

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2017 – 7:00PM  
NEW HARTFORD TOWN HALL**

**PRESENT:** John Burdick, Jack Casey (7:07 pm), Mary Ann Gunning, Donna LaPlante, Mark Russo; Alternates Bill Baxter, Robin Buzzi and Midge Langston; and Commission Secretary Debbie Ventre.

**ABSENT:** Damon Bean, Jim Brett, Lori LaMere, Shelley Lloyd,

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:** Felicia Jones – Northwest Connect, Selectman Elect -Eric Claman, Joe Toro, Selectwoman Laura Garay, Greg Wasoka, Kathryn Boughton – Republican American (7:10 pm)

Chairman Russo called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES.**

Mr. Baxter was seated for Mr. Brett. Ms. Langston was seated for Ms. LaMere. Ms. Buzzi was seated for Ms. Lloyd.

**2. WELCOME NEW MEMBER AND ALTERNATE MEMBER**

Chairman Russo welcomed Robin Buzzi who has been appointed an Alternate Member. He asked her to share a brief summary of her experience. Robin shared that she grew up in Torrington and worked a lot of projects including the restoration of the Warner Theater. Members will meet Mr. Bean next month as he was unable to attend due to illness.

**3. VISIT FROM NORTHWEST CONNECT – Felicia Jones**

Chairman Russo introduced Felicia Jones of Northwest Connect. Ms. Jones shared that she lives in Falls Village and a brief summary of her background. She is a consultant for the Northwest Hills Council of Governments. Her role is to work with the towns in the Council to see if a fiber optic infrastructure would empower economic development.

She expressed that laws have changed so that utility companies are no longer required to offer services to rural communities, so some areas barely have dial up internet service and poor cellular service. If fiber optic connections were available here, what would that mean for our community? Would the younger generation stay here if connectivity were available? Would there be more opportunities for businesses to develop?

They are proposing a private/public partnership where 2/3 of the project would be funded by the towns themselves. They are reaching out to the providers as well. The

partnership would also mean that the town would share in the re-occurring revenue. Mr. Burdick commented that this would be a public utility like the water company. Ms. Jones agreed and indicated they are looking at Torrington as a hub and there would be some job creations for construction of the network and maintenance of the network. Once established it is expected that the fiber optic would also generate additional jobs.

Ms. Gunning inquired about the cost sharing and it is expected to be proportional based upon population or users. Expected cost is about \$20 per month per property owner through property tax increase (the actual cost will be prorated by property value). Ms. Jones elaborated that once word of this project gets out it is expected that the current service providers will reduce their rates to be competitive.

Mr. Casey inquired if this project would require brand new infrastructure or if they could utilize existing infrastructure. Ms. Jones stated that the infrastructure will be all new. They will need 40% utilization among the town's consumers for it to be viable.

Ms. Jones also shared the additional functionality that would be available to residents with the increased bandwidth of the fiber optic connections such as assistive technology for aging populations and enabling students to research at home.

Mr. Baxter commented that he believes we cannot afford not to do this project. He questioned whether all towns need to be on board for the project to happen. Ms. Jones indicated that as long as the larger municipalities participate it could move forward even if a few small towns do not join in.

Chairman Russo questioned where the closest hub is and does the municipality have to be involved. Ms. Jones replied that the current model is to work through the municipalities because the fees are collected through property taxes and the towns would collect their rebate/profit sharing. The plan would be for Torrington to be a hub and fiber would be brought in from Hartford.

Ms. Garay questioned whether there are any studies or evidence to support the theory that young people will stay or return to a community if fiber optic is available. Ms. Jones indicated that there are some studies, but fiber optic is one of several factors that help to attract or retain young people.

Mr. Baxter stressed that the numbers will need to be firmed up and clearer before this is presented to the taxpayers. Ms. Gunning asked if any other companies are doing this type of project in this area. Ms. Jones stated not in Connecticut. She described a program in Massachusetts which stimulated competition. If this project takes place it will be the first rural regional project and could create opportunities for other regionalization.

Mr. Toro inquired about presenting to a Town Meeting and Ms. Jones indicated that she is working on a presentation that would be suitable for a Town Meeting. The expected timeline for completion of the project is late 2021.

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.**

September 11, 2017 regular meeting

**MOTION** Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Gunning, to approve the minutes of the September 11, 2017 regular meeting. *Unanimously approved.* Ms. Buzzi and Mr. Casey abstained.

**5. INVITATION TO Northwest Connecticut Economic Development Corporation for input on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update – November 20, 2017**

Chairman Russo asked Mr. Burdick to share this information. Mr. Burdick indicated that he cannot attend but hopes that other members of this Commission might be able to attend. Mr. Baxter shared that he is on the Board of Directors of the Corporation and while it has been stalled for a while, a recent grant has this project moving forward. He indicated that he has been giving some thought to the need for collaboration and communication between the Boards and Commissions as well as broader regional involvement. This area is lagging behind and the communication services mentioned is just one area. Planning & Zoning regulations should consider economic development goals.

Ms. Gunning inquired if this Commission has long range goals and long term plans. Chairman Russo indicated that the recent budget restrictions make long term planning difficult when the majority of the allocated budget is needed for fixed expenses. Mrs. LaPlante mentioned that the Town has a Plan of Conservation and Development. She was recently reviewing the Implementation Plan. Mr. Baxter inquired if anyone from EDC was on the Implementation Committee. He believes that this Commission needs to be more action oriented. Mr. Casey suggested that the Commission do what we can. Ms. Gunning commented that the Commission has done a lot but not toward specific goals. Chairman Russo will bring the budget presentation back to the next meeting for discussion of goals.

Mr. Baxter will be attending the meeting on Monday, and offers that anyone who wishes to ride with him could do so.

Chairman Russo and Mr. Burdick have been speaking with Mike Goman of Goman + York Property Advisors and he would like to meet with EDC and other Commissions to speak about economic development. Mr. Burdick suggests inviting Planning & Zoning, Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and even Inland Wetlands and Conservation. If he is available for the January meeting we will set up and invite the other Commissions. If not, we will set up a special meeting. Ms. Gunning inquired about inviting owners from the Industrial Park. Mr. Casey suggested inviting Business Council membership and it was suggested that the meeting be kept to key people.

## **6. 2018 MEETING SCHEDULE**

Secretary Ventre passed out copies of the proposed 2018 Meeting Schedule. She noted the October and November dates had to be adjusted due to holidays.

**MOTION** Mr. Baxter, second Mr. Casey, to approve the 2018 Meeting Schedule. *Unanimously approved.*

## **7. CURRENT BUDGET BALANCE – 6 MONTH ACTION PLAN**

Secretary Ventre passed out copies of the Budget Summary Report. A discussion followed about the budgeting process and timeframe. Mr. Burdick suggested that Chairman Russo approach the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance with his proposal from the spring now that State uncertainties may have been resolved.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS TO PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION**

Ms. Gunning requested feedback about whether the town will have a presence on CTVisit.com. She would like to see the town promote Small Business Saturday. Chairman Russo will prepare a written request to set up a town page on CTVisit.com

**MOTION** Mr. Burdick, second Mr. Casey, to have Chairman Russo write a letter requesting that the CTVisit page be populated for the town preferably by a town employee within a week. *Unanimously approved.*

Mr. Burdick shared that Chris Sayer has leased additional space and has a zoning application pending. The 4700' space behind them needs to be changed to be zoned the same as the front space so they can expand the tap room and production facilities. The hearing will be on December 13<sup>th</sup> and members are encouraged to attend and support him.

**MOTION** Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Gunning, to have Chairman Russo write a letter supporting his zoning application. *Unanimously approved.*

Mr. Burdick noted that the Business Council is again sponsoring flashlights for Light New Hartford. He would like to see EDC on the sponsorship again even if just a token amount.

**MOTION** Mr. Casey, second Ms. Buzzi, to allocate \$100 toward sponsorship of the flashlights. *Unanimously approved.*

Ms. Garay mentioned that she has been asking at the Board of Selectmen meetings for a task force with representation from each of the Boards and Commissions to deal with the water and sewer issues.

Mr. Casey asked that a thank you letter be sent to Mr. Krimmel for his service to this Commission.

**MOTION** Mr. Casey, second Mr. Burdick, to send a thank you letter to Mr. Krimmel written by Mr. Casey and Mr. Baxter. *Unanimously approved.*

Chairman Russo inquired about progress on the Grape Festival. Mrs. LaPlante indicated that she has been making pies and sharing the concept. She spoke with Donna Howard about it but she would need to make her grape pies before the apples come in. She also plans to speak with Anita Barden and the Sweet Harvest food truck. Mrs. LaPlante inquired about a location for the festival. Chairman Russo suggested Ski Sundown and Mr. Burdick suggested the Hurley property. Chairman Russo suggested checking the fair schedule to be sure to avoid conflict with local fairs.

Ms. Gunning mentioned that the guidelines sent out suggest cluster groups for businesses that are similar. She wonders if we could consider the artists, artisans and people who work from home such a group and find a possible venue where they could share their work and possibly teach their craft. Could this be considered for the next meeting?

#### **8. ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION** Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Langston, to adjourn at 8:46 pm;  
*Unanimously approved.:*

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Debbie Ventre  
Commission Secretary**