

TOWN OF MONTVILLE
Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes – April 15, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.

Comments will only be accepted at times designated for public comment by the Chairperson of the meeting. The Montville Town Council Rules of Procedure, decorum, timeliness, and suitability shall be followed and enforced.

1) Call to Order

Chairperson Gillette called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2) Pledge of Allegiance

All stood and pledged the flag.

3) Roll Call

Present were Chairperson Mickey Gillette, Vice-Chair Serg St. Felix, Commissioners Sierra Davis, Walter Hewitt (by phone), Meracus Hernandez (by phone), Sheelagh Lapinski and Christopher Napierski.

Also, present were Assistant Planner Meredith Badalucca, Matthew Davis, Director of Land Use and Development, Town Council Liaison Kevin Lathrop and Mayor Lenny Bunnell.

4) Alterations to the Agenda -- None

5) Remarks from the Public regarding items on the Agenda (3-minute limit)

Chairperson Gillette asked three (3) times for remarks. There were none.

6) Minutes

a. To Consider and Act on a Motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of March 18, 2024.

Motion by Vice-Chair St. Felix; seconded by Commissioner Davis to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of March 18, 2024. Discussion: none. Voice vote: 7-0-0, all in favor.
Motion approved.

7) Unfinished Business

a) Review of Business Report.

New Town businesses as of March 2024 reported on the New Business Report include a home-based baked goods business of sourdough bread and cookies. Also reported were a brick-and-mortar grocery/fresh food store and a used car business.

b) Discussion of Business Excellence Award. – *None*.

c) Discussion of Business Spotlight.

Director Davis reported a of shifting of gears concerning the Business Spotlight stating it will not move forward. He proposed that the item be removed from the agenda permanently. The

Director responded to Vice-Chair St. Felix who questioned the action. Director Davis explained that the decision was the result of IT protocols and practical concerns; the implication of advertising for businesses and the inability of the Commission to put information on the webpage. Further, having staff review and choose businesses to highlight was deemed inappropriate. Moving forward in a different direction and the Lo-CIP Grant are current aims/goals. Director Davis remarked that too much time can be spent on promotional efforts that is the duty of a Chamber of Commerce; instead, ideas should be considered that promote value. **Motion** by Commissioner Lapinski; seconded by Chairperson Gillette to permanently remove Discussion of Business Spotlight from the Agenda. Discussion: none. Voice vote: 5-2-0, Commissioner Lapinski and Commissioner Hewitt opposed. **Motion approved.**

d) Discussion concerning Cannabis Dispensary Facilities, Hybrid Retailers and Retailers as requested by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Director Davis referred to a full copy of text and two (2) maps emailed to the Commission for review in follow-up to discussion at the last meeting regarding cannabis locations, one (1) on the east side and the other on the west side of Town. The Director met with the staff to review the maps and noted to the Commission that the ZC1 and ZC2 areas would stay the same with an overlay over the east and west zones. The eastern area is taken care of with the existing cannabis business; the western area will allow for one (1) cannabis establishment with leveraged lot sizes although there are no prospects right now. The Planning & Zoning Commission will hold a public hearing on April 23, 2024, to amend the existing cannabis facility regulations as reported by Director Davis who welcomed its endorsement by the Commission to bring closure to the issue and to move the Department forward with other efforts. Commissioner Lapinski questioned whether to approach a vendor such as Affinity that has existing establishments in Middletown and New Haven; Director Davis is awaiting the consensus of the Planning & Zoning Commission at its upcoming meeting. The Director responded to a question from Commission Davis about expansion on the east side where a cannabis facility exists; the Director responded that it would not be able to expand per pending action by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Director Davis referred to his memorandum included in the Commission meeting packet regarding revisions to the meeting agenda that do not currently comply with the Commission Bylaws. He explained the changes to the agenda and common sense items as included in his memorandum and proposed combining remarks from the public, at the beginning and end of the agenda, into one item at the top of the agenda. Commissioner Hewitt remarked that the bylaws do say that the Chairperson can modify the agenda. As to remarks from the public, he stated that a request may be made to move items around on the agenda and there may be comments before and after substantive action at the meeting. Town Councilor Lathrop also noted that it may be an issue from the public if something occurs during the meeting. Director Davis agreed to leave the remarks from the public as is. **Motion** by Commissioner Lapinski; seconded by Chairperson Gillette to amend the Commission Bylaws and to revise the Agenda as discussed this evening. Discussion: Commissioner Hewitt asked for confirmation of the order for the revised agenda. Chairperson Gillette confirmed that remarks from the public will be added to the revised agenda at No. 6 and No. 10 with adjournment as No. 11. Per a question by Commissioner Hewitt, the Chairman also confirmed that the bylaws will maintain latitude for the chair to alter the agenda. Voice vote: 7-0-0. **Motion approved.**

Director Davis reported that the budget process was ongoing. As to consultant fees, the Finance Committee wanted to stay this item to obtain actual numbers; thereafter a request can be made to get it funded. The Director also reported on the Community Report prepared by Consultant Santy that includes recommendations, factual information, and common sense ideas to engage with groups such as the Southeast Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer); Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (COG); and Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce. Attached to the Director's memorandum of revisions to the Commission Agenda is the rules and procedures of the EDC. Director Davis responded to a question by Vice-Chair St. Felix about Consultant Santy's report as to what information the next consultant would advise to the EDC. Ongoing conversations for 3-6 weeks regarding the Lo-CIP Grant, the State Local Capital Improvement Plan, was the response. Mayor Bunnell remarked the consultant would provide on-call development services to evaluate prospects or for programs for the EDC. He added the role has not been thoroughly fleshed out and Finance and the Town Council will need answers for the bigger picture. Director Davis noted that there are constraints for going out to bid concerning economic development and Mayor Bunnell prioritized it even before the Director was hired. More importantly, economic development must be a part of the whole. Lastly, the EDC can call or meet with him noting that private conversations will be brought forward to the full board.

Director Davis also reported on the Community Investment Fund and his meeting accompanied by Mayor Bunnell with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) as it is authorizing \$179 million statewide for CIP projects. There is a planning grant for up to \$175,000 and application for it is due by June 1. The goal is to have the grant application ready by mid-May. The Director noted that the role of the EDC is collaborative effort between it and Planning & Zoning. The focus of the grant is a plan for use of the Route 32 corridor with a target focus area on industrial or mixed use. A Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) would require hiring a consultant to look at regional transportation, utilities, and land use. The main driver would be to look at the market cohort area to prioritize actions to move efforts forward in economic development and adhere to visions that speak to the market and specific areas as to what can be achieved to make it mutually beneficial. Director Davis remarked that Montville is not a normal community and said that the Mohegan Sun has a lot to do with what is achievable. Montville as an economic development site must have public engagement and be inventory data driven, a process that will be long as the DECD does not make recommendations until the fall after which a Request for Proposal (RFP) would be the next step, with the whole endeavor deemed as exciting. The Director added that the Commission can go online to the DECD website that is a mission driven organization and since Montville is classified as a disadvantaged community a grant program to deal with disenfranchised and underserved would be an outcome that would deal with that concern. As well, identification of shovel ready areas is an option. Town Councilor Lathrop spoke to a welcoming economy for Town events that includes reaching out to home-based and brick and mortar businesses. Chairperson Gillette remarked that the EDC does have a welcome letter in its system but expressed his unwillingness to going onto privately owned properties. A planning reality is having Electric Boat fast track its building of submarines noted Director Davis. Town Councilor Lathrop proposed that the Commission set a one-year goal for having a town business night or invite all town businesses to a park; in other words, putting traction on the ground to do things and have the businesses be a part of the development of the Town. Director Davis concluded that the EDC can be robust once it decides what it wants to do and then value it, in addition to administering awards.

Director Davis noted that Planning and Zoning is economic development and is the default of the Commission to what it can do. He suggested reaching out to other towns who have successful EDC programs. Planning and Zoning can review projects and run the risk of appeal for people who want to do business in Town and Montville does not require any special regulations. The Lo-CIP Grant is a part of economic development that gives municipalities a leg up taking into account geology, competitors, population, development, household income, and a business such as the Mohegan Sun. This relevant information is compiled to get a community to be aware and grounded in reality, such as Route 32, Route 395, Chesterfield etc. Commissioner Davis asked about the concern for growth of existing businesses. The Director remarked that the Town is primarily residential with only a certain amount of viable, investible land that requires how to understand it and then figuring out what to do with it. Commissioner Davis noted that the Town has no idea what the Commission is working toward and referenced economic growth opportunities for Town businesses to expand. She noted that this information is unknown to the community nor is there a connection. Director Davis remarked that outreach can be done but hoped that some would know how to reach out to the Town as its processes and standards are very generous. Commissioner Davis also expressed concern about rising rents, a deterrent to expansion, given there is no other place to go. She asked if there is a list of inventory in Town; Director Davis replied that inventory of commercial space is done by brokers and that the job of the EDC is to look at two (2) levels, land use and infrastructure, which there are plans to do. He also hopes that the Lo-CIP Grant will review these items. Assistant Planner Badalucca referenced using Sitefinder; the Director noted it would be useful if it is kept up to date and added that the grant and partnering with Planning and Zoning will flesh out ideas for a working program. Vice-Chair St. Felix asked about the planning for the same; Director Davis posed a homework question to the Commission; “What is economic development and what are we doing and why?” Town Councilor Lathrop suggested a plan for the future, a one-year one to be sustainable taking into account where we want to be, what do we want to see in the future. The Director noted that the discussion concerning cannabis regulations at the last meeting was good and shifted gears with some things and certain ideas that he has but will take time to come together and move forward as Montville is unconventional. He noted that people have land and have a right to use it and site plans cannot be moved forward—all kinds of things happen for consistent development. The idea is to make it strategic and then make it happen.

8) New Business

a) Staff projects updates.

Assistant Planner Badalucca remarked to the Commission about the emails sent by Administrative Assistant Megan to Chairperson Gillette noting that blind copies of the communications are sent to other EDC recipients. Replies to these emails concerning meeting attendance should be sent to Megan or Director Davis. It was distinguished that Commissioners do not respond by “reply all” as that would be indicative of a meeting with commissioners. Instead, any response should be sent “reply” only. Pending applications with the Department include a 13-lot resubdivision at Black Ash Estates, 970 Old Colchester Road and a processing, material storage and equipment storage facility at 1492 Hartford-New London Turnpike. As to the Pink Row development mentioned at the last month’s meeting, the pictures attached to the EDC meeting packet of the interior of that site taken during a walkthrough does not do justice to the site. Director Davis remarked the development is

affordable and beautiful and should be opening in the fall; the Commission will be noticed about it.

9) Report from Town Council Liaison

Town Councilor Lathrop reported that the majority of the Town Council meeting was devoted to the dog pound, a hot topic in Town. Grants and bond applications are being considered for the project and Mayor Bunnell is making phone calls and pushing the initiative.

10) Remarks from the Public (3-minute limit)

Chairman Gillette asked three (3) times for remarks. Mayor Bunnell remarked on what he knows about the EDC; it is a board of recommendation that should carry some weight and it should be noted on its agenda. As a recommending body, the EDC should attend Planning & Zoning and Town Council meetings as it would carry weight as a supportive measure. For example, the Mayor proposed encouraging more funding during budget season for the Land Use and Development department to move projects along and referenced that at one time the department was a skeleton crew. Mayor Bunnell also emphasized that the dog pound is an economic development issue that involves research, a budget, and regulations as well as the sharing of services with other communities. Making a recommendation to Planning & Zoning and the Town Council can be fortuitous for the Commission.

11) Remarks from the Commissioners and Town Council Liaison

Commissioner Napierski remarked on the opening of his business in Groton and being greeted by an EDC commissioner who visited the business and left a business card. Director Davis asked for the contact information of the EDC commissioner. He also remarked that the meeting was productive.

12) Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Davis; seconded by Commissioner Lapinski to adjourn the meeting at 7:23 p.m. Voice vote: 7-0-0, all in favor. **Meeting Adjourned.**