

**TOWN OF NEW HARTFORD
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Monday, August 16, 2021 - 7:00 PM**

PRESENT: Brian Watson, Shelley Lloyd, Polly Pobuda, John Burdick, Meg Toro, Jack Casey, Bill Baxter (via phone) Commission Secretary Madeleine Toro

ABSENT: Alternate Debbie Ventre

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: First Selectman Dan Jerram (arrived at 7:11 PM)

Chairman Brian Watson called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

1. CALL TO ORDER & SEATING OF ALTERNATES

No alternates were seated.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment on any agenda items.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

July 12, 2021 regular meeting

MOTION Ms. Lloyd, second Mr. Burdick, to amend the minutes of the July 12 regular meeting. Ms. Lloyd actually disagreed with the food truck ordinance that states that a food truck must be 250 feet from a brick and mortar restaurant because she does not think food trucks restrict the business of brick-and-mortar restaurants.

Unanimously approved.

4. OPEN FARM DAY – Brian

Mr. Watson informed the commission that he has received only one email from a business, Hayward Farm, that wishes to participate in Open Farm Day. They offered to give hayrides to customers every hour. Ms. Lloyd suggested that Mr. Watson contact the organizers of Celebrate New Hartford and inquire about Hayward being at that event. Ms. Lloyd also stated that she was in contact with a woman who teaches music lessons at the Senior Center and told her that she will be doing a music event at the pavilion. Ms. Pobuda and Ms. Lloyd suggested we combine Open Farm Day and New Hartford Day as one event.

5. SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY - Polly

Ms. Pobuda suggested that the restaurants also participate in Small Business Saturday since they are also small businesses. This would combine Small Business

Saturday and Restaurant Week into one event. Mr. Casey agreed with this and stated that there are many seasonal small businesses that won't be open in November when the Small Business Saturday event takes place. Ms. Lloyd suggested we replenish the shop and dine New Hartford signs throughout town. Ms. Toro then suggested that we call the event "All Business Saturday" to be more inclusive of all businesses in town. Mr. Watson offered to make flyers and promotions for the event and get them on Facebook as well as the town website. Ms. Pobuda inquired about possibly dedicating a full weekend or week to the businesses in town instead of just one day. She also suggested the EDC reach out to businesses in town and ask them if they would be willing to hand out 10% coupons to customers during the small business event.

6. NEW HARTFORD TOURISM – Brian/John

Mr. Burick informed everyone that he got in touch with the woman who is in charge of the New Hartford maps and she sent him some ideas for a new map. She also informed him that the map can be digitized. Mr. Burdick stated that it would cost the businesses anywhere from \$225 to \$800 for advertising on the map, depending on the size of the advertisement. Mr. Burdick said it would be easy to add businesses to the map, and the woman he spoke to will have a map ready for New Hartford, Barkhamsted, and Winsted in February or March. She would be able to digitally make a map for just New Hartford, according to Mr. Burdick.

Ms. Lloyd asked about the costs of the New Hartford only map to the businesses. Mr. Burdick informed her that the ads are already paid for and the map would just be updated quarterly with any new businesses. However, the new businesses would only be added to the digital copy of the map and would have to pay a \$50 setup charge. Mr. Watson said that if the EDC went with the other map option that he was looking into, it would cost businesses a one-time fee and have QR codes linking to the businesses websites. It could be updated as needed and updated versions could be printed. Mr. Watson does not have a price estimate on this option yet. Mr. Burdick stated that he thinks up to \$800 is a very high price for small businesses to pay just for a small advertisement on a map, and the commission unanimously agreed.

7. RESTAURANT WEEK - Polly

Ms. Pobuda suggests that Restaurant Week and Small Business Saturday be combined into one event to promote all types of businesses in town.

8. UPDATE FROM TRAILS COMMITTEE - Bill

First Selectman Dan Jerram stated that there hasn't been much progress on the Trails Committee, and a virtual meeting will likely have to be planned since many of the members have been on vacation. Mr. Baxter also stated that there were no updates that he was aware of.

9. IDEAS TO SUPPORT FIRE AID FROM NH HOUSE - Brian

Mr. Watson came forward with an idea for a slogan for aid efforts from the New Hartford House fire: "Build it Back Better New Hartford." Mr. Burdick informed the commission that Connecticut Main Street Center reached out to him quickly after the fire to inform him that state officials would be getting involved. First Selectman Dan Jerram stated that the main focus right now is the removal of the debris and finishing the demolition of the building. Mr. Jerram informed everyone that he has been collaborating with the building owner, as well as Congressman Larson and Senator Witkos to clean up the site and help those who were affected by the fire. The restaurant that was set to open in the New Hartford House before the fire and the barber that recently had opened are two businesses that have expressed commitment to returning to New Hartford once the building is rebuilt.

Ms. Lloyd mentioned putting large planters, similar to the ones in downtown Torrington, in the spot where the building was once the debris is cleaned up in order to make the empty space look better. Ms. Toro pointed out that it is private property and we would need the building owner's permission to put anything on the property. She suggested instead gathering donations if the building owner wants to accept help from the EDC. Mr. Burdick suggested the commission reach out to the building owner to ask specifically what the EDC can do to help.

Mr. Baxter added to the conversation via a phone call during the meeting, stating that the town is currently in an "immediate remediation program" and is addressing only the urgent problems. He then stated that the downtown has a problem with vacant buildings, and perhaps the burning of the New Hartford House can be a catalyst for a full downtown remediation. Mr. Baxter also recalled a conversation he had with Lou Pepe, former New Hartford Planning and Zoning Chairman, who thinks an urban planner or consultant is needed in town to look at the downtown area and devise a plan for a larger downtown revitalization. He emphasized that we need to think bigger and create a long-term plan that goes far beyond just rebuilding the New Hartford House. The EDC should start this process by finding grant writers and get help from state officials to get the proper funding and manage the current funds that the town has. Mr. Casey stated that he believes it will be difficult to get enough funding for a building of the same size as the New Hartford House, and it would be helpful to get a developer to evaluate the property, as well as selling other buildings in town and taking out loans to fund the rebuilding.

Ms. Lloyd then compared the New Hartford House Fire with the railroad house fire of 2001 in Canaan, which was the cornerstone of the town. She stated that the rebuilding of the railroad house greatly improved the downtown area, and perhaps rebuilding the New Hartford House could do the same.

Mr. Watson stated that he believes the most important thing the EDC can do right now is reach out to the building owner and offer our help. Everything else will be handled by town selectmen and people can personally volunteer their time outside of the EDC if they wish. Ms. Toro then suggested the town form a task force to aid in the efforts to rebuild. Mr. Baxter then reiterated his point that we really need to look at the big picture, avoid getting caught up with smaller details and make our main focus the overall revitalization of New Hartford's downtown. Mr. Casey agreed with this, but said the town needs a very large amount of money, possibly an amount up to ten times the amount of the sale price, to rebuild the building and revitalize downtown.

Mr. Jerram informed the commission that he and other town officials are currently more focused on immediate issues, such as corresponding with the building owner about insurance money and cleaning up the corner where the building was, which he stated will be cleared and seeded within 10 days. He also stressed the importance of helping displaced tenants of the New Hartford House, many of whom lost nearly everything they owned in the fire. With this as the town's main focus, Mr. Jerram estimated it will take approximately 12-18 months to begin the process of rebuilding. He also mentioned that he will be meeting with business owners that were affected by the fire, such as Alana of New Hartford Barber Shop, to assist them with getting into new buildings and keeping their customer base as they transition into spaces.

Ms. Toro stated that while she understands the town's concern for the New Hartford House tenants, she believes the EDC should be responsible for thinking of ideas to help the affected businesses and downtown as a whole, since the organizations such as the Red Cross are there to help displaced residents and the landlord has most of the responsibility of helping tenants find other living arrangements. Mr. Jerram informed her that the landlord is only responsible for \$4000 per tenant and the town is actually responsible for helping tenants.

10. BUDGET PLANNING

Mr. Burdick brought up the banners on telephone poles throughout town and suggests the EDC might get more to put up if there is room for it in the budget in the future. Mr. Watson suggested members take note of which banners in town need replacing and discuss this at the next meeting.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

MOTION Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Toro, to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 PM.
Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

**Madeleine Toro, Secretary
Economic Development Commission**