

NEWINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
NEWINGTON TOWN HALL
131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT
CONFERENCE ROOM L-101 LOWER LEVEL, TOWN HALL
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2016

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Commissioner Richard Capuano
Commissioner Maria Pane
Commissioner Clifford Stamm
Commissioner Michael Fox
Commissioner Jennifer Spano

Town Council Liaison Gail Budrejko
Town Council Liaison Carol Anest

Economic Development Director Andrew Brecher

ABSENT:

Commissioner Ken St. Onge (excused)
Commissioner Dan Fisher (excused)
Commissioner Dana Havens
Commissioner Sarah Jorgensen (excused)
Commissioner Linda Woods (excused)

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Fox made a motion to accept the February 17, 2016 minutes. Commissioner Stamm seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Gail Whitney, Executive Director of the Newington Chamber of Commerce, advised ribbon-cutting ceremonies were upcoming for Autism Families of Connecticut (March 04, 2016), Good Life Fitness at Cedar Mountain Commons (March 10, 2016) and Jump-On-In (March 22, 2016). Ms. Whitney also requested contact information for all commissioners to better inform them of upcoming Chamber events. She also reported on the successful "State of the Town" event held on February 25, 2016.

VI. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Chairman Capuano noted his pleasure with how discussions are progressing regarding the Commission's mission and goals. He cautioned that although free-flowing discussions can be productive, in the future all speakers first should be recognized by the Chair to keep discussions organized.

Chairman Capuano also suggested the Commission should consider how the EDC can better participate in recognizing new businesses and other Chamber and Downtown Business Association (DBA) events. That led to a conversation about the DBA, its history and current challenges and how both the DBA and Chamber might increase their memberships. Commissioner Stamm volunteered to provide some ideas for reinvigorating the DBA at the next EDC meeting.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Review of December, 2015 Holiday Event

As previously directed by Chairman Capuano, Mr. Brecher distributed some statistics about the event. Commissioner St. Onge was unable to attend, but discussed the topic with Director Brecher, who reported Commissioner St. Onge's recommendation that any future social event should be tied to a specific goal of the Commission—as a way of meeting that goal.

Commissioner Stamm suggested 1) not holding social events in November or December because of scheduling conflicts, and 2) charging a nominal sum (e.g. \$2.00 or \$5.00) to make attending any event a commitment. Commissioner Pane suggested future invitations include an RSVP. Councilor Anest suggested other towns be polled to determine what types of events they host and how they do them.

B. Continue Discussion of Mission, Objectives, Goals, Initiatives

Director Brecher distributed copies of three documents: 1) Draft Mission Statement, 2) Summary of Potential Goals and Activities, and 3) What Do Businesses Want From a Community?

Director Brecher reviewed how the draft Mission Statement was developed. Councilor Budrejko suggested adding language found frequently in the 2020 plan "to preserve Newington's unique character." All agreed to include such wording in a revised draft Mission Statement.

Regarding the Summary of Potential Goals and Activities, Director Brecher reported the Town's IT department intends to begin the process of developing a new website shortly, which would include Economic Development and EDC pages and links to social networking. He also advised that advertising is generally prohibited on .gov websites. Chairman Capuano indicated the discussion of Goals would continue next meeting when hopefully more commissioners would be in attendance. Accordingly, he asked all commissioners to be prepared with what each considers to be the top five goals for the EDC for discussion at the next meeting.

Councilor Budrejko questioned the document "What Do Businesses Want from a Community?" suggesting we should ask businesses what they think, perhaps by conducting a survey.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

None.

IX. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Brecher reported that at the State of the Town Event, Acting Town Manager Lane revealed an updated financial analysis indicating the Town could afford a debt level of \$82 million, far higher than the Town's current level below \$7 million and the 2002 recommended level of \$30 million. The significance to the EDC is that Newington should have the financial capacity to maintain and improve its infrastructure in ways that will sustain and perhaps better the Town's quality of life—should voters approve projects by referendum.

Director Brecher noted a number of business “happenings”: Cricket Wireless has opened on the Berlin Turnpike; the space occupied by Sleepy's adjacent to Stew Leonard's is for lease; the Mobil site on the Berlin Turnpike is back on the market; STOC restaurant will not be opening in Best Market Plaza; and the Office Café is searching for a new location.

A copy of the Town Manager's proposed budget for the EDC was distributed by Director Brecher, indicating a slight reduction (-\$100) from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Gail Whitney asked what was happening at the former insurance agency space on Main Street. She urged commissioners to check out the Chamber website, which includes its goals. Also, Ms. Whitney cautioned about doing surveys—they can be a lot of work for a small response. And although testimonials are great to receive, criticisms can be difficult to address. She is excited to hear about a new town website and would like to see more done to promote what's great about Newington.

Hal Whitney reminded commissioners that successful businesses put customers first, and that the EDC should too, advocating for businesses wherever possible and perhaps inviting businesses from other towns to EDC sponsored events. He also advocated for the Town to use a local website developer to help design its new website.

Domenic Pane suggested awards are a good way to boost attendance at social events, but the recipients have to be notified early enough so they can plan on attending. Mr. Pane also recommended a listing of available sites for lease or sale should be included in a redesigned website. He also commended the EDC on “doing a great job.”

Rose Lyons thanked the Chairman for including Public Participation two times on the agenda but cautioned that all discussions should follow the order of items on the agenda. She indicated her concurrence that a new website is a good idea.

XI. COMMISSIONER AND LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Stamm suggested restarting the “Districts,” perhaps getting name tags made again that each commissioner could wear to business visits. Chairman Capuano agreed that should be an agenda item for a future meeting.

Councilor Budrejko thought a "Welcome to Newington" should be extended to all businesses locating to town. Ms. Budrejko further wondered if exit interviews for businesses leaving or closing would be possible, which might require building a network to know when such happenings are occurring. She also suggested a letter thanking departing businesses for their time in Newington might be appropriate.

Councilor Anest expressed her opinion that it should be a priority to reestablish territories/districts for each commissioner. Also, that commissioners should have EDC developed pamphlets that they can hand out to businesses within their districts.

Chairman Capuano stated that the EDC and its members need to tell businesses what the EDC does.

Commissioner Fox agreed. Also, that it is important to ask businesses "how are you doing?"

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Fox made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Pane seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted:


Sophie Glenn,
Recording Secretary