



CHESTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Special Meeting Minutes

December 18, 2023 at 4:30pm

Location: Chester Town Hall Meeting Room - Fl 2 and Microsoft Teams

1. Seating of members

EDC Chair Pat Bandzes called the meeting to order at 4:35pm.

Commission members present: Pat Bandzes, Rebecca Mead, Douglas Mahana, Carlie Dailey.

Tourism Representative: Bekah Wright.

Ex Officio: First Selectman Cindy Lignar

Audience of Citizens: there were 8 total attendees, both live and virtually

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Carlie motioned for approval of 11/13/23 Meeting DRAFT minutes with edits. Rebecca Mead seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Commercial Listings and Transactions Update

47 Middlesex Ave

This project was approved by the Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Commission, but is currently under appeal.

59 Winthrop Rd (Kenyon Property)

The BOS is working to get this property sold so that it can contribute to the town's tax rolls. This property recently got an 8-24 Referral from P&Z. There were 3 offers on the property, but one dropped out. As a next step, the Selectmen will meet this week with buyers and realtors. No further details on potential uses were provided, except that the eventual use would be in line with the property's current RLM zoning. The final deal will need to be approved at a town meeting. The BOS is considering the deal holistically in regards to property tax and job creation, as well as offer price.

132 Main St. (Chesterfields)

This property is currently under contract. No further details can be provided at this time.

33 Liberty Street

This property was sold. Cindy will meet with the realtor and new owner this week.

26 Water St. (Former Herbery Building)

This property had been sold as residential over this past summer, but has since come back on the market. Pat was approached by a potential buyer interested in doing rental or retail at the site. Further details to come.

4. Business Outreach Update

Pat compiled a list of the top commercial real estate tax payers in Chester. EDC is in the process of meeting with these businesses and their contacts. Interestingly, many of the top entries are for marinas and so the EDC will explore working closely with the Harbor Management Commission to build relationships.

Pat recently connected a property owner on Inspiration Lane looking for a tenant with a business owner interested in moving to Chester.

5. Old Business

Merchant Rack Cards

A motion was passed in November to provide a small annual contribution to the merchants for rack cards. The funds have not yet been processed as EDC is awaiting destination account information for the funds. Rebecca Mead will follow up with the merchants.

Business-to-Business Presentation to Merchants

In November, EDC hosted a presentation by Lauren Pszczolkowski, East Haddam's Economic Development Coordinator from Haddam regarding the "Neighbor to Neighbor" program. A follow-up meeting has not yet been set, but Rebecca Mead will touch-base and schedule one.

6. Updates

Cell Tower Lease Agreement

The terms and conditions for the lease agreement have been agreed between the BOS and the cell tower development company. The contract is currently with the town attorneys for review. The development company will shepherd the process with the state. Business owners, residents, and emergency services have described improved cell service as a necessity. Cindy added that the town was exploring carrier interest in a potential tower on the western side of town. Cindy spoke with Bob McGarry, Haddam First Selectman, and learned that Haddam is adding a tower that might help coverage in parts of Chester.

EDC Initiatives

EDC hopes to begin advancing these initiatives in the new year.

7. New Business

2024 EDC Meeting Schedule

The 2024 EDC meeting schedule was proposed. This schedule aligns to the 2023 meetings, in that meetings would continue to occur on the 2nd Monday of the month, barring town-observed holidays, at 4:30 p.m.

Carlie motioned for approval of the proposed 2024 EDC meeting schedule. Douglas seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

8. Audience of Citizens

Bekah Wright, Tourism Representative, provided an update. There will be an Art & Literary event on February 9-11 in galleries and shops throughout town. To facilitate, Bekah met with various humanities and arts programs in the area.

Bekah had the opportunity to view some preliminary footage from the recent CTVISIT/Tourism filming. The footage is generating excitement. The footage will be used by the State of CT for various tourism marketing materials over the next 10 years and will also be made available to Chester.

Karin Badger had questions about the cell tower project that led to a robust discussion. Karin expressed excitement over the project and had questions regarding the location and aspects of the project related to state approval. Pat explained the company selected the spot from a list of available town-owned locations and a propagation study was still to come. Pat explained that the most important thing is to have reliable cell service in the Village Center and to as many areas in Chester as possible – a bonus is to have a revenue stream by locating the tower on town-owned property. The tower will also assist with emergency communications. Cindy explained the process for state approval and that the entire project was still contingent on the results of the propagation study.

Karin also inquired about the PFAS status of the property at 26 Water St. and wondered if municipal water would be extended down to that and other properties on Water St.

In a brief discussion of the 47 Middlesex Ave. property, Cindy explained the appeal process for the developers and Chester P&Z. Additionally, it was stated that the current proposed buyer for Chesterfields is not one of the developers of the 47 Middlesex Ave. project.

Several citizens expressed concerns about traffic and pedestrian safety at the intersection of Main Street and Rt. 154. Phillip Reynolds noted his concern about the amount of traffic a recent Saturday church service generated near and around this area. Phillip pointed out that the volume was much greater than what was accounted for in the recent traffic survey. Susan Peck and Virginia Carmany each cited the need for crosswalks. Cindy mentioned asking the developers to include crosswalks across Rt 154.

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Revisited the traffic safety discussion with an additional concern about the prevalence of speeding in and around town. Susan Peck added a concern about the safety of pedestrians attempting to cross Railroad Ave. near Marker 37.

Joe Cohen voiced a number of questions regarding the cell phone tower project, including: asking about the identity and selection process for the development company; public meetings and notice related to the project; and the site selection process. He voiced an objection to the way Chester contracted this project prior to public notification. Carlie pointed out that the cell phone tower project has been discussed in numerous public meetings over the past year. Joe went on to criticize the town for only considering town-owned properties for this project and accused the past BOS of being biased in site selection. He entreated the EDC to reconsider the cell phone tower plan. Pat and Cindy responded to all of Joe's questions and comments, providing additional clarifications and insights. Cindy pointed out that the cell coverage problem would likely be solved by several solutions, including this tower and other local initiatives, to bring service to the maximum number of residents.

9. Adjourn

The next meeting will be held on Monday, January 8, at 4:30 pm.

Rebecca Mead motioned to adjourn. Douglas seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:32pm.

Respectfully submitted by
Douglas Mahana, Recording Secretary