlon event.

Mr. Russo questioned whether the Recreation Director is full-time or part-time and noted that helping with an event such as the Triathlon should really fall under their responsibilities. Perhaps this Commission could make a formal recommendation to the Board of Selectmen next month.

11. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION Mr. Brett, second Mr. Boyan, to adjourn at 8:35 pm; unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

**Debbie Ventre
Commission Secretary**