

Chester Economic Development Commission
Meeting in Person at Chester Town Office
Monday, March 21, 2022 at 2:00PM
(Rescheduled from 3/14/22)

Minutes- Approved

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:03 by Chairman Jon Joslow attended by commission members Pat Bendzes, Adam Perl, Susan Wright, and attended by First Selectwoman Charlene Janencek and Kimberly Megrath.

Approval of minutes of 2/14/22 EDC meeting

Edits proposed by Pat:

Affordable housing update: Pat reported 1/24/22 second regional meeting. Regional solutions being discussed. 3/10/22 Chester workshop (7:00 during P&Z meeting). River COG is working on plans for 13 of 17 towns. Each town will have a plan. CT Law requires an affordable housing plan in place by 6/1/22.

Motion to Approve: Pat

Second: Susan

Vote: Passed (4 Yea, 0 Nay)

Community assistance/participation in addressing Town initiatives:

There was consensus that once priorities are defined, EDC will discuss the role/assistance that Charlene would like EDC to provide. As those needs become clear, and depending on existing EDC bandwidth, the EDC may enlist people interested in assisting with specific initiatives and projects. Given the small size of EDC, we may try to facilitate connecting volunteers to lend their expertise toward moving Town initiatives forward. This would allow residents to apply their skills toward helping us move forward, expand community participation, provide hands-on experience at helping to address community issues, grows and expands the pool of volunteers to potentially serve on boards and commissions, and allows progress to continue in parallel with other initiatives.

Follow up from 2/14/22 meeting:

There was consensus that our monthly meetings would be informational vs problem solving and that we would adopt an agenda that has two major components:

First-- update the quantitative reports (Commercial Listings and Recent Commercial Transactions), and obtain an update on key business events and issues that have materialized after our last EDC meeting. That will provide us with the context for the second section:

Second-- Following the Update, the meetings will be used to report progress against specific initiatives.

We agreed to problem solve in between meetings so progress can happen faster and the monthly meetings can remain short but effectively informative.

Update on Existing EDC and Community initiatives/issues

This section was rolled into the First Selectwoman's report on her listing of major projects and initiatives as discussed below. Responsibility for addressing each initiative appears to the right of each heading.

TOWN INITIATIVES- STATUS REPORT

59 Winthrop Road: Charlene, EDC- Open

Objective: Sell town-owned property once Phase II finalized.

Status:

3/21/22

Atlas completed Phase I and II environmental assessment and sampling. Atlas is applying for a grant to fund the cleanup.

Next Step: Secure financing for cleanup

Inspiration Lane Industrial Park: Charlene, EDC- Open

Objective: Assist Commercial Development and Expansion of the industrial park and adjacent available property.

Status:

3/21/22

Parcel at the first bend of the road—might be a good spot for storage units, on a slab without basement.

Next Step: Unassigned

Roto-Frank: Charlene, EDC- Jon

Objective: Assist them in sourcing expansion so they can remain in Chester

Status:

3/21/22- Unknown

Next Step: Jon to arrange a meeting with Charlene, Roto-Frank and the EDC. Timing: before next EDC meeting on 4/11/22

WIFI/Towers: Ed Mehan, EDC- Susan, Adam

Objective: Provide Internet access for downtown Chester.

Status:

Before 3/21/22

Michael Jordan and Donna Moore worked on this project to get the initial quotes.

3/21/22

Charlene- not sure that WIFI downtown will work. Waiting to hear from Steve?

Expensive annual maintenance. Finding a different solution might be better. Potentially re-approaching United Church of Chester (after 15 years) to attach to their steeple, consider extending Fire Department siren tower behind fire house, a tower at the fairgrounds. Susan reported that a limited coverage in the center of town would cost \$20/\$25K per year from Comcast. Consider other ways to offset maintenance fee like advertising.

Adam reported that at one point a resident offered to pay for the tower and will research. He suggested an option: talk to Chester merchant association about a feature of Comcast is that you can enable a “Guest Mode” where other people can sign onto it. If there was a common protocol that everyone referred to it as “Chester Village” then anyone with a Comcast/Xfinity account could log on. The issue of network safety was highlighted as a potential issue

Adam explained that with the emergence of 5G or 5G Ultra-wide, we might not need WiFi at that point. Chester’s schedule is unknown—might be a year or two away.

Next Step:

Susan is assembling a small group of experienced and knowledgeable residents together because this is too technical. Adam agreed to lend his expertise.

Susan to reach out to Ray Guskowski of Emergency Services to see if he has a map of Chester that indicates cell and wifi coverage by vendor (Comcast, Xfinity, T-Mobile, etc).

Goodspeed at Chester- Charlene, EDC= Unassigned

Objective: Reopen the theater or consider alternative uses

Status: 3/21/22- Charlene’s calls to Donna Hilton, Artistic Director, are not being returned. Charlene- wants to reach Caryn Paradis to understand her plan for that property.

Next Step:

Unassigned

212 Middlesex Avenue/Greenwald Industries or current owner – Charlene, EDC= Unassigned

Objective: Understand the use and needs of current owner (Initiative)

Status: 3/21/22- Current owner plans to occupy 100% building

Next Step: Remove from list

33 Liberty Street / MS Brooks Factory: (Charlene, EDC= Unassigned)

Objective: Help it get sold/developed (Project)

Status:

3/21/22- Potential buyer interested in purchasing this property and converting it into apartments. They are at P&Z in February 2022 asking what they need to do to obtain approvals.

Next Step: Help where needed

212 Middlesex Ave (Ted Tine Motorsports): (Charlene, EDC= Unassigned)

Objective: Property has been vacant for a long time, facilitate bringing it to a productive life

Status:

3/21/22- Potential buyer backed out, \$400K cash offer refused.

Next Step: Unknown

47 Middlesex Ave (St. Josephs Parish Center): (Charlene, EDC= Unassigned)

Objective: Church considering partial or complete sale of parish center

Status:

3/21/22

Meeting this Thursday night in Saybrook (Our Lady of Sorrows Church, basement) regarding the disposition of the Parish Center.

Next Step: Charlene is a member of that church and will attend the meeting.

RiverCOG (Charlene, EDC= Unassigned)

Objective: Charlene trying to work with them on regionalization of some of town operations positions that are filled by part time professionals, i.e. Building Department and other part time functions.

Status:

3/21/22

Charlene reported that RiverCOG present focus is on Assisted Living and byways.

Next Step: Undefined

ARPA fund priorities: (Charlene, EDC= Susan and Jon)

Objective: Committee formed to set up a process to spend ARPA money wisely and in the spirit of helping Chester recover from COVID's impact.

Status:

3/21/22

ARPA committee addressing capital expenditures: police body cameras, IT for meeting house and town offices and WPCA for \$400K. If approved, \$800K remains to address covid related social, emotional and financial impact.

Jon talked to a number of towns and learned that some towns are putting aside pools of money for economic development. He suggested that the EDC consider requesting funds to promote economic development. To be added to our next agenda.

BOF has indicated that ARPA funds can and should be used to pay for some capital expenditures associated with operating the Town.

Next Step: Next ARPA meeting 3/22/22 to discuss how the Committee will address spending criteria, priorities and process.

East Haddam Swing Bridge Rehabilitation (Charlene, EDC= Pat)

Objective: To materially rehab the bridge and add a sidewalk to permit pedestrian traffic and add two roundabouts off of Route 82. EDC objective to minimize disruption.

Status:

3/21/22- The Chester Ferry will be one of the directed options for travelers to cross the river. Charlene went to the first meeting this week. Chester was not included in DOT's project plans and communications. This project has surprised many in Town but has been in the works for a long time. Charlene emailed Chester Merchants so they would be aware.

Next Step:

Bids open next week, project awarded in June and will start in July. There are 15 days when the bridge will be closed completely for 63 hours. Proposal from 6PM Sunday night until noon on Wednesdays.

One way traffic automated lights over the bridge span. DOT considered adding a second ferry but the slips were designed only for the Seldon. DOT considering Ferry vouchers for impacted residents.

Two roundabouts being added at either end of Route 81 intersection.

Given the expected traffic tie-ups, Jon wondered about a hot dog cart opportunity for those stuck in traffic at the Ferry- Charlene said that \$20 vendor permit (hawker's license) and health department approval might be all that is needed. Might be a business opportunity.

3/24/22- DOT presenting to Chamber for Haddam and East Haddam 8AM. Pat will attend and provide information to Charlene, who may attend. DOT is managing the project. Pat might inquire whether DOT has a traffic control plan that includes Chester since we will be directly impacted.

Transportation To and From Marinas: (Charlene, EDC= Unassigned)

Objective: Provide transportation so boat enthusiasts can easily access Chester's businesses.

Status:

Next Step:

3/22- Charlene and Leslie Strauss going to CT Transit in Middletown to discuss the possibility for summertime transit from marinas to the center of Chester and Deep River.

Boardwalk from North Quarter Park to the Cemetery Road (John Ivimey and Mike Abramson, EDC= Unassigned),

Objective: Connect NQP with cemetery road.

Status:

Park and Rec estimates \$95K to get it done as requested to the BOF.

Charlene heard concerns that it may run as high as \$300K because it needs to be engineered and negotiated through swamps/wetlands, and residential properties. DEEP approval might be necessary. A lighting plan might be needed.

Mike is Chair of Park and Rec commission and John involved as a citizen and as a representative from Rotary, one of a number of organizations trying to get this project started over the years.

Inland/Wetlands is also participating.

Next Step:

Unknown

EDC Budget 2022/23

EDC did not spend its budget this year Jon suggested that we maintain the existing budget funding as a placeholder until we know what projects and initiatives will be addressed during the year. The decision was made to submit a budget that is unchanged from 2021/22 totalling \$2,850.

Motion to Approve the EDC budget for 2022/23 totaling \$2,850

Motion: Pat

Second: Adam

Vote: Passed (4 Yea, 0 Nay)

EDC Contact List- Chester Businesses

Objective: The Town has no way to communicate directly to Chester businesses. A contact database by type of business or enterprise, is needed to communicate with all businesses, small businesses, independent contractors, gig workers, and anyone who works from home for these reasons:

- Communicate the existence of loan programs, guarantees, etc. programs helpful to this segment such as Middlesex Revitalization Loan Fund, PPP type/COVID programs for businesses, etc.
- Communicate planned or future situations that might impact Chester business. An example is the upcoming traffic diversion through Chester once the East Haddam bridge is under repair. Another example is to inform on WIFI progress
- Communicate employment, product and service needs that might be satisfied using Chester professionals and their businesses versus outsourcing beyond Chester.

Status: There have been numerous attempts at creating this list from a variety of databases but efforts to date have produced limited success. As of today, no database exists and the consensus was that such a list is necessary.

Followup: Jon to scope out why prior attempts by town volunteers to obtain business data has failed. He will contact other towns to see how they have addressed this communications problem. It may be necessary to hire someone to do what our town volunteers have been unable to accomplish. Jon will report back at the next EDC meeting.

Note: Pat to contact Eliza at RiverCOG to find a list of EDC contacts. She also to meet with Clinton EDC this Wednesday (John Alan), at Simons. This contact sheet might help all EDCs to

share information so we are not recreating the wheel each time we run into a problem common to area towns.

Other topics:

Bank Building- Water Street

Honeycomb- wants to move to the Bank from Main Street. They are going to P&Z using the pre-application process that Susan had proposed for adoption in the past. Heather found the process to be beneficial. Susan wants a standard form to be adopted. Charlene agreed.

Next Step:

Susan to send Charlene the pre-application process and she will roll it out to the Town agencies after reviewing it with Town Legal Counsel.

Future follow-up summary (Included in the notes above)

Audience of Citizens

Kim Megrath- Chester Community Partnership

Child care

Declining children population only 3 or 4 licensed child care programs with limited enrollment and a Montessori program. YMCA/after school program at CES will not open this school year.

First Congregational Church in Deep River will close their childcare program in September vs June, as originally planned. Kim will meet with trustees and the director to understand the options. Kim pointed out that some communities help pay for child care as part of the education budget.

Separate identification of need for child care from the ability to pay. Charlene concerned if ARPA is requested to address the financial issues because subsidies from ARPA will fall as the funding dries up. This is a regional issue that the three towns should address.

Kim- to contact the Office of Child Care to understand the obligation and responsibilities of local school districts to provide pre and after school programming.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn: Pat

Second: Adam

Vote: Passed (4 Yea, 0 Nay)

Adjourned at 3:28PM

Draft prepared and submitted by Jon Joslow