



# **Economic Development Commission**

## **SPECIAL MEETING**

**Wednesday, October 25, 2023 | 6:30p.m.**

This Meeting held at Willington Town Hall, Lower Level. 40 Old Farms Rd and via Zoom

## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **I. Call to Order**

Interim Chairman Matt Clark called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. In attendance for the meeting were Cheryl Mitchell and Samantha Hills Also in attendance were Land Use Official Mike D’Amato and EDC Consultant John Guskowski.

### **II. Public Participation**

There were no members of the public present

### **III. Approval of Minutes**

a. September 27, 2023

**Motion to approve the minutes of July 26<sup>th</sup> by Cheryl Mitchell, seconded by Matt Clark. Motion carried unanimously.**

### **IV. Commission Business**

a. BRIG Survey Results – John Guskowski reported that he circulated a survey among the recipients of the grant money to understand more about the utility and effectiveness of the BRIG program. Of the seventeen recipients, six provided responses in the first week of the survey. He reviewed the responses, which were generally very positive, with most recipients stating that the funds were valuable to backfill from lost revenue and make investments in the future. Most revenues were fully expended, and businesses were generally optimistic about their business prospects going forward. Mike D’Amato noted that the ARPA Committee would like a report on the survey, probably in December. John Guskowski will re-send

the survey request and provide summary notes when the survey responses are complete.

- b. Welcome Signage – Mike D’Amato reported that the signs are being fabricated, and one of the two property owners of the desired sign placement locations have agreed to allow the Town to place the sign. The hope is for the first sign to be installed before the winter. He discussed the potential need for a formal agreement between the Town and the property owner for the placement and maintenance of the sign.
- c. Business Outreach/Interviews – The Commissioners had no new reports.
- d. Town-wide Strategic Plan (Discussion to include E. Bleinberger, Strategy 5 Consulting) - Matt Clark welcomed Ernie Bleinberger to the meeting and asked about his review of the Town’s recent strategic plan RFP. Ernie Bleinberger stated that he thought the RFP properly set forth the goals and desired analysis that the EDC was seeking. He discussed his background in local economic analysis and asked questions of the Commission about their specific targeted efforts. Matt Clark discussed the questions concerning finding ways to match the Town’s capability and capacity for development with the demands of the market. Ernie Bleinberger talked about the types and focus of a market analysis, possibly starting with the anchors of the FedEx distribution center and that geographic area, looking at the potential of that area and related supporting businesses. He stated that he would want to understand more about town views of specific types of development as well as reviewing development regulations. He likes to focus on stakeholder interviews as critical input, as well as performing some specific financial feasibility analysis. If there were targeted properties, individual development concepts could be developed. This would include a funding and financing analysis, which is generally heavy on private investment, possibly with support from some limited public investment.

Matt Clark discussed the wide variety of resident viewpoints concerning development in Willington. He stated that the Town needed to back up and understand these different viewpoints, attempt to come to some consensus, or at least an understanding of the capability and potential options for the community. He stated that the Town needed to understand the fiscal/tax rate implications of both development and inaction/refusal of development. Samantha Hills stated that the

Town needed to understand more about what each of the three key potential development areas could yield, from a growth and impact standpoint. She focused on the area in South Willington between the elementary school and the mill complex on Hall's Pond. She asked about comparative market analysis approaches, and a deep dive into local perceptions and interests. Ernie Bleinberger discussed the variety of community settings he has worked in, with different challenges in each place.

He discussed the hoped-for comprehensive approach to local economic analysis. He stated that generally these projects go more smoothly with a community if projects and approaches are formed with extensive community input and the public is given opportunity to respond to clearly presented financial realities that result from different decision paths. Building trust and buy-in through thoughtful outreach is critical. Concerns expressed should be incorporated into design or analytical considerations. The Commission discussed the traffic numbers on I-84, which are approximately 52,000 eastbound and 26,000 westbound on a daily basis. Samantha Hills discussed the strong inertia of the town, which hasn't changed significantly in many years. She supported focus group discussions, budget dependent. She and Ernie Bleinberger discussed approaches to soliciting input on a strategic plan, and engaging the gravitational pull of UConn to induce investment and development.

Matt Clark brought the conversation around to the financial analysis component about the costs of change and costs of stasis, and what investment and expenses would have to be borne by the community in those cases. He thanked Ernie Bleinberger for his time and insight and stated that the Commission would be in touch about next steps.

- e. Future Commission Initiatives – Matt Clark reviewed the discussion from the prior meeting and suggested that this be tabled until the next meeting. Sam Hills asked Mike D'Amato to re-send the list of potential businesses for outreach.

## **V. Reports/Correspondence**

- a. Upcoming Meeting Date: The Commission discussed the upcoming meeting with Bill Rankin's absence and the November holiday calendar. They discussed the final week in November or first week in December, tentatively targeting November 29<sup>th</sup>. Mike D'Amato reminded the Commission about setting a direction with the

strategic plan. He suggested that the next step could be to request a specific response to the RFP from Ernie Bleinberger. The Commission generally agreed by consensus to request a proposal from him, for review at the next meeting.

## **VI. Public Participation**

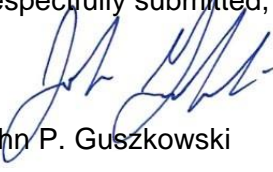
There was no additional public participation.

## **VII. Adjournment**

**Motion to adjourn by Cheryl Mitchell, seconded by Matt Clark. Motion carried unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



John P. Guskowski  
EDC Consultant