

**Meeting Minutes
Economic Development Commission
October 20, 2011
7:00pm Human Services Building**

Attendees: Blunt White, Ed Hart, Amy Arruda, Wendy Bury, Paul Burgess, Robynne Madison, Dan Oliverio

Call to order: 7:00pm

Approval of prior Minutes: (dated September 15, 2011) Motion: Chairman White
Second: Wendy Bury

Old Business:

The **Business Guide** was further discussed by the committee. To date only one department from the Town Hall has responded to First Selectman Haberek's request to review the draft version of the guide and provide input specific to each departments' function that would be beneficial to the prospective new business owner. A follow up request will be made to the First Selectman.

A copy of the guide was also provided to Tricia Cunningham of the Chamber of Commerce so that she may review it and provide feedback on necessary and unnecessary content.

The key discussion points of the Commission were to determine the actual extent of content to be provided with the guide as well as the target audience. The current length of the guide is over 25 pages before added content from the Town departments. Some Commission members felt this was much too long and a shorter, brochure format was more appropriate, while others thought that if it were to be a business guide for prospective new business owners, the more detailed version was appropriate to clearly outline the individual facets of not only doing business in the Town of Stonington, with checklists and explanations of why certain steps were necessary, but to also provide information that is critical to the success and sustainability of a business in general that are seemingly often overlooked.

The idea was put forth to create both versions, brochure and detailed, on-line so the inquirer could choose how much detail they did or didn't want to see via links and section expansion options.

In terms of target audience, it was unclear as to who was being targeted from the content - the home business owner, small business/store front/brick and mortar owner, the larger corporations, or someone already in business. It was determined that the audience was the prospective small business owner, home based or store front, as this would have greater impact on the town to fill vacant spaces and provide more options for economic development. The larger corporations, while ideal for quickly boosting the tax base, were less likely to materialize given the available properties in the town.

Commission member Hart noted that the inclusion of available properties was important so that a prospective business owner could review the list and have an idea of what property/location would work best for their business without having to search on their own. The listing would provide the name of the listing agent that they can then contact on their own or drive by the property to help narrow down their search.

The Commission members compiling the data agreed to go back and reorganize the content of the draft document so that both formats were achievable. This would be done by starting with a basic checklist of necessary steps for business startup and providing a brief explanation of each step.

The Commission members also discussed the suggestion of testing the accuracy of the guide by having someone actually use it and identify any gaps, pros, and cons.

The discussion of listing properties led into the agenda item for the **EDC Website**. There has been very little activity on the site and essentially no new visitors. The idea of setting up a database for the properties to be listed was vetted awhile back and was determined to be too expensive and time consuming to maintain by any commission member. The idea of posting a listing rather than develop a database was discussed, but that too would entail a degree of maintenance to determine if properties are still available. Any changes would also come at an additional cost to the Commission as the service provider would need to make the changes.

The Commission is still faced with the challenge of getting people to visit the website. If traffic were more extensive, further investment into the site would become more advantageous.

Under Business Outreach, the status of the CT Castings building was discussed. The owner is in the process of securing funding to clean up the property as well as for additional financial assistance and incentives.

Discussion took place about adding success stories and business highlights to the website, noting the proposal sent to the Architectural Review Board by Brustolon and the recent new comers, Tractor Supply and LaQuinta. Additionally, the filming of "Great Hope Springs" in the Borough was a success story to local community due to the economic boost it provided drawing in not only spending from cast and crew but all the draw of outside folks to the area.

Member Hart opened discussions around the EDC getting more involved and possibly taking a position on development projects such as affordable housing development plans, in particular the plans submitted for the development on Route 1 near Rutmans Furniture. It is believed if the EDC can agree to support a proposal, the plan would have a better chance of securing the backing of other commissions and of getting approved. Chairman White took the action to reach out to the applicant of the Route 1 Property and to see if the EDC could in conjunction with the Conservation Commission, hear a presentation of the plan being proposed.

Regional and Local Tourism Marketing: the announcement of the Mystic Seaport's closure this coming winter for six weeks was discussed particularly the impact it would have on tourism and business for the OMV shop owners, the Aquarium and downtown business owners. Members Bury and Arruda took the action to reach out to the Chamber as well as OMV and Aquarium liaisons to discuss a potential strategy or marketing campaign to stress that Mystic itself is still open.

Signage Regulations: It was brought to the attention of the Commission that signage in downtown Pawcatuck, while promised, has not yet appeared. Directional signs to businesses and restaurants are necessary especially for those businesses tucked away off the main street. Signage regulations do not permit the types of signs that would typically be put out to draw attention to an open business, therefore hindering sales.

Planning for POCD: Discussion, not specifically toward the editing of the POCD took place, but more so around setting goals and objectives of the EDC in terms of priorities and adding value to the Town and businesses. The Commission requested specific goal and objectives to be outlined for the coming year. It also believed that more than one objective could be worked at a time. Chairman White took the action to develop an outline of what needed to be accomplished and what the high level plan might look like to achieve the goals and objectives.

Other Business: Member Bury gave an update on the Roundtable Discussions she has been engaged with for the Non-Profits. The NPRT Committee has asked Sen. Maynard to get further information regarding the Department of Revenue and Policy Managements review of NP's and based upon certain criteria (being requested of Sen. Maynard), removing some NP's from non-taxable to taxable. Other than the notification of the review, no further information has been provided and is clearly a concern for the Commission. A good understand of the criteria is imperative.

New Business: The proposal was made by Chairman White to officially move the meeting schedule to the 2nd Thursday of each month from the long withstanding 3rd Thursday of the month. All EDC members present voted to accept the change and submitted the change request to the Town Clerk in accordance with FOI mandates.

Meeting Adjournment: 8:50pm

Approved 11/17/2011

Blair White
Chairman