



CHESTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes - APPROVED

April 12, 2023 at 4:00pm

Location: Chester Town Office Meeting Room

1. Call to Order/ Roll Call

Meeting called to order at 4:01 pm by Jon Joslow, Chair. Commission members present: Pat Bandzes,, Rebecca Mead, Cindy Lignar, Carlie Dailey, and Charlene Janecek (via Microsoft Teams).

Audience of citizens: Carol Lewitt, Bekah Wright, Bruce Josephy, and Susan Wright

2. Approval of 3/13/23 DRAFT Minutes

Pat sent one edit that was incorporated. Motion to approve minutes with edit by Cindy, second by Pat, motion carried unanimously.

3. Governance Study Committee- Selectmen next steps

The Board of Selectmen will be making motions to accept a resolution for the Charter Commission at tonight's meeting.

4. Recent commercial listings & Transactions

Pat provided a brief explanation of the document for the audience of citizens then provided updates on the following properties.

12-14 Main St. (Wayfinder building)

This property has been for sale for a long time and sold on 3/2/23 to someone from out of town. Pat will find out more info.

9 Water St. (former Bank building)

Honeycone was interested in moving their business to this building, but there have been problems with water at the site.

Carol Lewitt noted it would cost a minimum of \$120,000 to bring potable water to the site. Honeycone needs more space, they can't keep up with public trash nor the increase in demand at the current location. John Rapp from River Tavern is also hoping to open a wine bar and expand his space into the current Honeycone space. Jon suggests adding this to the agenda for our next meeting. Pat will run the May 8th 2023 meeting.

20 Water St. (Doctor's Office)

The current lease goes through June 2024. EDC is still interested in using this building as a public bathroom or other visito-friendly facility.

244 Middlesex Ave (formerly Ted Tine)

Greggory Cichowski is the new owner. Some site work is being done, but more info needed.

33 Liberty (Brooks building)

This property is now being marketed as residential for \$725,000 (no longer commercial use and zoning changes are needed to provide multi-residential housing opportunities).

33 North Main St. (Norma Terris)

No update since the last meeting (2 shows are scheduled for the 2023 season). Article from *ink Publication*, Vol 18, Issue 204 alludes to the previous project from Caryn Paradis is still in play.

59 Winthrop (Kenyon Property - formerly referred to as Skyview in EDC minutes)

Phase 1, 2, and 3 came back clean. No significant environmental contamination to be dealt with. Waiting on the final report to move forward with putting up for sale.

5. Progress on existing Town Initiatives- Charlene

No update.

6. Road Safety Audit (RSA)

Cindy provided a brief update of the report for the audience of citizens. The RSA final report was completed and received in March 2023 and identified areas for pedestrian and bike safety improvements on state roads within Chester. The final report was posted to the town website on April 11, 2023. Cindy encourages everyone to review it. Next steps as a town, we need to identify what recommendations we prioritize. The 3-Town (East Haddam, Haddam, & Chester) Lower CT River Valley Heritage Loop should also be considered in this endeavor. The ad hoc committee mentioned in #7 below can help identify these priorities.

Cindy noted that the RSA report findings provides a foundation to proceed forward to apply for infrastructure state and federal funding. Currently there is an abundance of federal funding available as well as funding from other sources, including Sustainable CT.

Charlene noted the East Haddam Bridge work is on schedule.

Rebecca confirmed the same and added that the bridge closures are still being planned through the end of June.

7. East Haddam Spur Trail (Heritage Loop Trail)

Pat reported that Haddam, East Haddam, and Chester are working together to create a 17-mile multi-use path that will connect the great assets of these three communities. East Haddam applied for a DEEP Engineering Feasibility Grant to help finance an off road section of the path.

Three of the four legs of the trail in Chester are state roads (Ferry Rd. to Moravellas to Main St to Rt 154 back to Moravellas) - we must go by what the state will allow.

Jon noted that we should give the Board of Finance notice to put this on their radar so they can budget for the funding of the project as well as maintenance.

Pat noted funding is available from the state, sustainability, and ARPA. RiverCOG will also help guide us through this.

Next Steps: This dovetails nicely with the RSA and visitor-friendly initiatives. There was a discussion about putting together an ad hoc committee to advise the EDC on priorities, cost information, funding sources, etc. Charlene, agrees to put this on the Board of Selectmen's agenda to create the ad hoc.

The three towns will meet with RiverCOG this month to discuss the best way to proceed. We expect a lot of help because three towns are involved.

Last Step: How do we want to brand this? Current name is *Connecticut River Heritage Recreational Loop*. Pat noted that the former 5-town EDC had initiated a branding effort for the region. She will get this information from Susan Wright (former EDC chair) and share with the group.

Jon noted that items #6 and 7 above are dealing with infrastructure that will impact the Visitor Friendly Initiatives the EDC has been discussing.

8. EDC Open Projects/Initiatives:

- a. Coordinating Visitor Friendly Initiatives (see attachment previously discussed)
- b. Addressing Chester's bulky waste / recycling canceled program with Deep River.
 - i. Chester is still allowed to bring bulky waste to Deep River Dump. The only thing we cannot bring is brush. Chester is going to offer chipping at the end of the month for residents - more information to follow. Charlene is working on an agreement with Deep River for Chester residents to bring brush to the Deep River Transfer Station and has budgeted for the increase from \$70,000/year to \$100,000/year.
 - ii. Cindy noted RiverCOG also has a Hazardous Waste program schedule on their website.
- c. Community Engagement Initiative- training to serve on boards, commissions and committees.
- d. Bekah Wright reported the Earth Day event is running smoothly and continues to expand. Hoping to continue events through the end of month and including something on Arbor Day.
- e. Cindy reported the April Earth Month town-wide survey was completed with results posted to the town website.
- f. Public Bathrooms; Water Station; Bike/Tire Station and Rack; Recycling station; Electric Vehicle Charging; Other.
 - i. Cindy went to the Chester Merchants meeting and they emphasized the need for public Restrooms. We need to do something ASAP. Locations could include: North Quarter Park, Water St. Parking Lot, Maple St. Parking Lot, Cedar Lake, Other?
- g. Bekah Wright noted the Herbery is for sale ... could that be a good place for public restrooms? Carol Lewitt responded that the property is not feasible and is being changed back to residential.
- h. Cindy noted that a parking lot has been approved at the Chester Hose Company location and will be available for public parking. The project is estimated to begin within 2 years.
Also at this time, the BOF has indicated they generally are not in favor of EV charging stations, as they may not be fiscally viable and may be a safety hazard. However, the Energy and Sustainability Teams will continue to investigate and advocate for at least one EV charging station in town in lieu of the ever-increasing use of EV's by visitors who arrive here for various events.

NEXT STEPS:

Prepare to engage the Board of Finance: Is there public interest? The EDC can be the impetus to project management that connects various town commissions who are interested or are already working towards these initiatives.

Cindy noted the ad hoc committee mentioned in #7 above can include this also and she is very interested in helping with the public restroom initiative.

Pat suggested these various initiatives can be add ons to the RSA and Heritage Loop Trail.

Jon motioned for Cindy to take on the Visitor Friendly Initiatives within the ad hoc committee noted in #7 above to coordinate the RSA, Heritage Loop Trail, and Chester's Visitor Friendly Initiatives. Carlie seconds. Motion carried unanimously.

9. Other

Quick overview of gatekeeper liaison - anything related to EDC:

Chester Merchants

Cindy: public restroom facilities are a high need, more Maple St. Parking Lot signs on flag pole area are also requested. There are lots of events being planned including a Block Party by Little House for their 5th anniversary.

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce

Rebecca: the Middlesex County Revitalization Commission Business Operating Grants application will go live on April 20. There are \$200,000 in grants for nonprofit and for-profit businesses. Information will be sent to towns for posting.

RiverCOG

Cindy: the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is being finalized. Funding/Grant opportunities will eventually be available.

Silver Certification:

Cindy: application is in and attached to these minutes. Anticipated Sustainable CT response to the application timeline is several weeks.

10. Audience of Citizens

Bruce asked Pat if the Heritage Loop was going to continue further South into Deep River and Essex? Pat stated that there will likely be opportunities to expand the trail in the future.

Bruce asked Charlene about the Greenwald property update. Charlene noted it is no longer for sale and that business is sticking around.

Susan commented that the Chester Leadership Fund helped Kim Price get a portable water station at the Chester Fair through Rockfall Foundation. It was purchased and will be for the town which could help with the visitor friendly initiatives. Susan also has bathroom information to share with Cindy on this topic.

Susan commented that it is so nice to meet Bekah Wright and to see all the work everyone is doing on EDC. Chester Leadership is doing *Chairs for Charity* on Thursday, June 1st from 5:30-8:30 at the Meeting House. Thirteen or so artists from the shoreline will do chairs with food trucks and music to raise funds. Chester Leadership is a fundraising organization so share initiatives that EDC is doing and maybe they can help with financing.

Town of Chester

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Cindy reported that the tri-town Sustainability Team (Essex, Deep River and Chester) received permission via the Region 4 Superintendent to initiate a R4 school system (all 5 R4 schools) Food Scraps program. Essex Elementary is already food scrapping for composting, Deep River Elementary in 2 grades and partially at Chester Elementary School. VRHS and J.W. are not yet food scrapping. Cindy noted that the Town of Chester (at BOS meetings) has been asked to contribute \$2,500.00 for the Region 4 Food Scraps program to begin the 2023-2024 school year. Once funding from each municipality and via a public fundraiser are completed by June 15th, Sustainable CT will equally match funds collected. Essex and Deep River have already committed to their \$2500.00 contributions via their Nips funding. Rob Bibbiani, with assist from Cindy, is leading the effort to obtain approval for \$2,500.00 in ARPA funding to cover Chester's contribution.

Carol Lewitt encouraged that a town review be done to help with planning. She would also like to come back to an EDC meeting with a proposal for a bike path. Jon requested that she get this to him and Pat so it can be added to the agenda.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:12pm.

Respectfully submitted by

Carlie Dailey, Recording Secretary