

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2019 – 7:00PM
NEW HARTFORD TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: John Burdick, Mary Ann Gunning, Donna LaPlante (7:02 pm), Shelley Lloyd, Polly Pobuda, Meg Toro, Brian Watson; Alternate Bill Baxter; Commission Secretary: Debbie Ventre

ABSENT: Jack Casey, Pat Casey,

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Kim Parsons-Whitaker, Connecticut Main Street, First Selectman Dan Jerram (7:14 pm)

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

1. CALL TO ORDER AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES.

Mr. Baxter was seated for Mr. J. Casey.

2. GUEST SPEAKER – Kim Parsons-Whitaker of Connecticut Main Street

Ms. Toro welcomed Ms. Parsons-Whitaker. Ms. Parsons-Whitaker brought a presentation which was projected on the screen in the conference room. She shared the goals of the Connecticut Main Street organization.

The Main Street program is all about downtown cities and town centers. Ms. Parsons-Whitaker passed out a directory of professional affiliates and resources who are also members of Connecticut Main Street. She will be sending a pdf of her slides to Secretary Ventre to be included with the minutes of this meeting.

The components of a Vibrant Main Street consist of Connectivity, Place, Economic Vitality, Sustainability, Inclusiveness and Stewardship which all work together for a sustainable success. Unless you are a large tourist destination, local retail and restaurants will not survive without customers within walking distance. The downtown area needs to be a walkable area.

Ms. Parsons-Whitaker reviewed our 2015 POCD and noted that it does address place with the gateways and walkability with the plans for a multiuse trail. She expressed that our POCD is geared toward the components of a Vibrant Main Street.

Experience is a vital ingredient. Consumers tend to spend more with a retailer who offers a meaningful in store experience. This is how small retailers can compete with online or big-box retailers. The unique customer experience and local relationships can make the difference.

Pop-up stores and short-term retailers are becoming increasingly popular in downtown areas. EDC can possibly help landlords find compatible tenants for their space.

Omnichannel is a merging of online and offline channels – where storefronts have a single sample of items in one size and customers order the size they need right from the store for delivery to their home.

Ms. Parsons-Whitaker suggested that local retail and restaurants can address some of these trends by having well-trained staff and a variety of payment options for their customers.

“In order to compete with the internet, downtowns need to be beautiful” Robert Gibbs. Quality signage (such as BLT), clean streets, trash receptacles, warm and quality lighting can all combine to make this possible.

Planning should focus on connecting downtown to multi-use developments for residents to be able to walk to downtown.

45% of retail purchases occur between September and December. 75% if all retail sales occur after 5 pm and on weekends. Higher rents are possible in close proximity to grocery stores and brew-pubs.

Mr. Baxter noted that when he was First Selectman, Connecticut Main Street suggested cutting the trees at the bridge to expose a better view of Callahan Park.

Ms. Lloyd inquired about whether the lack of 55+ housing is an issue. Ms. Parsons-Whitaker noted that she does not see that as an issue, as long as there is plenty of diverse housing available.

Ms. Toro thanked Ms. Parsons Whitaker for her time.

Ms. Toro noted that Mr. Baxter requested that the agenda be amended to move his presentation up following the Minutes.

MOTION Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Lloyd, to move item 7 up following item 3.
Unanimously approved.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.

September 09, 2019 Regular Meeting

MOTION Mr. Burdick, second Ms.Gunning, to approve the minutes of the September 09, 2019 regular meeting. Mr. Baxter abstained.
Unanimously approved.

September 10, 2019 Special Meeting

MOTION Ms. Lloyd, second Mr. Watson, to approve the minutes of the September 10, 2019 special meeting. Mr. Baxter abstained.
Unanimously approved.

7. UPDATE FROM TRAILS COMMITTEE

Mr. Baxter noted that the Committee just voted to accept a bid from Anchor for the feasibility study and the trail will be moving forward. The Board of Selectmen will be meeting tomorrow to take the next steps.

Mr. Baxter noted that Jim Brett, former EDC member, deserves a great deal of credit for the progress made so far as he has invested years of work on this project.

4. FARM DAY WRAP UP

Mrs. LaPlante noted that Secretary Ventre had emailed out her report with the statistics on the outcomes of the event. Mrs. LaPlante shared comments from the farms.

Bruce Gresczyk *"A huge Thank You to everyone involved. I hope it was a great day for everyone."*

Peter Hayward *"I would have to echo your opinion that Open Farm Day was a great success. Not only did the many visitors enjoy it but the farmer and his family were equally entertained. On one of four tractor rides there was a great downpour. The heavy rain, however, did not dampen the spirits of the participants. It was also a treat for me to get to spend some time with John Burdick and Pat Casey. John did not know that the former name of Hayward Road was Burdick Hill Road nor did he know that members of the Amos Burdick family owned our farm in the early years of the 19th century. All in all Open Farm Day was a great concept and we look forward to participating next year on which hopefully will be a little bit dryer of a day."*

Caren Ross *"Kudos to you Donna. Well Done!"*

The Slate Family *"All of us here at Lottaroc Farm would like to express our appreciation for your organizing of this year's Open Farm Day. We recognize the amount of work putting together an event like this would require and from what we heard, everyone that toured the various farms, enjoyed the day."*

If we repeat this again next year, we should solicit the farms for feedback early on. Ms. Toro inquired if there is an agricultural organization in town. Mrs. LaPlante clarified that the Open Space Preservation Commission is also the Agricultural Commission. She noted that we initially had included them on the promotional materials but listing them as sponsors implied a monetary contribution to the event so they were removed.

Mrs. LaPlante noted that most of our expenses were printing and we did recover nearly all the signs. Ms. Gunning commented that she would like to commend Mrs. LaPlante and Ms. Ventre in putting this event together. Ms. Lloyd suggested that if we are going to continue with Celebrate New Hartford as a weekend, we should speak with the Historical Society about holding their wine tasting on Friday evening of the same weekend.

Mrs. LaPlante noted that visitors did not read their passport or the online schedule and didn't realize that some of the farms closed early. Mary Beth Greenwood stayed longer at McCarthy Farm because people kept coming. Lottaroc noted that people stopped by in the afternoon and wanted to turn in their passports. Ms. Pobuda noted that some farms might have been apprehensive about committing to a full day this year. There was discussion regarding whether having a central location or two to distribute the passports and collect the completed door prize entries might be practical.

Ms. Gunning inquired about the Board of Selectman's response to the results. Mrs. LaPlante noted that the Selectmen were very supportive of Ms. Ventre preparing the printed materials on town time. Her preparation of the printed materials saved on printing costs because she provided the printer with pdfs.

5. BUSINESS PROMOTION EVENT RECAP

Ms. Ventre shared that we had approximately 20 people attend the event at Brewery Legitimus on Tuesday, September 10. 7 EDC members were in attendance and the rest were local businesses. She noted that 7 additional business listings have been added to the website representing individuals who attended the event. Additionally, Ms. Ventre noted that she had added the brewery and the wineries prior to the Open Farm Day event and recently added the Farm River Café. She noted that she had also unpublished the listing for Portobello's since they have now closed.

6. BUSINESS SURVEY UPDATE

Ms. Toro noted that 154 surveys were sent out. 100 were opened. 17 people completed the survey. Typical time to completion was 13 minutes and 14 seconds. Ms. Toro shared the survey results summary reports and highlighted some of the comments.

Ms. Lloyd asked if another email could be sent to those who opened but didn't respond to give them one more chance to complete the survey.

Mrs. LaPlante commented that when looking at the responses it is important to consider what industry the responses came from.

Ms. Lloyd commented that this is our first survey and we subscribed for a year, so we might want to create a brief survey to send to residents.

Mr. Watson suggested that survey be promoted through social media. Mr. Burdick suggested that we set up a link from the Town website.

Ms. Gunning noted that based on the results there is a large percentage of solo entrepreneurs and suggested that perhaps the EDC could arrange for a program to help solo entrepreneurs.

Ms. Lloyd suggested that we ask the Business Council to send a message to their members to ask them to respond to the survey or notify EDC if they did not receive it. Mr. Burdick will ask Peggy Budny to send the request to Business Council members.

8. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

Ms. Toro noted that she has no further items.

9. CURRENT BUDGET / DISCUSSION

Ms. Ventre had emailed an updated budget report reflecting expenses for the current fiscal year and the updated spreadsheet with Open Farm Day expenditures.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS TO PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

Mr. Burdick mentioned the plans for Trick or Treating downtown on Halloween that has been set up by Barden Farm. Ms. Pobuda noted that they will light the path to the firehouse with luminaries. Ms. Ventre shared that she had checked on using EDC budget funds to purchase candy and learned that the Recreation Department will be having a table at Town Hall to distribute candy. Mr. Burdick suggested that the remaining flashlights be available at that table. All members present agreed.

Mr. Burdick noted that he had been contacted by artists who received Personal Property Declarations and felt that the timing and communication was not appropriate. Ms. LaPlante noted that she had received comments from some members of the New Hartford Art League who participated in the latest show. She added that statute permits the town to set a value threshold below which it is not economically practical for the town to collect. The Board of Selectmen will be addressing this item at their special meeting on Tuesday.

Mr. Burdick noted that Mr. Lans Perry went to the last Planning & Zoning meeting and some members of the Commission were disrespectful toward him. Members who had attended that meeting agreed.

Ms. Gunning noted that she has a box a t-shirts from the triathlon and offered that anyone who would like some should take them.

Mr. Burdick commented that he would like to recognize Ms. Gunning for her tremendous contributions to the EDC and the Town of New Hartford. Ms. Gunning noted that she will submit her resignation tomorrow as she will be moving out of town very soon.

Ms. Toro also expressed appreciation for Ms. Gunning's activity as a member of the Commission, especially her efforts on behalf of the Litchfield Hills Triathlon.

11. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Lloyd, to adjourn at 8:31 pm; *Unanimously approved.*

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Ventre, Commission Secretary