Commissioners Present:
Chairman David Pelletier, Lelah Campo (arrived at 7:40 a.m.), Brian Miller, David Orsini, Robert Sepp, and William Stanley

Commissioner Absent:
Richard Kaplan

Staff Present:
Jerry Sitko, Economic Development Coordinator

Others Present:
Arthur Hostage, former Economic Development Commission member; William Freitag, Chamber of Commerce Liaison; Bill Meyerjack, Town Beautification Committee Liaison; Dr. Greg Florio, Superintendent of Schools (departed at 8:20 a.m.)

I. CALL TO ORDER
Chairman Pelletier called the meeting to order at 7:29 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 – November 16, 2010

MOTION by Mr. Stanley that the minutes from the November 16, 2010 Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Commission be accepted as presented. SECONDED by Ms. Campo.
The motion passed 6 – 0.

VI. APPROVAL OF 2011 MEETING DATES

MOTION by Mr. Orsini that the Regular Meeting Dates for 2011 of the Economic Development Commission be accepted as presented. SECONDED by Mr. Sepp.

VOTE: In Favor – Campo, Miller, Orsini, Pelletier, Sepp and Stanley
Opposed – None

The motion passed 6 – 0.

VII. COMMUNICATIONS

There were numerous article related to topics on this meeting's agenda that were included in the meeting packet of information, for Commissioners to review.

VIII. BUSINESS

A) Discussion with Superintendent of Cheshire Public Schools Dr. Greg Florio

Chairman Pelletier and Mr. Sitko welcomed Dr. Greg Florio, Superintendent of Cheshire Public Schools who was present to talk with the Cheshire Economic Development Commission this morning.

Dr. Florio talked to the Commissioners about Public Act 111, the School Reform Act, which was passed by the Connecticut Senate in May 2009. The Act was passed as part of the “Race to the Top” competitive initiative between States. In the end, Connecticut did not receive any grant money. Dr. Florio stated that Connecticut Education Reform over the next 6 – 7 years will impact all Public Schools. Starting with the Class of 2018, they will be required to have a minimum of 25 class requirements to graduate High School, including a Senior Project and expanded foreign language, math and reading requirements.

Also as part of this Reform, Individual Success Plans will be created starting with next year’s 6th graders to help them focus their High School class selections. Dr. Florio noted that there is no funding in place at the State level for this requirement, although there are a lot of good intentions. There will also be required end of course examinations for graduation in Algebra, Biology and English.
Chairman Pelletier asked about the impact of not getting the grants? Dr. Florio replied that the grant would have been worth about $185 million, which overall is not a very significant number for the overall Connecticut Education expenses but it could have really helped. He added that it was a “one shot” grant, though, which would have been distributed based on Title 1 funding. Cheshire would have maybe received $200,000 over 2 years, if the grant were received. So now, the State has these Reform laws but no funding to cover the additional costs to the Education Departments across the State. When asked, Dr. Florio informed the Commissioners that students now need a minimum of 22 credits to graduate High School, although most students in Cheshire have over that at graduation.

Dr. Florio talked about a new software option that he is looking at that would help with creating and tracking the Individual Success Plans for each of the students and maybe even after High School. Mr. Stanley asked if there a definition of what an Individual Success Plan should entail? Dr. Florio replied no, the State is still working on it. He added that he doesn’t know who will create these Plans with the students, how they will be tracked or monitored, although it can be a positive tool if it is developed right.

Dr. Florio mentioned that we are approaching the end of the Federal Stimulus Funding in 2012 for the Education Cost Sharing Grant, of which Cheshire receives $10 million in State funding. No one is sure what will happen then, Dr. Florio noted that it could be catastrophic, in terms of Education. The Governor-Elect has stated that he will do all that he can to level Education funding, so we will all have to see what happens but the potential is not good. Mr. Freitag asked if there are any solutions to the dire picture that is predicted for 2012? Dr. Florio replied that he is not sure. He is again trying to work with the teachers union, but they have not been of any help. Dr. Florio talked about how the Town focuses on 1 year when preparing the Operating Budget, perhaps they should try to look 2, 3 or 5 years out.

Dr. Florio talked about the significant decline in enrollment that Cheshire is seeing. As the enrollment numbers decline, Cheshire can make some consolidations without too much impact to the quality of education. Mr. Freitag asked why the enrollment was declining? Dr. Florio replied that the State is seeing a decline in the birth rate, adding that this year’s kindergarten class is the smallest in 35 years. It was noted that it is not an issue of choosing a private school over public, over 90% of the students are in Public Schools in Cheshire. The economy has an impact on birth rates so eventually as the economy improves, the birth rates will pick up.

Dr. Florio talked about what he feels is the most exciting technological change for education, the tablets or iPads. He explained how he thinks these tablet computers have the potential to change classrooms over the next decade. Ideally, it would be great to be able to supply a tablet to every 7th grader that they could use through Middle School and High School. Mr. Orsini asked if the schools were wired for WIFI and Dr. Florio replied that some parts of the schools are but an upgrade would be needed to expand the services in all of the buildings.

Dr. Florio informed the Commission that one of the Science teachers at Cheshire High School is doing a paperless class this year, which is an exciting venture.
Chairman Pelletier thanked Dr. Florio for attending this morning’s Economic Development Commission meeting.

B) Meetings with Cheshire companies

Mr. Sitko stated that Dan Ford from Alderson Funeral Home will likely be at the February meeting. Commissioners would like to invite an Economist to the January 2011.

C) Pratt & Whitney

Mr. Sitko reported that Pratt & Whitney machinists union has approved a new contract, but the plant will still close. There is no exact plan for the property yet and there is some talk that UTC may keep the building but nothing is definite.

The Pratt & Whitney facility on Knotter Drive is 294,000 square feet and there has already been some outside interest in the facility. Mr. Sitko talked about some enabling legislation for a defense / enterprise zone designation for the Cheshire Pratt & Whitney property.

D) Focus Group Meetings

Mr. Sitko stated that the Manufacturer Focus Group meeting was held on September. There will be 3 additional focus group meetings held in early 2011 for the small businesses, local distributors and landscapers / contractors. After all of the meetings have been completed a wrap up report will be put together for Commissioners to review and then a presentation will be made to the Town Council.

Mr. Sitko informed the Commission that the meeting with the Machinists in September was so well received they would like to continue to meet as a group on a regular basis, possibly quarterly, to additional roundtable discussions.

E) West Main Street Commercial Area Streetscape Improvements Project Update

Mr. Sitko reported that GPIC Construction has been doing a good job on the West Main Street Streetscape project and working with the businesses in the area. Phase 1 of this project is near completion; some granite curbing from Willow Street to Warren Street was added this month as an addition to phase 1 since the road was already torn up. The local businesses were informed of the additional work and agreed they would like it done now, rather than next year.

Phase 2 of the West Main Street Commercial Area Streetscape Improvement Project has been sent to the Connecticut Department of Transportation for their review and approval. If the approval is received from the State in January, Mr. Sitko stated that he is hopeful that Phase 2 can go out to bid in February 2011 for construction this Spring / Summer.
F) Incentive Policy

Mr. Sitko informed the Commission that he would like the Incentive Policy Committee to meet in January, either on the 13th or 14th.

G) Business Appreciation Day

The Business Appreciation Day Committee should know in the next 30 days if the initial prospective guest speaker for the next Business Appreciation Day is available on the proposed dates in May 2011 for the event. Once the speaker has been locked in, a date will be finalized. The event will be held at Elim Park, who has also volunteered again to print the brochure for Business Appreciation Day. The Town will be recognizing businesses that have been in Cheshire for 50 years or more at the Business Appreciation Day event.

H) Liaison Reports

Mr. Freitag, Cheshire Chamber of Commerce Liaison, stated that he had nothing to report.

Mr. Meyerjack, Town Beautification Committee Liaison stated that he had nothing to report.

I) Coordinator’s Report

Mr. Sitko stated that Alexion Pharmaceuticals is continuing to grow and is looking for additional office space in Cheshire. Cheshire Fitness Zone has been approved to move from the Watch Factory to South Main Street near Higgins Road. Automated Mailing Services, a Southington company, is buying property on Reinhard Road for a future move to Cheshire.

Mr. Sitko mentioned that Paul and Phil Bowman will be doing some emergency repairs to Earl Conti’s property on South Main Street, to help stabilize the 2 historic buildings before winter. He added that he is not sure what the buildings may be used for but any improvements to the buildings will be a positive development.

Mr. Sitko stated that the former Hartman / Hulteen property on South Main Street has new owners that are before Planning & Zoning to re-develop the property. Two medical condominium buildings with apartments on top will be constructed towards the back of the property; the existing building will remain and Dana Bartone & Company, a local hairstylist, is looking to move in to that building.

An application for incentive assistance from Heavyweight, Inc. has been received by the Town from John Hilzinger relating to an addition and new building, totaling 18,000
square feet, that will be constructed on his property to enclose the equipment on the site. The Planning & Zoning application for this project has been approved.

R.W. Hines is celebrating 100 years in business. Commissioners agreed that a letter of congratulations should be sent from the Economic Development Commission. It was suggested that a representative from R.W. Hines be invited to attend a future Commission meeting.

The Town Council has had some discussions regarding expanding the Linear Trail from West Main Street to Jarvis Street. The State Department of Transportation has offered to work on design plans for the extension. The Town Council has started their budget talks. It will be another difficult year and there have been some discussions about offering early retirement plans to some employees.

Whole Foods is looking to make a 4,000 square foot addition to the East Johnson Avenue property and will bringing in 2 temporary modular offices.

Mr. Sitko stated that he received a press release from a PV cell solar firm, Solar Fun, that is looking to expand into Cheshire, they are a Chinese company that are considered the largest manufacturer of solar cells.

Mr. Sitko informed the Commission that the Chamber of Commerce’s Annual Meeting is scheduled for January 20th at the Farms Country Club. The Economic Development Commission has funding if some of the Commissioners would like to attend. Chairman Pelletier noted that Mr. Sitko is being recognized as the Member of the Year at the Chamber’s Annual Meeting.

I) Other

Chairman Pelletier wished everyone Happy Holidays as the meeting ended and everyone shared the same sentiments with each other.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Miller to adjourned the meeting at 8:46 a.m.; SECONDED by Mr. Orsini.

VOTE: In Favor – Campo, Miller, Pelletier, Orsini, Sepp and Stanley
Opposed – None

The motion passed 6 - 0.

Respectfully submitted:

Tracey M. Kozlowski
Recording Secretary