

Litchfield Economic Development Commission
DRAFT Meeting Minutes
Wednesday September 24, 2014

David Dean, EDC Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM

Present

Regular members Renee Betar, Kay Carroll, David Dean, Mitchell Fishman, Cleve Fuessenich and Alexander VandenBerg. Alternate member Doug Parker.

Also present were Jocelyn Ayer, Heather Boesch-Wages and Fred Colson.

Appointment of Alternates

The Chairman appointed Doug Parker a full member of the Commission.

Approval of Minutes

The Chairman asked if there were any corrections to the draft minutes of the meeting of August 27, 2014 previously circulated. The only correction was his noting that his name should be spelled "Dean" not "Dead." Upon motion duly made and seconded, the draft minutes were unanimously approved as so corrected.

Public Comment

The members of the public present introduced themselves. Fred Colson explained that he had recently moved back to Litchfield from a town in Colorado, where he had been active in the Chamber of Commerce. He is also a former chief financial officer of the Forman School and business owner. Heather Boesch-Wages has lived in Litchfield since 1996 (on Meadow Street since 1998). She and her husband own a printing and marketing company located in Middlebury. Both are interested in the work of the EDC.

Jocelyn Ayer explained that she is the Community and Economic Development Director of the newly-formed Northwest Hills Council of Governments (NHCOG), which takes in 21 towns. She distributed a copy of the two-page FY 2015 Goals and Outcomes of this organization, and stated that the current primary focus was on infrastructure development and supporting local economic development groups. She also noted that she was preparing an application for a Farm Viability Grant to assist local farmers, and said she could assist us with grant applications. Further, she suggested we consider forming an Economic Development District with other towns to become eligible for federal grant monies, noting that she had recently obtained a \$250,000 grant that would support hiring staff to work with 8 towns in the county (not including Litchfield).

Ms. Ayer also noted that part of her role was to work with local Planning & Zoning bodies and to encourage them to share ideas of how they could help local businesses to succeed. She distributed a three-page "checklist of action steps" that local P&Z commissions and other governing bodies could take to help support town "Main Streets" and local business. She also passed out a list of questions that planners could ask local businesses to clarify the type of assistance that could be useful.

Main Items

- **Jail acquisition.** Cleve Fuessenich reported that he had not yet met with the successful buyer, Russ Barton, but would do so soon. He would invite him to attend one of our future meetings and discuss his ideas for use of the property.

Monthly Updates

- **Bantam** – (1) Mr. Vandenberg reported that there seemed to be some interest in the old Aerospace building. (2) It was noted that a new boutique had opened at "the Cove."
- **Litchfield** – (1) Stop 'n Shop – There was nothing new to report on this project; (2) despite a notice posted some time ago at the property, there did not seem to be any work going on at the premises on South Street that might be the new location of Casa Bacchus; (3) the French Antiques store on West Street is closing and conducting a "going out of business " sale; and (4) work was proceeding apace at the proposed distillery to be located on the South side of Route 202 near the Wamogo high school. Mr. Dean reported that the venture's first product to market would be a gin, because gin did not require the aging needed to make bourbon.
- **Commercial/Business properties** – There seemed to be no activity vs. last report on storefronts around the Green, except that an attractive new gallery had opened in the space on West Street formerly occupied by Casa Bacchus. Mr. Dean noted that a group was proposing to open a 10,000 square foot liquor store in the downtown shopping mall in Torrington (where Staples is located), and that this would pose significant competition for existing package stores.

Old Business

It was noted that the Planning & Zoning Commission had conducted a public hearing on the proposal of the Litchfield Community Greenway to improve and extend the so-called "ghost trail" that runs from the base of South Lake Street behind the cemeteries to White Woods Road. Previously, there had been concern expressed by some residents of South Lake Street about cars parking on that street and on the grass bordering the cemeteries, and the town had recently installed a large number of "No Parking" signs in response.

New Business

The Chairman asked the members to postpone the two items noticed under New Business until the next meeting, and this change was approved.

Kay Carroll reported that there was a group of people in town interested in reviving the Litchfield Grange as meeting place for farmers and others, especially younger farmers, and that the former Grange building on Route 202 was still standing.

Doug Parker reported that there was a group of residents in Torrington concerned with historic preservation that was interested in becoming more active. Cleve Fuessenich said that the Litchfield Historic Preservation Trust thought of its role as encompassing neighboring towns, and volunteered to get in touch with someone identified by Doug Parker.

The Chairman reported that there was an organization interested specifically in providing financing for small businesses that had been rejected by or could not qualify for a conventional bank loan. This is the Community Economic Development Fund in Meriden (www.cedf.com). Jocelyn Ayer noted that this was one of the groups listed on her handout from the Northwestern Connecticut Regional Planning Cooperative, which also provides contact information for a number of other helpful groups.

Carroll proposed, VandenBerg seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:03 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell S. Fishman, Acting Secretary
Economic Development Commission
David Dean, Chairman
Economic Development Commission