

**CHESHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2014 AT 7:30 A.M.
CHESHIRE TOWN HALL – 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET
ROOMS 207 / 209**

Commissioners Present:

Chairman David Pelletier, David Orsini, Lori Rusnack, Steve Sidoruk, William Stanley and Ray Voelker (departed at 8:35 p.m.)

Commissioner Absent:

Michael Ecke

Staff Present:

Jerry Sitko, Economic Development Coordinator

Others Present:

Dr. Jerry Larson, Headmaster of Cheshire Academy (departed at 8:00 a.m.); Robert DeJongh, Inland Wetlands Liaison; David Schrumm, Town Council Liaison; Arthur Hostage, Chamber of Commerce Liaison; Kelly Lenz, School Business Partnership Coordinator

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Pelletier called the meeting to order at 7:27 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. WELCOME NEW COMMISSIONER, LORI RUSNACK

Commissioners welcomed Lori Rusnack as the newest member of the Economic Development Commission.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Regular Meeting January 21, 2014

MOTION by Mr. Orsini that the minutes from the January 21, 2014 Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Commission be accepted as presented. **SECONDED** by Mr. Sidoruk.

The motion passed unanimously by all present.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

VII. BUSINESS

A) Discussion with Dr. Larry Larson of Cheshire Academy

Chairman Pelletier and Commissioners welcomed Dr. Jerry Larson, Headmaster of Cheshire Academy to the Economic Development Commission.

Dr. Larson stated that he was the Headmaster at Cheshire Academy from 1999 to 2004. In 2012 he received a call from Trustees of the school expressing concerns with a deficit and low enrollment and asked they asked Dr. Larson to return to help the school. Dr. Larson is expected to stay at the school for 1 more year while Cheshire Academy searches for this successor. During his terms at Cheshire Academy, Dr. Larson consulted with other private schools in Rhode Island as well as future Olympic Athletes. He also spent 2 years working in Qatar, which is one of the richest countries in the world.

Dr. Larson explained the history of Cheshire Academy, which originated in 1794. In 1937 Cheshire Academy was granted non-profit status and the State Charter for the school required that a scholarship be given each year to a Cheshire resident. During the 1960's Cheshire Academy had approximately 900 boys enrolled and their property included the Watch Factory and 21 homes around the center of Town. By the early 1970's enrollment was down to 125 students, the Watch Factory property and most of the residential properties were sold. Currently there are 363 students enrolled at Cheshire Academy with 117 full time staff, of which approximately 20 live in Cheshire. Cheshire Academy currently has 226 boarding students and now runs at a surplus. Students at Cheshire Academy come from 29 countries, with the majority coming from Mainland China, and 42 states.

Dr. Larson estimated that between the students and staff of Cheshire Academy, \$400 - \$700 a day is spent on coffee. And even more is added to the local economy at local restaurants, grocery and retail stores. Cheshire Academy day student tuition is \$36,000 while boarding students pay \$49,900 per year. \$2.8 million is awarded in financial aid each year, with 120-130 students graduating and going on to higher education each year.

Dr. Larson and Commissioners talked about recent infrastructure improvements that have been made to the campus over the last 10-15 years and Mr. DeJongh asked what the next 10 years expansion / renovation plans are for Cheshire Academy? Dr. Larson replied that the

school would like to replace some of their older dormitories, update / expand their athletic facility and performing arts space but this all depends on the economy and fundraising efforts. He added that there are no plans at this time to acquire additional land for the school. Dr. Larson also mentioned that the school needs to save \$100,000 a year for the next 10 years to prepare for the artificial turf replacement.

Mr. Hostage asked about technology on the school campus. Dr. Larson replied that each student will have an Ipad mini next year so that the school can use e-text books. There is also information on the school website with resources for the students. Dr. Larson explained that the staff at Cheshire Academy is working to develop critical thinking in students and extending the use of electronic information by students.

Dr. Larson would like to continue to teach students about stewardship and giving back to society. There are currently ties with the school and a nearby retirement facility and local early education facility. Dr. Larson would like to have additional land for farming as another avenue of teaching the kids about the effects of child hunger in the world. Mr. DeJongh asked if volunteerism is required for the students at Cheshire Academy? Dr. Larson replied that there is some but it has become lax over the last few years. Cheshire Academy continues to support the Cheshire Food Bank, Food Pantry and Special Olympics in addition to its work with the local elderly and young kids of the community.

Mr. Sitko asked about the challenges that Cheshire Academy faces. Dr. Larson replied that customer service, energy costs, healthcare costs as well as diversifying the student population both nationally and internationally. Internationally, Cheshire Academy is looking to expand its student draw from Russia, Brazil and Venezuela.

Members thanked Dr. Larson of Cheshire Academy for coming to speak to the Economic Development Commission this morning.

B) Speakers for Future Meetings

Commissioners would like to invite representatives from W/S Development to speak to the Commission in May about the final site development plans that were recently submitted to the Planning & Zoning Commission. Some suggestions for the April meeting were Macy's, Pratt & Whitney or Yale's new business & technology group.

C) W/S Development

Mr. Sitko reported that W/S Development's application is currently being reviewed by the WPCA. The State Traffic Commission will be reviewing the application of W/S Development within the next few months, too. Once all approvals are in place, W/S Development will likely start moving earth on the project site by the Fall of 2014 and building will be done in phases, likely starting in the Winter or Spring of 2015.

W/S Development's final plans call for a 500,000 square foot outlet shopping center and will be built on 111.5 acres on the Southington border. The project also includes plans for 147

apartments, a hotel, a fitness center and an athletic club. There will also be walking paths along the Ten Mile River on the property.

D) Manufacturers and Cheshire Public Schools

Mr. Sitko reported that there has not been another School / Business Partnership meeting with local manufacturers. Ms. Lenz added that manufacturing representatives will be meeting soon with Applied Technology teachers from Dodd Middle School to talk about future collaborations.

E) Regional Planning Organization Consolidation

Mr. Sitko reported that the 13 towns, including Cheshire, in the Council of Government Central Naugatuck Valley branch and 4 other towns (Ansonia, Derby, Seymour and Shelton) from the Valley COG as well as Bristol and Plymouth have agreed to voluntary merger to form the Naugatuck Valley Planning Region. In addition, Cheshire's Town Council will have to adopt a new ordinance to join the Naugatuck Valley COG. Mr. Sitko expects the Town Attorney to review the draft ordinance soon. The Town Council will need to review and approve the new Ordinance by January 1, 2015 to be part of the NVCOG. Mr. Sitko noted that Town Manager Milone has offered to be on the Finance Committee of the new group.

F) DECD Program Re: CT's Economic Development Strategy

Chairman Pelletier and Mr. Sitko will be attending the DECD Program on CT's Economic Development Strategy, which is scheduled for April 23rd at the Club Room at Rentschler Field in East Hartford from 8:30 am to Noon.

G) Televising Board and Commission Meetings

Commissioners reviewed the proposed schedule of televising board and commission meetings and noted that the Economic Development Commission is scheduled for May 20th.

H) Liaison Reports

Mr. DeJongh, Liaison of the Inland Wetland Commission reported that this group has been quiet.

Mr. Schrumm, Liaison of the Town Council reported that they are in the middle of Operating Budget season. He noted that the Grand List is down this year for commercial and residential property, adding that larger homes' values fell more than modest homes which will result in a shift in the residential demographics. The Town Council will need to approve the Operating Budget for 2014-2015 by April 15th.

Mr. Schrumm noted that the 3 year long upgrade project at the Waste Water Treatment Plant is underway. The Planning & Zoning Commission is reviewing the Zoning Regulation change proposal to allow for the height of the proposed pool enclosure at the Cheshire Community Pool.

l) Coordinator's Report

Housing Authority Insurance Group, located on Commerce Court, is currently in the midst of building a 46,000 square foot building expansion at their current location at the end of the cul-de-sac. The Town Council has approved a 7-year tax break of \$ 295,000. Housing Authority Insurance Group currently has about 160 employees and is expected to top out around 180 or 190 employees. Mr. Sitko noted that they were approved for a tax incentive with their last addition, in 2003, but the company never pursued it.

Macy's recently laid off 151 employees in Cheshire in an effort to reduce duplication across the company. Mr. Sitko stated that he recently met with Fred Meade of Macy's to discuss their future plans in Cheshire and was told they plan to keep their rental space on West Johnson Avenue in addition to their Knotter Drive location. Mr. Sitko has suggested that Macy's employees that were recently laid off employees contact Bozzuto's or Whole Foods for potential new jobs.

Mr. Sitko has been working to find a new south-end post office substation since the closing of the Timberline location. He stated that he has tried to put the USPS and Staples together for this cause but nothing definite has come of it. Therefore the Post Office will be running and advertisement this week looking for space on the south end of Cheshire for a possible substation.

Mr. Sitko talked about Consolidated Industries' plans to install new programmable hydraulic drop hammers in their existing shop, while phasing out their old hammers. The first of the new hammers is expected to be installed in July. He noted that the plans of Consolidated industries have gotten the attention of their neighbors. The Town Attorney has issued a letter stating that Consolidated Industries meets the non-conformity guidelines currently but only time will tell the final outcomes, after the new hammers are installed and the old hammers are no longer in use.

Marbridge Retirement Center's plan to demolish and expand on their current property and adjacent property for a 28,000 square foot facility on West Main Street was approved by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Jake's Wayback Burgers will be opening their first franchise location in Cheshire in the former Casual Curtain location on South Main Street. The sign for the location is currently being reviewed.

Jordan Caterers recently closed their business on Highland Avenue. The Town is working with the owners to resolve the balance that is due on the tax incentive they received when they built their addition.

Mr. Sitko reported that Spectra Energy's property in the northeast quadrant of the interchange zone may have a 5 acre section sold off for a medical use.

Mr. Sitko was happy to inform the Commission that Cheshire has been named the 21st Safest Place to Live, which is a nice recognition.

Radio Shack recently signed a 3 year extension to their lease on South Main Street. Everybody's supermarket and Big Y are talking about options for the store but there is nothing specific to report at this time.

Napoli Foods recently had a large solar array installed at their Knotter Drive warehouse.

Mr. Sitko would like to continue to work with the incentive Review Committee next month to finalize recommendations to the Commission.

J) Other

Mr. Sitko distributed the Council of Governments Central Naugatuck Valley Economic Profile for 2013 for Commissioners to review.

Mr. Schrumm mentioned that Scott Bushy of the Connecticut Department of Transportation recently gave a great presentation to the Town Council recently on the Linear Trail expansion. He noted that it was very interesting and may be something that the Economic Development Commission would like to see. Mr. Sitko agreed that a lot of thought of has been put into the Linear Trail expansion. Chairman Pelletier suggested inviting Mr. Bushey in to speak to the Economic Development Commission before the Summer.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Orsini to adjourned the March 18th meeting of the Economic Development Commission at 8:40 a.m.; **SECONDED** by Mr. Pelletier.

The motion passed unanimously by all present.

Respectfully submitted:

Tracey M. Kozlowski
Recording Secretary