

Chester Economic Development Commission
Meeting in Person at Chester Town Office
Monday, April 11, 2022 at 1:00PM

Minutes- Approved 5/11/22

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 by Chairman Jon Joslow attended by commission members Pat Bendzes, Susan Wright, and attended by First Selectwoman Charlene Janecek and Kimberley Megrath.

Jon received a note from Adam that he could not attend today and would be stepping off EDC to focus on his growing company. Jon thanked him for his service to Chester.

Approval of minutes of 3/21/22 EDC meeting

Motion to Approve: Pat

Second: Susan

Vote: Passed (3 Yea, 0 Nay)

Commercial listings and Transactions

Pat issued updated reports and these will be posted to the EDC web site after Pat makes some adjustments.

Water Street has no public water or sewer. Charlene said that several years ago, Key Bank was willing to pay for water access from the Water Company. The Water Company rejected the request at that time. Susan reported that Carol Lewitt has received a cost estimate from the Water company which is now under new leadership. There are no plans to extend either water or sewer at this time.

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.

59 Winthrop Road: Charlene

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.

Update: 5/11/22 – Atlas getting cleanup estimate.

Inspiration Lane Industrial Park: Charlene, EDC- Open

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

Update: 5/11/22 – Schedule meeting after budget and Charlene's return

Roto-Frank and Whelen: Charlene, EDC- Jon

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

Update: 5/11/22 – Budget and ARPA are present priorities. Charlene preparing for her vacation, to be addressed upon her return.

WiFi/Towers: Ed Mehan, EDC- Susan

Objective: Provide Internet access for downtown Chester.

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 Guasp 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).

Update: 5/11/22 WiFi on Wig Hill- Ed looking at firehouse tower location.
Charlene to explore potential Haddam tower joint project.

Goodspeed at Chester- Charlene, EDC= Unassigned

Objective: Reopen the theater or consider alternative uses

Update: 5/11/22 Norma Terris Theater- Susan will contact Caryn Paradis to invite her to speak with EDC about the project plan that she envisioned for that facility when there were past discussions about its future use. Given that the building has been shuttered for several years, the EDC is interested in understanding existing proposals for that location even though Goodspeed Musicals owns the location. Susan will contact her to see if she is interested in sharing her vision.

33 Liberty Street / MS Brooks Factory:

Objective: Help it get sold/developed (Project)

Update: 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):

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

Update- 5/11/22 No update

47 Middlesex Ave (St. Josephs Parish Center):

Objective: Church considering partial or complete sale of parish center

Update: 5/11/22 Two developers are negotiating to purchase the Parish Center for the purpose of adding housing.

RiverCOG (Charlene)

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.

Update: 5/11/22 – Charlene reported that previous discussions about regionalizing some town services were discussed with Sam Gold at RiverCOG. Given the diversity of needs, and that there is no apparent regional solution, this topic is not relevant to RiverCOG.

John Allen, ED of Westbrook’s EDC, previously met with Pat to discuss tourism and joint marketing/branding efforts. There is a meeting that Jon will attend in her absence, with staff at RiverCOG and John Allen.

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.

Update: 5/11/22 – ARPA subcommittee suggesting process for allocation and to consider four proposals.

East Haddam Swing Bridge Rehabilitation (Charlene)

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.

Update: 5/11/22 – work to begin this summer

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

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

Update: 5/11/22- Charlene and Leslie Strauss working to have CT Transit in Middletown consider 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.

Update: 5/11/22 – Charlene meeting with John Thursday pm

Preapplication process to help people doing business in Chester

Update: 5/11/22- Charlene reported that the Building, Fire, Zoning now meet every other week at a set time to review the status of all applications.

Child Care in Chester (Kim Megrath, Chester Community Partnership

Objective: Provide pre and after school care for children under 5

Update: 5/11/22- Kim contacted Office of Early Childhood/Learning Education, ARPA administrator- how are towns using ARPA funds to support? Chester Community Partnership- identification of a child care crisis, summer program and fall/back to school. No response at this point. Kim has not been able to reach the families of potential need for pre and after school care. Kim to followup with Superintendent’s office, Elementary School administrators and potentially PTO, BOE, etc.

4/5/22 Workshop report and next steps

Discussed the POCD list of initiatives and agreed that many relate to housing and P&Z initiatives requiring their feedback at to status and relevancy/urgency. The consensus was that the initiatives listed that support the first 2 of 6 goals provide detail to a variety of needs and initiatives. The balance, primarily relate to affordable housing, infrastructure and quality of life issues covered that are partially discussed within the first two sets of goals. Jon will take a pass at sorting the initiatives into groupings of similar initiatives in order to simplify the list so it can be usable.

The discussion continued where we left off on 4/5—going through the list of initiatives where we attempted to define responsible agencies and individuals assigned to the initiatives. This will be summarized and passed on to the BOS for further action, prioritization, and communication.

Consideration for funding EDC-related and POCD initiatives:

Once the POCD review is complete and the BOS discusses priorities where EDC can help, we will outline a request for funding.

EDC Contact List- Chester Businesses

Objective: The EDC wants to communicate directly to Chester businesses to include 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.

5/11/22 – No update

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn: Jon

Second: Susan

Vote: Passed (3 Yea, 0 Nay)

Adjourned at 3:03PM

Draft prepared and submitted by Jon Joslow