



CHESTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes - APPROVED

January 08, 2024 at 4:30pm

Location: Chester Town Hall Meeting Room - F1 2 and Microsoft Teams

1. Seating of members

EDC Chair Pat Bandzes called the meeting to order at 4:35pm.

Commission members present: Pat Bandzes, Rebecca Mead, Douglas Mahana, Carlie Dailey.

Tourism Representative: Bekah Wright (virtual).

Audience of Citizens: Heather Amara-Miles.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Rebecca Mead motioned for approval of 12/18/23 Special Meeting DRAFT minutes with edits. Carlie seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Commercial Listings and Transactions Update

59 Winthrop Rd (Kenyon Property)

The town is moving forward with this sale of this property. The Board of Selectmen (BOS) have accepted one of the two remaining offers on the property. The town attorney will meet with the buyer's attorney as a next step in the sale. The Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Commission has granted the necessary 8-24 referral for the sale, but the buyer will still need to secure zoning permissions for the property's planned use. A town meeting will be scheduled regarding this sale, with time and date yet to be determined.

33 Liberty Street

The sale of this property has recently closed. Pat and First Selectman Cindy Lignar have met with the buyers, Mike and Amanda Tevis will co-own the property with Artist Kelly Bailey. The new owners plan to create an art facility that would combine work and living spaces for artists to create, share, and collaborate. This facility would be similar to others around the country and also in Connecticut, and is expected to add positively to Chester's arts and culture. The Tevis's still need approval from P&Z, but their planned use is in accordance with Connecticut state building codes.

132 Main St. (Chesterfields)

The new owners of 33 Liberty Street have submitted an offer on this property as well, but the sale has not yet closed. Engineering inspections have identified issues that may delay the deal, since the prospective buyers specialize in rehabilitating old buildings and do not want to demolish the existing structure. Pat inquired with

the prospective buyer regarding the ½ acre lot across the street, and they indicated that they would need it included in the sale. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

4. Business Outreach Update

EDC is conducting ongoing meetings with the top commercial tax payers in Chester. Upcoming meetings include Aerocision and Masonicare. Meetings with Whelen and Chapco are still to be scheduled. EDC still plans to organize a meeting with local marinas and the Chester Harbor Commission. Paul Radichi will act as liaison to the Harbor Commission.

5. Old Business

Merchant Rack Cards

EDC is still awaiting banking information for distribution of funding to sponsor the annual merchant rack cards. Rebecca Mead will meet with Chris Howe from the Merchant's Group this week to discuss a variety of items, including the banking information. EDC will keep this item on old business until the funds have been transferred.

Business-to-Business Presentation to Merchants

Rebecca Mead reported that the Merchant's Group is still interested in pursuing this business-to-business advertising opportunity and will discuss it further with them this week.

Cell Tower Lease Agreement

Negotiations are still underway with the cell tower development company, and once they are agreed, the town attorneys will review the lease agreement in detail. The primary goal of this project has been and remains to improve cell service for the Village District and as many residents and businesses of Chester for their added safety and convenience. The BOS is making every effort to ensure a deal moves forward that can be of benefit to most Chester residents, however, the town will not know the exact coverage area until the lease agreement is finalized and the propagation study conducted by the developer.

EDC Initiatives

The Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) is opening another round of TRAILS grants. There was a recent consultation call with RiverCOG, in which EDC presented plans for the Chester spur of the Heritage Trail, while Chester Parks & Recreation (P&R) presented plans for the boardwalk project. RiverCOG recommended advancing the application for the boardwalk project, due to it being completely on town-owned land. Aaron Page of P&R will be submitting the grant application. The boardwalk project will continue to be included as a part of the overall Heritage Trail..

Pat brought to the EDC's attention that any road markings (e.g., sharrows) on state roads as a result of the Heritage Trail are subject to being lost during future roadway improvement work. In these cases, the town would have to have them re-applied through a road-marking firm.

6. New Business

Links for Chester Website

The EDC is undertaking an update of the EDC landing page on ChesterCT.org. This project will include an update of all text sections, as well as an audit of links. Carlie will lead the website update. Suggestions for additional links included: both Chester and regional Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD); Middlesex Chamber of Commerce; Chester Merchant's Group; RiverCOG Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS); and maps of regional bike and pedestrian plans. Pat will assist by surveying pages from other towns' economic commissions for additional ideas. Findings and plans will be discussed at the next EDC meeting.

FY 2023-2024 Funds

Ideas for the remainder of the EDC's 2023-2024 budget were discussed. Suggestions included old ideas like permanent downtown parking signage or water-filling stations, as well as new ideas like downtown bicycle racks or parking lines on the Maple Street and Water Street municipal parking lots. EDC will consult with P&R and DPW for additional insights on the new ideas.

Additionally, capital budget planning for 2024-2025 is underway, with applications due by Friday, January 19th. While EDC may be able to add proposals at this point, they would need to compete with necessary proposals from other departments like the proposed parking lot at Chester Hose Company. Discussion on possibilities included the Heritage Trail section from the ferry to Main Street with signage, and public restrooms. EDC will contact Chester Public Works for assistance with the budget package for submission. Rebecca Mead will find out where we have purchased permanent signage from in the past.

Middlesex Chamber Economic Outlook – 1/24/24, 11 am -1 pm, Rocky Hill

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce will host an "Economic Outlook" Luncheon featuring Ron Insana, Award-winning Journalist, Financial Analyst, Commentator, Author and Contributor to CNBC and MSNBC. Rebecca Mead will attend and report back.

7. Commissioner/Tourism Updates

Bekah Wright, Tourism Representative, provided an update on the Art & Literary event, to be held February 9th-11th throughout Chester. Events are set to include music, storytelling, and one-act plays.

The Chester Tractor Parade is scheduled to return on February 18th, from 1-3 pm. They are trying to arrange for ice-carving as well. There is a tentative rain date for the event of February 25th.

Town of Chester
203 Middlesex Avenue
Chester Connecticut 06412

telephone: 860-526-0013
facsimile: 860-526-0004
web page: chesterct.org

Preparations for Earth Day 2024 are underway. Events are scheduled in collaboration with Energia for Sunday, February 21st at 6 pm. Discussion is ongoing on the possibility of additional Earth Day events that might last throughout the weekend.

Rebecca Mead reported that the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission (MCRC) is re-opening their grant program in March. Grants will be available to local businesses to mitigate DOT-related impacts, or to spur business growth. EDC will continually communicate with Chester businesses to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to apply. Last cycle, MCRC had 78 applicants and they hope to double that number this year.

8. Audience of Citizens

There were no comments.

9. Adjourn

The next meeting will be held on Monday, February 12, at 4:30 pm.

Carlie motioned to adjourn. Douglas seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by
Douglas Mahana, Recording Secretary