I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Chairman Theresa Avey
Commissioner Maria Pane
Commissioner Dana Havens
Commissioner David Marsden
Commissioner Robert Rioux

Town Council Liaison Gail Budrejko

Economic Development Director Andrew Brecher

ABSENT:

Commissioner Fernando Rosa (excused)
Commissioner Sharon Dunning (excused)

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Rioux made a motion to accept the April 3, 2019 minutes. Commissioner Pane seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

VI. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Director Brecher updated the status of bills with potential to affect development in Newington in the current session of the Connecticut General Assembly: HB5259, HB5260, HB6470/HB7421, SB18/HB7098/File 512. Councilor Budrejko summarized the appearance of Newington officials at the 4/29/19 hearing of the Government Administration and Elections Committee on HB7421.

Director Brecher summarized recent development activities:

--Transit Village Design District regulations are being finalized for presentation to the Town Council. If the Town Council endorses those regulations, they will be submitted to the Town Plan and Zoning Commission for approval.
Hartford Magazine announced its “Best of” awards for 2019. Thirty-three enterprises and individuals with connections to Newington were recognized, receiving a total of forty awards in different categories.

Local Market Plaza: There has been some interest in purchasing the property.

3333 Berlin Turnpike: Eversource has received a new offer. No information is known as to what the potential new owners’ plans might be.

287 Main Street: The last vacant space in the plaza at the northwest corner of Main and Stoddard has been leased for a barber shop.

985 Main Street: Mojo Solar Studio announced they would be closing on May 25, 2019.

10 East Cedar Street: White Orchid Spa opened in the space formerly occupied by Home Care Assistance, which had relocated to the Berlin Turnpike.

80 Fenn Road: Montana Nights Axe Throwing is seeking TPZ approval to add more parking.

151 Carr Avenue: WhipLashes Salon held its grand opening on April 14, 2019.

36 Holly Drive: The front portion of the building is being marketed for retail.

2143 Berlin Turnpike: Callahan’s Bowl-a-Rama is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

2327 Berlin Turnpike: The former Sunset Cleaners space is being renovated for a new Bizwiz Sign, Print and Copy Center.

2391 Berlin Turnpike: Artichoke Basille’s Pizza has asked TPZ for permission to add outdoor seating.

3153 Berlin Turnpike: Neptune Cremation Service is opening in the space formerly occupied by Shine Studio.

3491 Berlin Turnpike: DLC, owner of the former Toys-R-Us building, is still seeking new tenants, contrary to an earlier report.

In response to a comment at the April 3, 2019 EDC meeting, the Information Technology Director is pursuing adding a general complaint form to the Town’s website.

Director Brecher also reported:

Newington’s unemployment rate has drifted downwards again to 3.7% from 3.9% in February, 2019.

A report received from Commissioner Marsden indicates Newington’s commercial vacancy rate is an exceptionally low 3.9% on a base of 9.3 million square feet of commercial space. This compares to a low of 3.2% at the end of 2016 and a high of 12.9% at the beginning of 2012.

A rating call related to the upcoming sale of bonds for the town hall/community center project revealed a strong interest by Standard & Poors in the potential for new development throughout town, with particular attention given to possibilities for new housing.

Plaza Azteca will be holding their annual Cinco de Mayo party on Sunday, May 5, 2019 after receiving approval, with conditions, from TPZ. OFI will be holding their annual Cinco de Mayo party for employees, customers and vendors on Thursday, May 2, 2019 at their headquarters on Garfield Street.

Director Brecher distributed the 2019 edition of the Lucy Robbins Welles library’s Newington Information Packet and urged commissioners to become familiar with the data contained in that packet.

VII. OLD BUSINESS.

Chairman Avey reported she is becoming familiar with District 3 and that there were no changes in businesses that she detected in the past month.

Director Brecher distributed the latest draft of the “Newington Means Business” brochure, a list of potential pictures that could be included in that brochure and a draft script to be used when visiting businesses. Commissioners were requested to provide their comments on all the handouts.
VIII. NEW BUSINESS

Director Brecher distributed a conversation starter entitled, “What Should Be Our Sales Pitch?” Commissioners cited strengths including location, the Berlin Turnpike, Town Center, free parking and community support. They also suggested consideration of using a professional marketing firm to develop a “brand” for Newington—which should be tied into the “Newington Means Business” brochure being developed.

IX. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE REPORT

Pete Forcellina, Executive Director of the Chamber, reported on new Chamber members, Business Before/After Hours events, collaboration with the Environmental Quality Commission’s Earth Day clean-up and the upcoming Cruising Newington car show. He also reminded commissioners that “Best of” Newington voting is underway, with winners to be announced at the Chamber’s Annual Meeting and New Year’s Eve Party on May 31, 2019. Raffle tickets are available to win a cruise worth $2,500. Only 400 tickets will be sold and the winner will be selected at the Annual Meeting.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Patty Foley urged commissioners to speak into their microphones. She offered to provide a video at the next EDC meeting that was made in the 1980’s to showcase the town.

XI. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Rioux made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Pane seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted:

Sophie Glenn,
Recording Secretary