

DRAFT MINUTES
BROOKFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING
TUESDAY, September 15, 2015 ROOM 135
7:00 PM

Commissioner Fisher made a motion to start the meeting at 7:05 PM. Commissioner Tolmoff seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

Present: Chair Hal Kurfehs; Vice Chair Greg Dembowski; Secretary Dave Matte; Commissioner Jim Fisher; Commissioner Nancy Tolmoff

Also Present: Secretary Emily Cole Prescott
(Draft Minutes, as revised by Chair Kurfehs.)

The Commission moved directly to discussion of agenda item 6, Other Discussion.

6. Other Discussion:

a. A Letter to the Editor Written by Howard Lasser, published in *The Patch* on 09/08/15 – Vice Chair Dembowski mentioned that he thinks there should be an EDC response to this opinion. Commissioner Fisher stated that if Chair Kurfehs writes a response to the opinion, he thinks it would be more powerful if the EDC endorsed it. Vice Chair Dembowski replied that he thinks it is better if the article is written from the EDC, not just from Chair Kurfehs. The fact that Chair Kurfehs has many years of commercial real estate experience was highlighted by the Commission members, and articles by committee do not work well anyway. It was agreed the best course of action is for Chair Kurfehs to write the article to then be reviewed by the Commission prior to publishing to establish a uniform response. Vice Chair Dembowski pointed out the importance of the EDC giving Chair Kurfehs the points on which the article should highlight. Chair Kurfehs indicated that there was a misconception previously that if there were many more housing units, there would be a need to add more infrastructure to support the schools. Commissioner Fisher noted that the school population has been steadily declining. Chair Kurfehs mentioned a survey which was done of hundreds of units in Danbury, which survey showed only ten to fifteen students in the schools from these hundreds of apartments. Secretary Matte stated that apartments are built for the younger-age communities, who are starting their careers, and will then upgrade to single-family homes. Chair Kurfehs stated that there will not be the population to support the sale of houses from seniors who are looking to down-size their homes in this Town unless there is something done to support housing in this Town for the younger age group.

Secretary Matte stated that one of the opinions expressed in the article is that the character of the Town will be lost. Secretary Matte stated that people who make comments about the negative aspects of affordable and incentive housing seem to show fear of the type of people who will move into the new units. Secretary Matte stated that he believes the article is implying that the community of the area will actually change. Chair Kurfehs indicated that the credit score requirements are also very high to even qualify for the housing units in the Laurel Hill Residences.

Chair Kurfehs reviewed the article with the EDC point-by-point:

New England Village: Chair Kurfehs stated that he has never heard of the New England Village design in the past, which is referenced in the article. Chair Kurfehs stated that the Town will not be able to reproduce another Town's New England Village look, as other Towns have historically been built as town centers for many years. Secretary Matte stated that he thinks Chair Kurfehs could indicate what Brookfield could have as its downtown. Secretary Matte indicated the importance of noting that much of the plan has been based on studies done by the Town. Commissioner Fisher indicated that the Town has been discussing a Town Center for over twenty years, originally under the direction of Ken Keller. Vice Chair Dembowski stated that the EDC's response article should be factual and clear. Chair Kurfehs pointed out the FHI study which had been done a couple of years ago. The Commission discussed the residential and commercial space and mixed use developments in the Town. The number of vacant commercial units currently throughout the Town was noted by Commissioner Fisher. Chair Kurfehs stated that over a year ago, the Zoning Commission had discussed needing commercial development on all first floors in the area, whether the first floor had road frontage or not. As many as 22 retailers could be in one development with 22,000 square feet. Commissioner Tolmoff asked if there could be more flexibility with the development of the building, so the use would be implemented only when needed, but Chair Kurfehs noted that this would be a "tough" concept for the Town to approve.

Chair Kurfehs indicated that most developers are looking to build apartments at this point because there is currently a demand for housing. Chair Kurfehs stated that some developments in the Town Center have been approved, but not yet built, such as Green Acres, which did not have enough equity to meet financing requirements. Secretary Matte stated that H. Kurfehs should counter square footage issues raised in the opinion article, and indicate how this square footage is difficult to fill with commercial use.

Vice Chair Dembowski noted that there have been public hearings and two years of public comment, as well as surveys done by former Community Development Director K. Daniel, so there has been a wealth of opportunity for residents to offer public comment regarding the plans for the Town Center. Commissioner Fisher asked about the statistics on the surveys, and Vice Chair Dembowski replied that he will research the matter.

Commissioner Fisher and Secretary Matte agreed that when drafting the response article, Chair Kurfehs should focus on several key points, rather than attempting to answer every point in the article.

Chair Kurfehs stated that the accusation of making "quick money" is something that does not make sense, as developments take many years to finance and build. The previous Costco development and the time taken to develop this addition in Brookfield was discussed.

Vice Chair Dembowski stated that the discussion of the demographic gap should also be included in Chair Kurfehs' draft article.

Commissioner Tolmoff pointed out that pictures of the current building should be added to the website. It was also mentioned that another option is to write a longer piece with the possibility of posting it on brookfieldedc.org. Chair Kurfehs reiterated that “there is no such thing as a quick buck in development”. Commissioner Fisher indicated that the Commission should have as many of the Town’s facts as possible in the article. Commissioner Fisher stated that he does not believe the draft article should respond to any more than four points.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes (07/21/15 & 08/18/15) –

- **07/21/15: Commissioner Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 21st meeting. Chair Kurfehs seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.**
- **08/18/15: Vice Chair Dembowski made a motion to approve the minutes [of the August 18th meeting]. Secretary Matte seconded the motion, and it carried, with Commissioner Fisher abstaining.**

3. Update on Website Functioning & Newsletter Contact List – Vice Chair Dembowski noted that the action item for everyone at the last meeting was to take a look at the website and respond to him with ideas of how to replace the Business Incubator page. Vice Chair Dembowski will share his ideas for the page with the Commissioners, and get their responses.

Vice Chair Dembowski stated that the grand opening event for the Town Beach and Cadigan Park is planned on Saturday, the 26th from 2:00 to 7:00, and this may be a great opportunity to collect some updated pictures for the EDC website.

E. Cole Prescott will draft a rejection note to send to businesses which are not located/based in Brookfield who are looking to advertise services on the Business Directories.

4. CERC: Municipal Economic Development Program Self-Assessment – Community Readiness Assessment – Vice Chair Dembowski reviewed and answered the questions before the meeting, and shared his answers with the Commission. The Commission reviewed his answers to the assessment, and indicated revisions item by item.

Noted below are the sections of the Assessment, as revised by the Commission:

A – Community Economic Development Function: no change

B – Designated Community Contact Person(s) for Business or Prospective Projects: one change

C – Existing Business Visitation and Public Private Partnerships in the Community: two changes

D – Business Friendly Land Use Planning: changed D9 to no; D14 no to yes; D19 no to yes

E – Commercial/industrial Land Inventory and Marketing: changed E10 from no to yes
F – Economic Development Oriented Communications: no change

Vice Chair Dembowski stated that he would be interested in seeing how other Commissions/Boards would score this: Planning, Zoning, Board of Selectmen, Land Use Office in Town Hall, Inland Wetlands. Chair Kurfehs stated that he will send the EDC's results to CERC, and the assessment will be sent to the other Boards and Commissions for their input; Vice Chair Dembowski noted the need to include a response deadline when requesting feedback from the other Boards and Commissions.

At this time, the Commission returned to agenda item 6, Other Discussion.

6. Other Discussion:

- Encroachment Permit – Vice Chair Dembowski gave a brief update as to the status of the encroachment permit and the OSTA permit. Chair Kurfehs asked that when Vice Chair Dembowski has enough information from the DOT relative to the approval of the encroachment permit, to write a blurb and send it along to E. Cole Prescott for website posting.
- Tax Increment Financing Workshop: Chair Kurfehs stated that he had attended the Tax Increment Financing Workshop, which is a new tool for economic growth. There are many different options, and he sees the benefit of gap financing for developments. The developer makes the investment based on an investment schedule, and if the investment on the schedule is made, a tax break is issued on a “pay as you go” basis. This has led to a lot of development which would not normally have happened in the areas where it has been implemented. This makes it possible to come up with the needed equity in a tax write-off/discount. Chair Kurfehs shared the information he had received with the Commission. The next step is to have a discussion with the First Selectman, to determine if there is interest to proceed. This would be far more beneficial to the Town than the business incubator, according to Chair Kurfehs. Secretary Matte stated that he thinks there is nothing to be lost to have the conversation about this matter. Chair Kurfehs stated that one of the largest problems with building developments is financing. Chair Kurfehs stated that there is so much optional material that formulating the Town's final plan will be like a decision-tree process. If there is interest to move forward a consultant would be required to customize the plan to the Town's needs.

7. **Adjournment – Vice Chair Dembowski made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 PM. Commissioner Tolmoff seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.**