

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JULY 13, 2020 – 7:00PM
VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM**

PRESENT: John Burdick (7:10 pm), Donna LaPlante, Shelley Lloyd, Polly Pobuda, Meg Toro, Brian Watson (7:03 pm); Alternate Debbie Ventre; First Selectman Dan Jerram

ABSENT: Jack Casey; Alternate Bill Baxter.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Denton Butler, David Rosengren, Joe Toro, Kathryn Boughton (7:15 pm)

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

1. CALL TO ORDER AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES.

Ms. Ventre was seated for Jack Casey.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Denton Butler shared that the Asset Evaluation Subcommittee would like to schedule their presentation at the August meeting of the EDC. He also suggested that EDC should decide if part of their mission would be support for the WPCA.

Chairman Toro commented that since the Wastewater Treatment Plant is integral to economic development, she believes support for the WPCA is part of the mission of the EDC.

Ms. Lloyd requested that the presentation be sent to the EDC members prior to the August meeting. Mr. Butler will send the presentation to Debbie to be forwarded to the members. Ms. Lloyd also inquired if there will be a third session scheduled as she had planned to attend the public session which was cancelled due to COVID. Mr. Butler indicated that the Subcommittee is meeting via zoom tomorrow evening and she could join that meeting for the latest information.

Ms. LaPlante inquired if the presentation has been changed due to COVID. Mr. Jerram added that they hope to develop a hybrid virtual meeting format where commission members who are comfortable may meet in person but offer virtual access for those who are not comfortable.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.

June 8, 2020 Regular Meeting

MOTION Mr. Burdick, second Ms. Lloyd, to approve the minutes of the June 8, 2020 regular meeting.

Ms. Toro noted that she abstained from approving the March 9th minutes because she wasn't in attendance

Unanimously approved as amended. Mr. Watson abstained.

4. UPDATE FROM TRAILS COMMITTEE

In Mr. Baxter's absence, no one was available to provide an update.

5. OPEN FARM DAY – PRELIMINARY PLANNING

Mrs. LaPlante shared that she had emailed all the farms who had previously agreed to participate and those farms who would be new this year. Only Connecticut Valley Winery definitely agreed to participate. A couple of other farms were uncertain depending upon how the COVID situation evolves. She believes that in order to have the Open Farm Day we need at least 6 farms to participate. If only the larger farms and the wineries are interested, perhaps we can offer some advertising for them on social media and the town website. The latest attachment that was sent out today is a mailer that Donna's son received in New Hampshire and she shared it in order for members to consider if we want to prepare something like that.

Ms. Lloyd expressed that she doesn't feel we should hold Open Farm Day as we did last year because the climate is too uncertain and planning needs to happen now. Everything that she was scheduled to attend between now and December has been cancelled. She did like the flyer from New Hampshire and believes it could be a nice way to promote our farms and show what is available, where and when. Ms. LaPlante noted that she would have retained that flyer due to the product availability information.

Ms. Toro asked if we would be replacing Open Farm Day with the flyer. Ms. LaPlante noted that it would be an alternative means of promoting the farms. Ms. LaPlante noted that her office is exceedingly busy with absentee ballots and could not devote time to developing it before the primary. Ms. Toro commented that she would like to see social media campaigns instead of a mail campaign to reach a broader audience. Mr. Watson commented that the funds that would be spent on the paper mailing could be allocated to boost posts on Facebook to Litchfield County. Ms. Lloyd inquired if the digital document could also be shared to ctvisit, Litchfield hills or foodhub. Ms. Lloyd commented that as much as she'd like to see this done this year, Donna and Debbie will not have time with all the extra work issuing absentee ballots for the primary and the election. A discussion ensued suggesting various social media groups/pages where info could be shared.

Ms. Ventre commented that the mailer would reach people who are not on social media and that the mailer could be targeted to additional communities outside of New Hartford based on the statistics from last year. Ms. Toro expressed concern that the cost of mailing to a larger community to target the few people who are not on social media would not be cost effective.

Ms. LaPlante asked Mr. Jerram about New Hartford Day. He indicated it has not been decided, but expressed concern about the insurance liability of having large groups of visitors in areas without the ability to have outdoor space.

MOTION Ms. Pobuda, second Mr..Burdick, to cancel Open Farm Day for 2020.
Unanimously approved.

Ms. Pobuda suggested that next year we start to work on Open Farm Day earlier next year and maybe do a postcard in the Spring and then have Farm Day in the fall.

6. MISSION OF THE EDC

Ms. Toro asked for feedback on the Mission Statement. Ms. Pobuda inquired if there was a charge when the Economic Development Commission was first formed. Ms. Toro noted that things have changed since the Commission was first formed in 1959.

Mr. Jerram read the original ordinance from 1959. Ms. Lloyd noted that both the original ordinance and the 2001 statement consist of run on sentences. She would like to see a more succinct statement that is more timely and appropriate.

Mr. Watson commented that he thought the EDC was to help businesses and to bring new businesses in to town. He believes that more services should be offered to help businesses with website development, marketing, etc. He would like to see a handout with service providers in town and possibly a job fair twice a year.

Ms. Lloyd noted that the mission of the EDC is not just for businesses, it is also residential. What can be done to encourage younger families to move to town? We need to have the market to support new businesses. Additionally, the mission needs to include working with other stakeholders within the community.

Ms. Toro stated that she believes the tasks listed so far relate to marketing. Mr. Watson noted that his entire career has focused on marketing. Ms. Lloyd expressed that the EDC members do not have the marketing expertise to market the town. Mr. Watson commented that the Farmington River is one of the top ten rivers in the Country for fly fishing. Ms. Pobuda noted that it is one of the top five fishing destinations in the world.

Mr. Rosengren commented that he believes if EDC is going to focus on one goal it would be to focus on the Plan of Conservation and Development. The Plan describes a town that is vibrant and fresh and alive. The Plan is the roadmap to bring success to New Hartford. He supports bringing in experts to implement the Plan for economic development. In his opinion we are going backwards since the corner with the new larger Dunkin Donuts was supposed to be a community building or restaurant under the Plan. The beautiful plan calls for small things to be done right away to work toward the larger goals. He expressed that we need to aggressively seek out grants to fund projects.

Ms. Lloyd noted that there is a difference between annual goals and the Mission Statement. The EDC has used the Plan of Conservation and Development to formulate annual goals every year that she has been on the commission. The latest version includes an Implementation Plan. She believes the Mission Statement is more of an overall statement that will withstand the test of time and flexible enough to adapt as things change. She doesn't believe the content of the mission statement is the issue, it is more an issue of how it is written. Ms. Toro agreed that EDC is reviewing and following the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Ms. Lloyd inquired if we could review the EDC Mission Statements from other towns. Ms. Toro read Canton's statement:

"To foster and support economic development in the pursuit of making Canton and better place to live, work, conduct business and enjoy life."

Ms. Toro also shared another Mission Statement:

"The EDC works to ensure that there will be a professional and open-level of communication, support and trust between our business community members and our town government. In addition, the EDC will support existing and new business leaders in defining the process of managing and/or relocating their businesses in town."

Ms. Pobuda commented that she hears two trains of thought here – one being a mission and the other being more like goals. There seems to be conflict on whether to include goals in the mission statement. Ms. Toro agreed and noted that open communication between Town government and businesses should be important.

Ms. Lloyd indicated that her impression of the EDC when she joined is more of a think tank to come up with ideas to improve. She noted that goals should be attainable and end whereas the Mission is ongoing. Ms. Lloyd also commented that we should consider the mission statements from towns where the economic development commission members are volunteers like we are rather than paid.

Mr. Watson commented that the Mission Statement is just fluff and words. What really matters is what we are actually doing to benefit the town. He would like to see more action taking place. Ms. Pobuda expressed that she is understanding Mr. Watson as wanting to set attainable goals and drawing the Mission Statement from that. Ms. Toro stated that the Mission Statement is necessary to ensure that the goals stay on task for the Mission of the EDC. Sometimes EDC tries to compensate for not having a stronger business council or recreation department and gets off task.

Ms. Lloyd noted that all opinions expressed seem to agree and are just expressed differently. Ms. Pobuda sees us as a Welcome Committee and Event Coordinator and while that has been wonderful, we need to do more than that and interact with the other boards. Mr. Burdick added that we need to coordinate with the other Boards and Commissions and we need to look at the regional community as well and not replicate services that are available elsewhere.

Ms. Toro asked Ms. Lloyd to research additional mission statements from other towns. Ms. Pobuda asked if Ms. Lloyd could draft something after looking at some other statements. Mr. Burdick commented that there are some rubrics out there for the number of words and sentences.

7. 2020 / 2021 BUDGET PLANNING

Mr. Burdick commented that a lot of the planned expenses are no longer necessary because we have cancelled Open Farm Day. Ms. Lloyd said where we have been successful is in hosting events to bring businesses together, unfortunately we cannot bring people together now due to Covid. Ms. Toro commented that there is a zoom meeting scheduled for Wednesday morning.

Ms. Pobuda asked if we could come up with some suggestions for the next meeting that could be done instead of expending the funds for Open Farm Day.

Mr. Watson asked if as a town entity if EDC could have their own website. Mr. Jerram noted that it is possible but questioned whether it is practical. Ms. Lloyd noted that we need to direct more people to the new website. Mr. Watson noted that before he moved here, he only visited town websites for contact information. Ms. Ventre commented that the COVID situation has increased the number of subscribers.

Mr. Burdick questioned if we should be showcasing the “crown jewel” the river since we will not be promoting Open Farm Day. EDC could facilitate an event promoting the river.

Ms. Lloyd commented that EDC can facilitate starting an event but if its viable it should be taken over by the stakeholders. Ms. Pobuda inquired if we could create a visitor’s guide. Ms. Lloyd questioned whether the placemat/map was still around.

Ms. Toro commented that maybe EDC could look into a consult with a marketing professional. Mr. Watson commented that giveaway items with the business name on it don’t work. Ms. Pobuda commented that it would be nice to have a reputable lodging establishment in town. Mr. Burdick noted that we keep revisiting the need for housing for people seeking to downsize. The town has a lot to offer, we just don’t know where to start and how to move forward in marketing the town.

Mr. Jerram commented that there are a lot of New York plates around town and there have been complaints of people sneaking down to the lake without passes. He also shared that there have been issues in Satan’s Kingdom since the tubing business is closed this year.

He shared his notes from tonight’s conversation about the beauty of our town and in formulating a mission statement and goals EDC needs to determine what the vision for the town is in the future. Do we want it to grow or stay the same? How do we help existing businesses in the same manner that Open Farm Day helped the farms? How do we market other town businesses who are struggling in the aftermath of COVID?

One of the most important functions of EDC has been to provide input to Planning & Zoning Commission to improve the regulations and mold the future of the Town.

Mr. Watson commented that he had suggested the Taste of New Hartford event here last year. Perhaps that is something that could be set up this summer to take advantage of the outdoor seating. Mr. Burdick questioned if that is something that EDC should organize or plant the seed and let the restaurants organize and coordinate it.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS TO PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

None

9. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION Mr. Burdick, second Mr. Watson, to adjourn at 8:45 pm;
Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Ventre, Commission Secretary