

NEWINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

September 2, 2020

I. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Theresa Avery called the Zoom meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

III. **ROLL CALL**

Present

Chairman Theresa Avery
Commissioner Dana Havens
Commissioner David Marsden
Commissioner Jerilyn Nagel
Commissioner Maria Pane
Commissioner Robert Rioux
Commissioner Fernando Rosa
Commissioner Clifford Stamm
Councilor Sharon Braverman
Commissioner Jay Slater
Commissioner Clifford Stamm

IV. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The motion to approve the minutes of March 4, 2020 was made by Jay Slater, seconded by Jerilyn Nagel. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion.

V. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Barbara Squillicote wanted to welcome everyone back and had a correction of the minutes of the March 4, 2020 meeting. She corrected a statement that said she had informed the Commission that Crest Pontiac and the National Welding sites were available. She had asked what the status was of those two parcels of land. She has learned that Dakota is still going ahead with plans for housing. She also asked if the committee had a listing of businesses that might have closed since January or have moved out of town, and if so, where is that list, and if it's not done, why not? Thank you.

Chairman Avery knew of a few businesses that had closed; Mindful Yoga Center in the center of Newington did close but Stronghouse Yoga Center has taken its place. There was no knowledge of any other businesses except LaserQuest.

Theresa Avery
Town Clerk

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Councilor Braverman added that Pier One closed, or will be closing officially.

Chairman Avery knew of some businesses that would be moving into town. The Ren kitchen is going to be moving into the old Ann and Hope area and developers have been meeting with town officials about other areas. There is someone looking at Keeney and Best Market to redevelop that area.

Barbara Squillicote stated that there should be a list of businesses that closed or moved out or town and what buildings were vacant since that should be important to this town and every town and the public should be aware of that since that impacts the town and taxes.

VI. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE REPORT

Pete Forcellina summarized the Chamber's activities during the Covid crisis, concentrating initially on maintaining the current membership status and in the last couple of months more stress on trying to establish new programs. Membership is now over seventy percent and the mark of eighty percent should be achieved. Weekly Zoom meetings averaged 25 to 30 members which was as good as or better than when in person meetings were being held. In total the Chamber did 25 member videos that were put on Facebook to the entire membership.

In the last two months the Chamber has gained eleven new members which is good for a growth mode. In the last year the annual meeting was missed, the annual dinner was not held, and the silent auction will not be held in November. A drive-in movie will be held on Saturday, September 26th, set up for up to fifty cars.

Question was asked if LaserQuest had gone out of business and they are going out of business, may not have gone out yet. They did have to close because of Covid.

It was suggested by Dana Havens that a virtual auction might be considered or doing it on NCTV.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

The Committee working on the flyer will go back to IT to get the picture and after getting that the flyer will be good to go.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

Keith Chapman indicated that there have been meetings with a couple of developers that are looking at a couple of sites in town and optimistically hoping that one or two of them come forward. The Covid19 fallout is going to be more severe than originally thought. Looking at the Berlin Turnpike, the retail outlets are diminishing and there is concern that some of the other businesses are just hanging on.

There has been success in Town Hall for the last six months that no one has had Covid-19 however last night it was learned that there was an individual that acquired the infection. That has required thinking about what is being done in Town Hall.

The town is still closed basically and will remain closed until the Health Director gives the okay to open up. The town is providing service but not in the way that they would like to. From the

town's perspective we will continue to strive toward new business, retain and maintain those that are here.

Mondays are dedicated for recruitment and retention. The retention side, it's difficult to meet with them and the infrastructure we have is being improved and maintained hoping to recruit new businesses to town.

There is an investor currently negotiating with the owner of the previous Bonefish Grill site, a restaurant owner that has several restaurants in the general area and would be a welcome addition to the turnpike. There have been discussions about the Main Street, Lowery Place, Constance Leigh area about Keeney Manufacturing and Best Market, so there is activity, marketing studies, and the Town has been invited to participate, so that is moving along.

The hotel and garage on Myra Cohen busway still is moving forward. The National Welding site is being talked about with developers and looks very promising. That area of town could be the next boom area for the town because of the busway and the college, Route 9 and the potential train station. The parking lots for the busway now are not full at either location since many of the residents who take the bus are working from home.

Jerilyn Nagal talked with a church in Hartford with 50 members are looking for a site to rent. Some of the churches in town are struggling with membership and some facilities might even be shared.

There are businesses that will be moving into empty stores on the Berlin Turnpike, Burlington Coat Factory is looking at the Toys 'R Us building. There is a change going on on the Berlin Turnpike and hopefully after the Covid-19 is over the Berlin Turnpike will remain active.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Gail Budrejko stated that the restaurants were concerned about fall coming and the revenue will decrease if the inside capacity is not expanded, and she suggested we might approach our legislators to look at the numbers again, if the outdoor dining is not viable.

That is being mandated by Governor Lamont and the Chamber and Economic Development Commission can only advocate to the local legislators. There has been no decision on opening Phase 3, waiting until schools reopened to see the effect that had on the Covid-19, hopefully in September. It was suggested that EDC and the Town Council and the Chamber could draft something to send to the legislators.

The gas station in the center of town removed the dirt that had accumulated from the change over of the pumps, the old pumps need to be removed and the area cleaned up. The Zoning Enforcement Officer and the Blight Officer had that area cleaned up.

The plan is to extend sidewalks on both sides down to the new town hall, and beyond, all the way down to Willard as well as on the south side, to take in up to the park, making it more accessible for walkers from the center of town.

Chip Stamm suggested that some of the business in town might be interested in contributing to some of the things needed in the center of town, that businesses might be more interested in sponsoring that than advertising in the local papers.

State funding has been applied for, for several projects and state funding was sought for the center of town, complicating that is that there is no way of knowing right now what is going to happen with the Keney property. The pedestrian walkways going down Garfield Street, now that the town hall is finished and the old town hall removed, if the busses can be moved to a permanent location, that whole area can become a very attractive walking area for the public. It is a definite advantage to have the park near the town hall also.

Projects on the table right now moving forward are the Robbins Avenue reconstruction from Main Street to Maple Hill and the New Britain Avenue Maple Hill intersection area, there is a plan to redevelop that whole area infrastructure wise with new driveways, new curbing, new lighting. A grant is being sought for the intersection of Main Street, Stoddard Avenue and Hartford Avenue that will include new sidewalks, new lighting and new curbing and plans are being developed for the length of Maple Hill Avenue and redesigning the Cedar Street/Maple Hill Avenue area to better align with Alumni Road. Those are four projects that are currently being pursued.

Chip Stamm questioned if there was a plan that had something to do with a walkway and a bicycle track, developed by Cathy Hall. That might be an action item to resurrect.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

XI. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Dana Havens wanted to let the businesses that survived know, happy for those who did and sorry for those that didn't and that they could continue to come to us and to Keith, mostly to Keith for assistance.

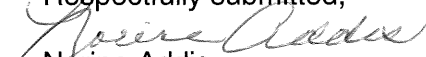
Chip Stamm felt that it might be a good idea to have a sub-committee to investigate some of the things that could be done to bring things up to date, cleaning of the waterways, dredging the brooks to avoid flooding, all will take time. The waterway system, the vehicle replacement system program, the two pools that are in town are old were not updated as they should have.

TPZ changed the rules for breweries and distilleries so when people are out and about they can be aware that they are now allowed in the town.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Norine Addis,
Recording Secretary