

**TOWN OF NEW HARTFORD
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
Monday, October 4th, 2021 - 7:00 PM**

PRESENT: Acting Chairman Shelley Lloyd, Polly Pobuda, John Burdick, Meg Toro, Alternates Bill Baxter and Debbie Ventre

ABSENT: Brian Watson, John Burdick, Jack Casey, Commission Secretary Madeleine Toro

Acting Chairman Shelley Lloyd called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

1. CALL TO ORDER.

Debbie Ventre was seated for Mr. Watson, and Bill Baxter was seated for Mr. Burdick.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment on agenda items.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

September 13, 2021 regular meeting

MOTION Ms. Toro, second Ms. Pobuda, to approve the minutes of the September 13 regular meeting as written. Ms. Ventre and Ms. Lloyd abstained because they were not present at the September 13 meeting, otherwise the motion was approved.

4. New Hartford Tourism/Map Update - Brian/John

Ms. Lloyd chose to skip any discussion on this item because Mr. Watson and Mr. Burdick were not present at the meeting.

5. Discover Litchfield Hills Website – Brian

Ms. Lloyd inquired about the cost of the website, to which Ms. Ventre said she didn't know exactly, but she believes it is a couple thousand dollars. She also commented that she did not like how the Discover Litchfield Hills websites looked exactly like the main town websites and there was nothing that made them stand out. Mrs. Lloyd commented that when the presentation was done by Evan Dobos to our commission, there were not very many other towns participating.

6. Holiday Events/Light New Hartford - Polly

Ms. Lloyd informed everyone that Anita Barden of Barden Farms has approached all the business owners in town and asked them to participate in a trick-or-treating event for Halloween. Ms. Barden has also asked via Facebook if there are any other businesses in town that would like to set up a table downtown at the event to hand out candy. Ms. Toro also suggested a scarecrow contest where each business and/or residents can make a scarecrow. Ms. Pobuda recommended the Business Council also get involved in the Halloween events, as well as events in the future. She believes we need to improve our communication with the council and try to work with them

more. Ms. Lloyd suggested that a liaison between the EDC and the Business Council be appointed so there is no confusion about who to contact.

Regarding Small Business Saturday, Ms. Lloyd believes that we should extend the event to be the whole weekend, to which Ms. Pobuda agreed and stated that the event should be town-wide and not just be limited to downtown businesses. Ms. Ventre mentioned that she still has “Shop New Hartford” and “Dine New Hartford” signs in her office that we could distribute to businesses again, since they were a success last time. Ms. Lloyd agreed that we should do that again closer to Small Business Saturday in the beginning of November.

Ms. Pobuda recommended we tie Light New Hartford into Small Business Saturday to make it a weekend-long event. Ms. Lloyd mentioned that Anita Barden suggested all the businesses put lights in their windows for the holiday season. Ms. Pobuda informed everyone that Light New Hartford was called “Festival of Lights” years ago, and perhaps we could change the name and include more light displays at local businesses. Ms. Lloyd believes we shouldn’t change the name, but likes the idea of putting lights in the windows of the businesses downtown. Ms. Pobuda had another idea involving putting multiple trees with lights around town instead of just the one downtown. She suggested each business could put up a decorated tree. Ms. Lloyd suggested someone get in touch with Carissa Monroe, who is in charge of Light New Hartford, and Ms. Ventre volunteered to message her on Facebook to inquire about the details of the event.

Ms. Ventre believes that the biggest issue with many of the town events is that they are not being advertised far enough in advance, which leads to low turnouts. Ms. Pobuda mentioned that there are also too many words on them, which makes them hard to read when passing by. Ms. Lloyd suggested that the “Celebrate New Hartford” banners should be put up on buildings around town whenever there is an event in town.

7. Update from Trails Committee - Bill

Mr. Baxter updated the commission that he wrote a letter to First Selectman Dan Jerram about an article written about bike trails connecting Buffalo, New York to New York City. Mr. Baxter has been assured that a meeting for the Trails Committee is being put together soon. He thinks that the committee is perfectly capable of the responsibility of managing the process of the trails project.

8. Downtown Improvement Ideas

Mr. Baxter also wanted to inform everyone that the town has received money from the American Rescue Plan. He suggests that we write a request for the money and find a consultant to help. He believes as long as we have the money, downtown improvements will be fairly simple. He emphasized that we need somebody to help pull all our ideas and small details that have been discussed at meetings into one cohesive plan.

Ms. Lloyd informed the commission of an email received from Kim Parsons-Whitaker, who is the current director of Connecticut Main Street Center, a company that has many resources that can help revitalize downtown. Ms. Lloyd thinks we aren’t using their resources to their full potential, and we should renew our membership to Main Street Center. Mr. Baxter mentioned that all the smaller things we can do to improve the town, such as the Rails to Trails project and downtown

revitalization, all connect to each other. Ms. Toro agreed, saying that everyone should be concerned about improving downtown whether they live there or not.

Ms. Lloyd thinks we need to do everything we can to improve the look of the lot where the New Hartford House was, such as putting planters on the property. She is willing to reach out to Torrington mayor Elinor Carbone to find out where the town got their large planters, as well as reach out to local farmers to see if they can put together the planters. Ms. Pobuda believes that while renewing our membership to Main Street Center is a good idea, there is an issue with finding people who can attend all the important meetings and events.

Ms. Lloyd used Torrington as an example. She mentioned that Mayor Carbone had lots of people and committees that helped her to greatly improve Torrington's downtown. She thinks we need to look forward more, take action, and look for someone who can help us formulate a complete plan to improve downtown. The former downtown improvement plan was never really completed and did not include plans of how to promote businesses and draw people downtown, according to Ms. Lloyd. Mr. Baxter said that the plan included a proposal to put sidewalks from Pine Meadow to downtown so residents could walk downtown more easily, but it was never done. Ms. Pobuda still believes that this is an issue in town that prevents people from visiting downtown. Ms. Lloyd suggested that we put a bike lane next to the road as well to improve safety for bikers.

According to Ms. Lloyd, it is very important that we find a professional who has experience with development who can help build and execute a plan for downtown renewal. Ms. Pobuda agreed, but also said that we shouldn't be concerned only with development, but also finding somebody who can coordinate everything. Mr. Baxter reflected on his time working in Torrington, and informed the commission that there were two town planners who ran town meetings and were able to get zoning laws changed in order to facilitate downtown improvements, all while staying objective and politically neutral. Ms. Toro inquired about how we would get town officials on board with downtown improvement ideas, to which Mr. Baxter responded by saying that we should inform them that we have the money and are unable to get much done without help.

Upon researching the American Rescue Plan, Ms. Lloyd discovered that the plan allows states to invest in infrastructure and support small businesses, so the funds are possibly able to be used for downtown development. According to the website that Ms. Lloyd read, the funds must be used by 2024. Mr. Baxter emphasized that we must take advantage of this opportunity to create and execute a constructive improvement plan.

9. BUDGET PLANNING

Ms. Ventre mentioned that we have a gift card for \$25 off a \$100 purchase from Peggy's Promos, a local marketing business that previously made small keychain flashlights for us for Light New Hartford. Ms. Lloyd suggested that we buy more flashlights from Peggy to distribute at Light New Hartford this year since there are very few left.

MOTION Ms. Toro, second Ms. Pobuda, to purchase 500 flashlights from Peggy's Promos. *Unanimously approved.*

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

MOTION Ms. Pobuda, second Ms. Ventre, to adjourn the meeting at 7:59 PM.
Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

**Madeleine Toro
Commission Secretary
Economic Development Commission**