



CHESTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

5/11/22 EDC Meeting- APPROVED MINUTES
(Note: This meeting was rescheduled from 1PM 5/9/22)

1. Call to Order / Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 by Chairman Jon Joslow attended by commission members Pat Bandzes and Susan Wright. Charlene notified the Chair that she was unable to attend due to recovery from illness. There was no audience of citizens.

2. Approval of draft minutes 4/11/22

Following edits were made, accepted and unanimously approved (Motion by Pat, Seconded by Susan):

Spelling corrections: Kimberley Megrath, Ray Guasp, John Allen

3. Recent commercial listings and transactions (Pat Bandzes)

Pat provided an update. It was decided that she would continue updating these reports with distribution to the First Selectwoman and to the EDC but to remove it from the web site because some of the information might open the EDC to potential legal exposure since it contains information about the status of available commercial property. A motion to remove the EDC prepared reports from the EDC website was made by Pat and seconded by Susan. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. Chester Affordable Housing Plan -AHP (Pat Bandzes)

In 2017, Connecticut passed a law mandating all towns develop a town approved AHP by June 2022. RiverCOG developed a master plan that included informational workshops. Chester's first meeting was March 2022 where options for Chester were discussed. First Selectwoman Janecek appointed an AHP steering committee with representation from P&Z, Social Services, CT Sustainability, Interested resident, John Guskowski (also contracted by RiverCOG to assist in the development of the region's master plan and its associated templates for individual town input) and Pat from EDC. Pat is chairing the Committee along with John Guskowski.

Chester has very little affordable housing. Pat reported that 42 of 1923 houses or 2% vs 10% CT-wide target, qualify as Affordable Housing. Most of that is Cherry Hill. Changes to zoning would be required in order to initiate the AHP. The state mandate was to have a town-approved plan, but there does not appear to be an enforcement mechanism so changes to Chester's zoning cannot be compelled, they will need to be self initiated if change is to occur.

Approval steps: P&Z being informed at their next meeting on Thursday, May 12. 5/25/22- 6:00 – 7:00 public information meeting before 7:00 Selectman's meeting to review and approve.



Final approval without optional Town Meeting. 16 of 17 RiverCOG towns did not require a Town Meeting. The exception was Saybrook who proactively addressed housing as part of active initiatives several years ago. Notice on Selectman's Corner and Social Media.

5. East Haddam Bike and Walk Path – Chester Spur

Chester's EDC was contacted by East Haddam's EDC Chair, Bob Casner, to attend their May 4, 2022 public meeting regarding the subject topic.

Pat reported on this meeting which was called for the purpose of receiving input from the residents potentially impacted by the initial design of a 30 mile pedestrian/bike loop through town that crosses the CT River, passing through Chester. This project is supported by 100 ft right of way established during colonial times that runs along Town Street. The East Haddam EDC received an in-kind services grant through the National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program to fund the feasibility and design of a pedestrian / bike path that loops through East Haddam, crosses the Swing Bridge (which will have a ped/bike lane added as part of the renovation project), Route 154, then to Ferry Road to complete the loop in East Haddam.

Bob contacted Jon to understand our EDC's interest in adding a spur from the corner of Ferry Street and 154 down Water Street.

The National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS RTCA Program) team has the knowledge of where to find Federal grants to support and execute a final design. At this point, there is no projection of costs that might be incurred related to Chester's involvement in general, nor any information on costs related to the proposed spur.

Absent any budgetary or other information beyond a proposed project map, the EDC discussed the concept of the loop and spur. In a motion made by Pat and seconded by Susan, to unanimously approved the following resolution:

RESOLVED: That Chester's EDC endorses the concept of the proposed East Haddam Loop and Chester Spur pending determination and clarification of the safety, financial and community impact to Chester residents and visitors.

Pat will take the lead on this project.

We also discussed two additional pedestrian/bike path initiatives:

Rails to Trails Initiative:

Rick Holloway, of Chester's Sustainability Committee, also attended the East Haddam meeting and has since contacted the NPS for assistance regarding the feasibility of a Rails to Trails, Bike/Hike path along the Essex Steam Train right of way. He contacted Stephanie Stroud, of the NPS, who was presenting at the East Haddam public meeting, who agreed to meet in Chester on June 2 to



walk the spur, learn more about the RiverCOG plans impacting Chester and to discuss potential Rails to Trails with Rick.

Townwide Bike/Ped Initiative:

Cindy Lignar, of Chester's Sustainability Committee and as Chester's alternate member of the RPC, is leading the "Complete Streets/Bike-Ped Path" initiative addressing safety and accessibility of Chester's streets and sidewalks.

Followup/Coordination:

In order to coordinate the three different bike/pedestrian initiatives, Pat will organize a meeting with Cindy and Rick so there is a coordinated approach to our Bike/Ped opportunities in general, and specifically, with our National Park Service contact.

Progress against existing town initiatives and POCD objectives:

With the exception of updates on ARPA and Childcare, it was decided that reviewing the 30 day progress made on existing listed projects would wait until Charlene can present them. There is a sense of urgency to get this initial list drafted and distributed for edits and input by staff, commission, committee chairs and other responsible parties. To that end, the Members agreed to schedule a Special Meeting rather than wait a month for our next meeting. Pending confirmation with Charlene, that date is set for Monday May 23 at 1PM in the Town Office Meeting Room. *(Note: Charlene confirmed her availability for that date post today's meeting).*

ARPA Update- Jon attended a ZOOM ARPA meeting on 5/10. There was discussion about how to evaluate two ARPA proposals: Evasive week removal on Land Trust property and adding names and other improvements to the Chester War Memorial. Combined projects were \$55K. The ARPA Committee decided to classify both of these initiatives under Economic Development. The Committee decided to review and approve ARPA funding requests on a first come, first served basis and declined to put a process in place to assess or prioritize requests.

Childcare in Chester- Chester Community Partnership (Kim Megrath)

Kim Megrath provided the following written report relating to her initiative to provide preschool and after school child care. There is a greater demand than supply. Kim would like to have a preschool program in place before September 2022. Initially, ages 3-5, available potentially 6am to 6pm. There is no funding in place for this to happen. This might be an appropriate ARPA project because an operator would need fit up costs that might need to be paid for or subsidized by interested parties, one of which could be the Town of Chester. Kim will provide timely updates as she summarized below for today's meeting:

1. Identified a site in Chester that is interested in renting space.
2. Will be posting a notice for owner/operator who wants to start an early care and education program or expand an existing program to a new location
3. Contacted Office of Early Childhood regarding licensing and director qualifications
4. Contacted a possible consultant



5. In process of scheduling meeting with First Selectpersons in Chester, Deep River, and Essex, which will include Christine Palm
6. Setting up project management to include activities, deadlines, responsibilities.

Notwithstanding the above, Kim is working on an overall business plan to support any requests of public funding.

Her report noted the following: Connecticut has the fifth highest cost of childcare in the nation. The average annual cost of care for an infant or toddler in Connecticut is over \$15,000 per year. Connecticut was already 50,000 childcare slots short before the pandemic. Now it's at 72% of its pre-pandemic capacity. During the pandemic, about 21% of centers closed and did not re-open. Lack of childcare significantly impacts economic development. The estimate for lost economic activity in 2020 was the equivalent of \$9 million every week, which does not include the parents who left the workforce to take care of their children. Childcare should be considered an essential service like other infrastructure programs/projects. Early care and education generates one of the highest returns on investment!

Childcare is an economic development issue. The EDC has heard that the business community has a hard time attracting employees to move to Chester due to housing and child care concerns.

The following motion was made and seconded by Pat and Susan, respectively, and it passed unanimously:

RESOLVED: The Chester EDC supports the concept of Chester Community Partnership's- Childcare Initiative, aimed at increasing the local and tri-town access to affordable childcare.

Contacting Business Leaders:

The EDC will request Charlene to use her office to contact the top 10 Chester business leaders to set up a meeting with Charlene and one or more representatives of Chester's EDC. The objective is to open lines of communication, understand present and future needs and to receive feedback on what the Town can do to help.

Consideration for funding EDC-related and POCD initiatives

Discussed the notion of reserving funds for unnamed promotional activities over the next three years, increasing the level of financial support to existing community events, and erecting a bandstand/concert shell at the NQ Park. Susan to set up a meeting with Mandy to discuss ideas from the Chester Merchants.

Audience of citizens- none

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 2:11PM (motion Pat, seconded Susan)

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Respectfully submitted,
Jon Joslow, Chair