

NEWINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

September 6, 2023

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Theresa Avey called the September 6, 2023 meeting of the Newington Economic Development Commission to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present

Chairman Theresa Avey
Commissioner Dana Havens
Commissioner Marissa Lenzi
Commissioner Paul Lenzi
Commissioner Chip Stamm

Commissioners Absent

Commissioner Meri Beatrice-excused
Commissioner Jerilyn Nagal

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Havens moved to approve the minutes of the August 2, 2023 meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Stamm. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion, with five voting YEA.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chairman Avey introduced the new Town Manager, Tom Hutka and suggested that he put forward the ideas that he may have for the town. He indicated that the town had some great opportunities for in-fill, coming first out of the recession and then the pandemic that created some vacant commercial property. The easiest and most efficient is when businesses use the existing space and make it work, but there are occasions when the buildings are not suitable or are too old for modern uses and instead are torn down and rebuilt.

He stressed that there are great opportunities for the downtown, and the Berlin Turnpike to tie together the existing properties. There is a fairly new Town Planner and a brand new Town Engineer who can help with some of the updating of the concepts and to tie things together, particularly in the town center where the updating could be more cohesive allowing residents to visit the entire downtown in one trip.

Thomas O. Higgins
Town Clerk

2023 SEP 12 PM 2:00

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
TOWN OF NEWINGTON, CT

The main question, what's the next big thing? Recently, malls were the last big thing but not as much anymore, then lifestyle centers, and then after the recession and the pandemic, those also dropped in occupancy. Then the question is, what is the next big thing in commercial, residential and industrial, what should a town be aiming for to create vibrancy?

Forecasters state that people will be working more from home, with luxury apartments a big contributor, single family homes should be available, but probably are not affordable.

Mr. Hutka stated that the New York Times did a study of areas that were thriving a few year ago, and are not now. One of the cities reviewed was Hartford where people are not living, working and playing downtown any more. That should start a trend towards mixed use, residential and commercial together along with entertainment where people would be near what they want. One of the goals for the community is to have the correct balance in the economy. There needs to be the right balance of people coming into the town to leave their money, to support commercial properties, entertainment businesses, but nothing that would leave a negative impact on the community.

The best for the community is to continually increase the tax base with more new construction, with infill and replacement of existing properties, but also to raise all of the property values. It is important to have the right type of development, the right type of growth so there is pride in the town and the businesses.

Mr. Hutka drew on his experience in revitalizing downtown areas, where the area was approximately sixty percent empty and within four years all of the downtown store fronts were occupied with restaurants, nightclubs, gift shops, and personal service agencies. This success carried over to the industrial park which was filled for the first time as a carry over from the success of the downtown area.

Commissioner Havens questioned the vacancy rate of the industrial park since the recent emphasis seemed to be more on mixed use of residential and commercial instead of just industrial. That information wasn't available because there are a couple of businesses that are getting ready to leave and a couple that are for sale, but there has been some interest expressed in those buildings.

Mr. Hutka did acknowledge that there was a significant number of vacancies in older facilities, older buildings in general that did not lend themselves to reuse with the new modern day technologies.

Commissioner Stamm stated that many of the town residents were long time residents and that more should be done to provide recreational services to those people. He mentioned the trails that had been established at one time and should be updated for today's population, particularly to retain the younger people in the community.

Commissioner Havens indicated that Newington had a large section of industrial buildings near the Connecticut Fastrak at Newington Junction. It might be possible to do multi-use at that location, giving people access to the Fastrack station.

Mr. Hutka indicated that the town has to be well rounded, keeping an eye on the tax base, but it isn't necessary to have a perfect balance of industrial and commercial, with the residential base

of the town working in other communities but it is necessary to find what works best for the town and best for the spaces that have to be rebuilt. One example is 690 Cedar Street, high end residential units replacing a factory.

Chairman Avey extended an invitation to Mr. Hutka to attend any of the meetings of the Commission and thanked him for his presentation.

VI. CHAMBER REPORT

Chairman Avey reminded Commissioners that September 23rd was the Waterfall Festival highlighting vendors, chalk artists, etc.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Beautification Committee

The flags for the fall season will be going up soon.

Commissioner Havens questioned if the proposal to change the flags into an advertising, fund raising type of program had been received by Chairman Avey. She will resend the information for discussion at a future meeting.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

There will be a grand opening, the Evolution Wellness and Yoga Center, 122 Market Square is having their grand opening Friday, September 8th at 6:15 p.m. E-mails have been sent to all Commissioners and Council members hoping for a good attendance. Different classes will be offered for free on Friday giving potential members the chance for a trial session.

Commissioner Havens reported that the Newington Chamber on September 12th has a hidden business open house. It's at 2315 Berlin Tpke, where they had many different aspects of businesses.

Commissioner Beatrice will present the information regarding the free assessment of the town center at the next meeting.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

X. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

XI. **ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Stamm moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Havens. The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Norine Addis,
Recording Secretary