

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2016 – 7:00PM
NEW HARTFORD TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Robert Boyan, Jim Brett, Cindy Donaldson, Lori LaMere (7:09), Donna LaPlante, Mark Russo; Alternate John Burdick; Commission Secretary Debbie Ventre.

ABSENT: Jack Casey, David Krimmel, Shelley Lloyd, Alternate Bill Baxter

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Paul Amenta, Bud Butler, Joe Toro, Polly Pobuda, Maria Moore, Selectman Laura Garay (7:11)

Chairman Russo called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES.

Mr. Burdick was seated for David Krimmel.

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

Chairman Russo welcomed Paul Amenta. Mr. Amenta owns Little Brook Engraving and is the President of the New Hartford Business Council. Mr. Amenta shared a schedule of events and informed members that he has been the President of the Business Council for 4 years. They have 110 members. He sees a partnership opportunity with the EDC wherein the Business Council can welcome new businesses to town.

He invited all present to attend the Riverfront Celebration on Thursday evening 5:30 to 7:30 pm and to stop by the Business Council table at New Hartford Day.

Mr. Amenta shared information about the Business Council's internship program and informed the group that he has 20 students interested in internships and had to ask the school to stop taking applications. Students receive school credit for the unpaid non-work internships each semester where the student spends about 1.5 hours each week. Each student must make a presentation to Mr. Amenta and the faculty to be accepted into the program. Afterward, each student makes a Powerpoint presentation on their experience. Mr. Amenta shared stories of some of the student's personal experiences in the program. Ms. Donaldson inquired about the age of the students and Mr. Amenta indicated that they are Juniors and Seniors at Region 7.

Mr. Amenta shared that the other initiative of the Business Council is their Scholarship Program. They have previously raised \$10,000 and awarded two \$5,000 scholarships, but last year raised \$5,000 and awarded two \$2,500 scholarships. He has new fundraisers in mind for this year to raise funds.

Ms. Moore commented that her business had one of the interns in the first year and highly commended the program. Ms. Donaldson inquired if any of the students have

been hired following the internships. Mr. Amenta mentioned one of the students that gave feedback following attending college that her professors were impressed at how much she knew. Mr. Butler suggested that Mr. Amenta contact Kathryn Boughton to do a feature story on the internship program.

Chairman Russo inquired what EDC can do to work more closely with the Business Council. Mr. Amenta indicated that Mrs. LaPlante and Mr. Burdick are members of the Board of the Business Council and he believes they will share information from EDC back to the Business Council. Chairman Russo mentioned prior EDC discussions about co-branding opportunities for advertisement. Mr. Amenta indicated that the topic can be discussed at the next Executive Board meeting. Mr. Amenta noted that he would like to get more exposure for local home-based businesses if they want it.

Mr. Amenta also shared the benefits he has received from the joint membership with the Canton Chamber of Commerce.

All members thanked Mr. Amenta for his time.

Chairman Russo asked members for comments. Mrs. LaPlante suggested that the Business Council and EDC could offer a joint workshop on co-branding. Ms. Donaldson expressed her approval of Mrs. LaPlante's suggestion and suggested perhaps WZBG would be a possible venue. Chairman Russo suggested that a marketing professional could prepare a powerpoint presentation for the event and it could be a paid event to cover the cost of that professional's time. Mr. Burdick suggested that a newsworthy topic could be an opportunity for cost free publicity.

Mr. Brett wondered if there is the possibility to have an intern work with the EDC to help with some of the projects. Mr. Burdick clarified that the Business Council internships are education only – non-work. Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of adding a line item for a paid intern.

3. WPCA CURRENT & FUTURE ACTION PLANS – Bud Butler

Chairman Russo welcomed Bud Butler, Chairman of the WPCA. Mr. Butler passed around a handout of WPCA initiatives and commented that he believes the WPCA is the hardest working group in town over the past few years as they have worked to address the difficult issues facing the WPCA and the town.

Mr. Butler noted that they have assimilated 3 new members: Polly Pobuda, Wes Marsh and James Surber. In doing so, they brought members to the facility for the first time to learn about the facility and the process. Additionally they have managed to stabilize rates, but New Hartford still has the second highest rates in the state with the average user paying \$1467 per year.

Mr. Butler shared the actions taken following completion of the expansion proposal prepared by Joe Toro, Roy Litchfield and himself. He also explained the sewer service area map which is still pending state approval together with the Sewer Line Extension & Repair Evaluation study prepared with the assistance of CDM Smith. The sewer service area map is a planning view of what may come into existence, but has created

much concern from residents in the area who are concerned about being forced to connect.

Additionally, the WPCA has prepared an Asset Evaluation RFP which is in the hands of an Asset Evaluation task force appointed by the Board of Selectmen to determine the feasibility of selling the water and sewer assets. They expect to have public informational meetings scheduled in the near future.

Mr. Butler added to his earlier comments about stabilizing rates without increasing them over the past three years. They have stabilized rates by marginalizing uncollected debt through filing liens and identifying individuals who had been receiving services without being billed for them. He also noted that maintenance costs have increased while usage is declining and collectibles are accelerated. WPCA successfully deferred some actions but those deferred items are coming due. He reminded members that the size of the sewer plant we have was mandated by the State Department of Public Health and cited an example of another community who was billed by the State to complete the mandates.

Mr. Butler indicated that he would like EDC membership to review the Sewer Line Extension & Repair Evaluation Report and feel confident in endorsing it. He believes that development in New Hartford will not happen without a sound infrastructure system.

Mr. Butler shared photographs of the ice pigging of one of the water lines and described the improvements to the water quality and pressure. Once analysis is complete they will know how many pounds of silt were taken out of the line.

Mr. Butler also shared the current initiatives of the WPCA including revision and adoption of the sewer rules and regulations, informational sessions if a sale is warranted, developing plans for adding abutters to the system, reevaluation of the septage hauling issue, monitoring the West Hill Pond issue, working with the Fire Company for fire hydrant flow testing and participating in WUCC (Water Utility Coordinating Committee). The average cost to replace a hydrant is about \$10,000 depending upon what is found underground. WPCA has identified funds to repair and or replace a number of non-functional hydrants.

Ms. Donaldson inquired what needs to happen in order to reduce the user's rates. Mr. Toro noted that the debt service is what cripples the WPCA. He sees the debt service payment on his bill.

Mr. Brett inquired about the outcome of the potential sale if the purchaser would assume the debt. Mr. Butler indicated that would not be the case. If someone purchased the water service, they would be regulated by PURA and Department of Public Health. On the sewer side because of the debt situation there are regulations about the assumption of debt by private entities.

Mr. Butler concluded his presentation with a handout of the dedication plaque at the wastewater treatment plant. He expressed that the best way that EDC could help WPCA would be to express agreement with and support their recommendations.

Ms. Donaldson thanked Mr. Butler and the other WPCA members present for all their hard work.

Chairman Russo inquired if there is any current discussion with Planning & Zoning regarding changing classification for any existing properties which would bring more users onto the system. Mr. Butler indicated that the WPCA has not approached Planning & Zoning and does not intend to do so unless they need to obtain 8-24 approval for the sale of the assets. 8-24 approval is required for a motion on the sale or purchase of town assets to pass at Town Meeting by a simple majority. Without 8-24 approval, a 2/3 vote is required at Town Meeting to pass.

Mr. Toro commented that he would like the EDC to reach out to the owner of the existing Dunkin location to determine what action will be taken to bring another business into that location.

Mr. Brett asked how much of the average bill is toward debt service. Mr. Toro described the portion of his bill that goes toward debt service. He would like to see an analysis of the debt to determine what the cost would be if it was rolled back to all taxpayers instead of just the users. Mr. Brett inquired if eliminating the debt would make the system viable.

Ms. Pobuda noted that eliminating the debt would make the rates more appealing to new businesses and she would like to see the EDC support the WPCA as essential infrastructure. Chairman Russo stated that the WPCA should determine how many users are needed for the system to break even. Mr. Boyan commented that there needs to be a plan to retire the debt service in order to move forward.

Ms. Moore shared that Barkhamsted got a developer to run a sewer line from the Tractor Supply plaza to connect to Winsted. The Barkhamsted EDC offered a five year tax abatement to that developer and Barkhamsted voters approved that unanimously. She urged the EDC to investigate a similar arrangement for New Hartford.

Mr. Boyan shared the manner in which a system in New Hampshire placed assessment liens which were due upon the sale of properties with a calculation for the increase in property values. Ms. Donaldson inquired if the WPCA could prepare calculations on sharing the debt service cost.

Mr. Butler indicated that he would not have the WPCA undertake any additional studies until the results of the RFP have been evaluated and a decision reached.

Members expressed appreciation to Mr. Butler for his time.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.

June 13, 2016 regular meeting

There were not sufficient members present to approve the minutes.

July 11, 2016 regular meeting

MOTION Mr. Boyan, second Ms. Donaldson, to approve the minutes of the July 11, 2016 regular meeting. *Unanimously approved.* Mr. Brett and Mrs. LaPlante abstained.

August 8, 2016 regular meeting

MOTION Mr Boyan second Mr. Brett, to approve the minutes of the August 8, 2016 regular meeting. *Unanimously approved.* Ms. Donaldson and Mr. Burdick abstained.

5. MARKETING PLAN PRESENTATION

Ms. Donaldson shared the design of the pocket folder that the Marketing Committee developed. She passed around the sample media kits from Minneapolis and Asheville for members to view and described what a media kit typically includes. The only way this works is for town staff to actually use it and it needs to be updated regularly.

Once designed, the inserts could be printed internally. Separate inserts could be customized depending upon the audience. Ms. Donaldson noted that the inserts could be emailed as well.

Mr. Brett inquired if a virtual kit could be developed where you click on it. Ms. Donaldson indicated that it could be virtual and could be available via links from the website. She noted that this needs to tie in to the Downtown Initiative and the WPCA in order for this to work. Additionally, the Town needs a paid person even part-time to work on marketing. Chairman Russo suggested that the Commission could allocate funds toward hiring an individual, perhaps it could be put out to bid. Ms. LaMere inquired if an intern could do some of the work. Ms. Donaldson indicated that specific knowledge of the town business climate would be necessary so it would be difficult to delegate to an intern who might not have that knowledge. Chairman Russo noted that the Commission would need the support of the Board of Selectmen to maintain the material after the Commission funds are used to kick off the media kit.

Ms. Pobuda shared an article from the Sunday Republican about a survey from the Northwest Hills Council of Governments. Secretary Ventre will scan and share the article with all members including the link to the survey.

Mrs. LaPlante commented that this Commission needs to propose a structure for a packet that incorporates a cultural/historical insert from the Historical Society, events from the website and Recreation programs that does not involve large amounts of spending so that it might be approved. An additional portion might be a piece from the EDC about local businesses.

Chairman Russo asked to have all members review the sample plans and be prepared to discuss at the October meeting.

6. SIGNAGE COMMITTEE UPDATE

Postponed to next meeting.

6. DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE ACTION PLAN

Postponed to next meeting.

7. UPDATES FROM TASK FORCES

Marketing – Reported Previously – Item #5

Rails to Trails – Postponed to next meeting.

Grand List Development – Postponed to next meeting.

8. CURRENT BUDGET BALANCE

The budget summary was passed around and will be discussed next month.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS TO PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

Mr. Brett suggested that Mar-Win farms be invited to next meeting.

11. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION Ms. Donaldson, second Mr. Brett, to adjourn at 9:03 pm; *unanimously approved.*

Respectfully submitted,

**Debbie Ventre
Commission Secretary**