

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
CHESHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
(held with the Economic Analysis Steering Committee)
Tuesday, February 21, 2016
7:30 a.m. – Room 207/209 – Town Hall

Commissioners Present:

David Pelletier, Derek Gromko, Lou Nero, Steve Sidoruk, William Stanley

Commissioner Absent:

Dan O'Connell

Staff Present:

Jerry Sitko, Economic Development Coordinator

Others Present:

E.J. Kurtz, Chairman, Cheshire Planning and Zoning Commission, Bill Voelker, Cheshire Town Planner, Don Dobbs, Executive Vice President, Lane Construction

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Pelletier called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

It was determined that a quorum was present.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING – January 17, 2016

MOTION by Mr. Stanley that the minutes from the January 17, 2017 Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Commission be accepted.

SECONDED by Mr. Gromko.

The motion passed unanimously by all present.

VI. Communications**VII. Business**

a) Discussion Re: Arnett Muldrow's Market Assessment & Marketing Plan

The Planning and Zoning Commission was invited by Mr. Pelletier to attend today's EDC meeting to discuss planning-related recommendations in the Market Assessment & Marketing Plan. Mr. Kurtz and Mr. Voelker are in attendance at today's meeting.

Among other things, the Arnett Muldrow Market Assessment & Marketing Plan identified positives for growth; the town's strong government and partnerships with the chamber of commerce and longstanding relationships with business and industry leaders. The plan recommends completion of a vision plan for the northwest corner of town, at the junction of Route 10 and Interstate 691 that looks at land uses, phasing strategies, public investment and potential return on investment of development. The town's zoning regulations should continue to be reviewed to encourage development. The north end of Cheshire will continue to be the economic engine that fuels the Grand List to stabilize the tax base, provide regional employment, and balance the land uses in the community. The plan also recommends activities to make West Main Street a walkable downtown area.

Mr. Kurtz said that the P&Z is already working on is the reduction in lot size. When asked about the floating zone concept, Mr. Kurtz asked how this was legal as he sees it as possibly being "spot" zoning.

Mr. Voelker said that the north end is made up of four quadrants. Two of them have more development potential than the others. The north easterly quadrant is owned by the State of Connecticut. The south easterly quadrant is owned by a gas company. The south westerly quadrant is owned by Bozzuto's and has utilities. The north westerly quadrant is owned by Tristar. It needs utilities.

Mr. Voelker said that he is not sure that the floating zone is the correct approach. Part of his philosophy is to protect the character of the community. Commercial use creates a magnet effect where others want to follow such as fast food chains. Commercial use builds different character than industrial use. Distribution uses are attracted to interchanges.

The P&Z has been flexible with considering development pursuits in the north quadrants. Restrictions were put in place from studies done in the 1980's. The Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) was carefully crafted to protect the industrial base. It would be advantageous to look at the plan again. The P&Z would have to decide on the requirements of a floating zone; what the minimum square footage/acreage would be and what uses would be defined.

The commissioners discussed new uses for the interchange zone, i.e., warehouse/distribution, for the interchange zone.

Formal amendments from the P&Z for public hearing will be presented at the EDC meeting in March. It is the hope that reducing the lot size in the I-2 Zone from 3 acres to 1 acre and increasing coverage from 25% to 35% will help to stimulate growth in the I-1 and I-2 Zones.

Mr. Voelker said that a two-step approach is a flexible way to grow business. The first step is for a developer to craft a master plan project and present it, informally, to the P&Z for recommendations. The second step is to refine the plan project based on P&Z recommendations, bring it back to the P&Z for comment at which time there is the possibility of the plan project moving forward. This approach may be the way to proceed with non-residential development in the north end. Mr. Voelker said that Mr. Meyers, former P&Z Chairman in Avon, will come to Cheshire to explain this approach in more detail.

Mr. Voelker said that the West Main Street area could be viable because of its mixed use component; i.e., Ball & Socket, commercial stores and access to the linear park. It could be a dynamic place to redevelop and work and live.

Mr. Nero asked about the Dunkin Donuts coming to town replacing the former bank and how this came about. Mr. Voelker said that an amendment to regulations was made for this to happen.

b) Discussion Re: Work Plan for 2017

A 6 to 8 month work plan has been drafted based on the recommendations in the Arnett Muldrow Report. After a review and discussion, the commission approved the work plan for 2017.

c) Speakers for Future Meetings

Speakers for Future Meetings will be tabled to the meeting in April.

d) Credit Ratings

Per Mr. Milone's email sent several weeks ago, Mr. Sitko, Mr. Milone and Mr. Jaskot gave presentations to Fitch and Standard Poor's Global to sustain Cheshire's credit rating. The town's ratings are AAA, the highest given by these agencies and the agencies have reaffirmed these ratings for Cheshire. During the presentations, Mr. Sitko provided information about the town's business community and economic activity, and the Arnett Muldrow report.

Question was asked about the outcome of the prison lawsuit; when will it be determined? Town Engineer Gancarz said that it should be in several months.

e) 2016 Grand List

The 2016 Grand List grew by .49 percent and now totals \$2.75 billion. Real estate value rose slightly at .58 percent and motor vehicles showed a 3.66 percent increase in value.

Local officials have been looking at ways to grow the Grand List since W/S Development pulled out of a plan to build a retail center on the north end of town. In addition, the departure of Alexion led to a five percent drop in personal property shaving \$8.2 million off personal property valuations.

f) Incentive Policy

Mr. Sitko is gathering information about incentives provided by municipalities in central Connecticut as well as communities comparable to Cheshire. He plans to present this information to the subcommittee (Chairman Pelletier, Commissioners Sidoruk and Stanley) next month.

g) Elections of Officers

Mr. Sitko reminded the commission that election of officers will take place at the EDC meeting in April. Officers are chairman, vice chairman and secretary.

h) Liaison Reports

Mr. Gromko mentioned that the chamber's annual meeting is February 23.

i) Coordinator's Report

Trinity Solar leased 15,000 square feet at 7 McKee Place. There continues to be interest in the building formerly occupied by Alexion Pharmaceuticals.

The Image Company abruptly closed all of its Connecticut locations last week.

Marion Manufacturing was awarded a \$225,000 low interest loan by the State Department of Economic and Community Development for new machinery and equipment.

EDAC Technologies Corporation has been awarded a \$6.4 million zero-interest loan and a \$10 million grant from the State's First Five program to purchase machinery and equipment. Per the terms of the agreement EDAC must retain 349 jobs and create 200 new jobs. A total of \$28M in loan forgiveness will be provided when the company reaches 549 jobs and maintains for 24 consecutive months.

ACHIQ Design, a jewelry store at 1081 South Main Street opened in December 2016. The owners consider Cheshire to be the perfect location for their business and have made a name for themselves. This is due to the types of Peruvian stones used in their jewelry. It is also due to customization of jewelry requested by clients. ACHIQ Design hopes to be in Cheshire for a very long time.

As online retailers compete with stores, some of the largest U.S. mall landlords are turning ownership of their properties to lenders rather than facing restructure of debt and bleak outlooks. This leaves lenders to unload properties at "fire sale" prices. When landlords are unable to negotiate with lenders, foreclosure is the result. Property values will decline with the closing/decline of malls. This information is from a Wall Street Journal article.

Investment and improvements will come with the sale of 15 South Main Street to John Weinstein of JMB Property, LLC. The commercial section of the building was constructed in the 1900's. There are wood structures in the rear built in 1787. Mr. Sitko is pleased that Mr. Weinstein wants to improve the property. It will help to improve the character of the center area and historic district.

There is a serious interest in the vacant "Wesson" Property.

The Town of Cheshire allows food trucks at special events but not on a regular basis because regulations do not support them according to Mr. Voelker. He went on to say that food trucks would compete with local restaurants and pose problems with parking, traffic flow, and emergency vehicle access. Regulations caused Cheshire resident, Dariush Rose, to start his food truck business, Greenleaf Catering, in Southington.

Mr. Sitko recommended that the creation of a (re)development agency authority be considered either independently or part of the EDC. This was mentioned in the Arnett Muldrow Market Assessment & Marketing Plan. Among its responsibilities, the authority would have the ability to acquire and redevelop property and enter into agreements with private developers. Mr. Sitko said that the creation of such an authority was successful in the town of Glastonbury where he served as its executive director as part of his responsibilities as Assistant Town Manager.

Mr. Sitko presented a draft of proposed amendments to the industrial zone regulations from the Planning and Zoning Department. Among the amendments are a table from Section 32 showing reduction in minimum lot size from 120,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet. Also proposed is increasing the lot coverage from 25 to 35 percent in the I-1 and I-2 Zones.

Spreadsheet for Governor's Proposed FY 18 State Budget Impact on Cheshire was included in the packet of documents for today's meeting. The budget calls Cheshire to contribute \$3.5M for teacher retirements.

Mr. Sitko plans to meet with Phil Brewer to discuss the Cheshire Improvement Society, an independent, non-political, non-governmental organization. It will not be limited to economic development and will include a holistic approach to community well-being and quality of life.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Pelletier adjourned the meeting at 8:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Dawn Guite
Recording Secretary
Economic Development Commission