

ENFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES

Thursday, May 19, 2022 – 7:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Turner called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Roll Call

Chairman Turner took the roll and present were Commissioners Gretchen Pfeifer-Hall, Mary Ann Turner, Kelly Davis, John Santanella, Steven Ragnauth, and Richard Stroiney. Absent were Commissioners Philip Kober, Virginia Higley, and Marilynn Cressotti.

Also present were Nelson Tereso, Deputy Director of Economic & Community Development and Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, Town Manager.

Approval of Minutes

- a. February 17, 2022 – Regular Meeting

Motion: Commissioner Stroiney made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Davis, to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2022 Regular Meeting.

The motion passed with a 6-0-0 vote.

Votes: 6-0-0

Commissioner Stroiney stated that Commissioner Kober had joined the meeting.

Report From Economic & Community Development

Town Manager Ellen Zoppo-Sassu addressed the Commission to discuss a business and non-profit assistance application process she would like the town to take on through the use of the ARPA funding. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu provided the Commission with details regarding the distribution of funds to local businesses. She described the survey available on the town website, and stated that they would collate applications through Mr. Tereso's office and provide them to the Commission for review. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that all funds need to be appropriated by December of 2024 and spent by December of 2026.

Commissioner Turner asked if this is all businesses and not just small businesses. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that it is all businesses and there are no restrictions on who can apply as long as they are registered with the town and listed with the Secretary of State.

Commissioner Turner asked if there would be more details provided to potential applicants. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that she is envisioning a webinar that will be taped so people can go back and refer to it, as well as possible Q&A sessions. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that there is no timeline and there are many options. Commissioner Turner stated that she would like to schedule a time outside of their regular meeting time to sit down and go through this.

Mr. Tereso asked if the goal is for the Commission to cap the amount per application, and if there are any ineligible businesses. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that she would be cautious about prohibiting anyone from applying, and suggested that they cast a wide net.

Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall asked if the Commission would be doing the interviewing and making the decision, to which Commissioner Turner replied that they will. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that the Town Council will be appropriating funds based on the Commission's recommendations.

Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that they are looking to leverage all of the state and federal dollars coming through, so they hope to have all available resources and opportunities on the website.

Mr. Tereso stated that the Enfield Square traffic impact study is completed and has been reviewed by Staff and Namdar. He stated that the concept plans should be submitted by early June and there will be a progress meeting with the state and Namdar around that time. Mr. Tereso stated that the Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) will be the Commission to approve the concept.

Commissioner Turner asked where and when this meeting will be and who can attend. Mr. Tereso stated that it will be in early June and is a closed meeting between town Staff, state DOT, and Namdar. He stated that the public will be allowed to weigh in on three alternatives and the town will have the opportunity to select one.

Commissioner Turner asked what public consumption means, to which Mr. Tereso replied that it will go before the PZC for review at a public meeting where the consultant will provide an overview of the study.

Commissioner Turner asked why this is just about Namdar, to which Mr. Tereso replied that the study is focused on the Enfield Square mall area to develop a preferred build-out to the mall. Commissioner Turner asked what build-out means to him. Mr. Tereso stated that a build-out is a mixed use development.

Mr. Tereso provided an overview of the schedule going forward.

Commissioner Turner asked how they are guiding the study from the consultant. Mr. Tereso stated that they are informing them of other projects going on in the vicinity to assess the roadway impacts. He stated that they are giving them a lot of feedback on this.

Commissioner Santanella asked if they know what use is being proposed for the mall area, to which Mr. Tereso replied that they do not. Mr. Tereso stated that they are proposing different uses as part of each concept.

Mr. Tereso stated that the concepts will be unveiled to the public in late June. Commissioner Turner asked if they have some idea of what is being planned, to which Mr. Tereso replied that he can provide the Commission with the three concepts they have now, one of which will be ultimately approved by the PZC. He stated that Namdar is comfortable with all three concepts.

Mr. Tereso stated that the Town Council had approved the purchase and sales agreement of 98 Prospect Street to David Weeks and Kelly Fradet lumber. He stated that the project will go out to bid in early July and they plan to have the environmental cleanup done this year.

He stated that the complete demolition and environmental cleanup of the Strand and Lamagna Center is also on a similar timetable. He stated that they hope to get a developer on board by the end of the summer.

Commissioner Stroiney asked how the state funds impact the potential of the TIF working with the developer. Mr. Tereso stated that there is no impact, but it does give the town more leverage.

Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall asked if the plan is to tear down some properties that are on the national register. Mr. Tereso stated that it would not be any properties on the register, and there may be some discussion with the state on which properties they deem to have no adverse impact to the redevelopment. Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall stated that she finds it troubling that these properties were considered to be contributing but now are not because they may be in the way. Mr. Tereso stated that there are about 250 properties in the district, and there is a give and take to everything so tough decisions must be made with the site redevelopment. He stated that he is having those initial conversations with the state so they can determine up front exactly what a developer can do with the property.

Commissioner Turner asked what is going on with the EverSource building, to which Mr. Tereso replied that they currently have nothing to do with that project and it is currently on hold.

Commissioner Turner stated that the EverSource building was supposed to be demolished and removed but it had Brownfield issues. She asked if the plan is to keep the building, to which Mr. Tereso replied that the plan is not to keep the building but they do not have any financial resources to knock it down or a redevelopment plan to build something there. He stated that they do not own the property, and the state will not fund the demolition without a viable redevelopment plan. Commissioner Turner stated that it makes no sense to keep that eyesore and still not have access to the river.

Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that there have been a lot of changes at the state and things have become significantly more competitive. She stated that they do not want to invest dollars into projects that they do not think are viable. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that with the right plan in place they can push that project, but right now there are too many problems and they are not in the driver's seat with them.

Commissioner Turner asked where they are with the train. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that the project is one construction season and they were told August or September of 2022. She went on to state that she was told by Congressman Courtney's office that they have moved it to spring of 2023. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that they are working with Congressman Courtney's office trying to be assertive to the DOT to find out the construction schedule.

Commissioner Turner asked if she wanted to discuss the people who are not in jail yet for the fire at the casket building. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that she did sign off on victim statements a few months ago and it does appear to be winding its way through court. She stated that she did ask to be notified on any activity on the docket. Commissioner Turner stated that someone did get arrested, to which Ms. Zoppo-Sassu replied that there are two or three people but at the time of the fire at least one was a minor.

Commissioner Turner asked why they allow the Abbe statue to constantly be desecrated with capes, masks, and bunny ears. The Commission discussed the location of the statue. Commissioner Santanella asked if that is their statue or if it belongs to the church. Commissioner Turner replied that it does not belong to the church. Commissioner Davis stated that the Abbe family originally put up the statue but the town took ownership of it. Commissioner Turner stated that they need to make this a project as she finds it annoying to see the statue decorated when she drives down the street.

Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall stated that the Conservation Commission planted trees with students on High Street and Central Street and it is looking great. She stated that there are photos posted on Facebook. Commissioner Turner thanked Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall for her work on this, to which Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall replied that it was a team effort. She stated that she would like to do a project like this again, to which Mr. Tereso agreed and stated that he thinks the next project is Enfield Street approaching the town line.

Commissioner Turner asked how the public at large will be affected by the mill rate reduction and the assessed values. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that the business/commercial side only saw an average 8% increase in value, and the burden was shifted to residential. She described how they were able to reduce the tax impacts to residents.

Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that they need to do a better job linking the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) with the Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) as well as the debt management policy. She stated that the end product for July 1st is a responsible and proactive budget.

Commissioner Turner asked if the residents should expect to get a tax increase even though the mill rate went down. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that four out of the five taxing districts will see a slight increase and everyone will see a decrease in their motor vehicle taxes. She stated that there will be no sewer user fee increases this year.

Commissioner Turner asked her to keep an eye on the Health District's budget as she heard they are looking for an increase and their robust bank account needs to be looked at. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that they will be looking at this.

Commissioner Stroiney stated that they dipped into their fund balance significantly to try to further ease the burden on taxpayers. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that this is not a sustainable process. She stated that they are solving problems but it will take a few years to dig themselves out of the hole they are in.

Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that growing the grand list helps flow money into the budget, so they need to look at business-friendly projects and offer incentives.

Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall stated that the Conservation Commission is going to start working on PA490 and open space. Commissioner Turner asked what the difference is between open space and farming. Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall stated that elderly owners of properties that have woodland that is sitting as open space with no forestry plan are being taxed at a different rate which may force them to have to sell their properties.

Commissioner Turner asked if everyone had a chance to look at the vacancy thing. Mr. Tereso stated that he would like to create a list of available vacant parcels that are on the market or the owners are looking to lease/rent. Commissioner Turner asked how he will keep track, to which Mr. Tereso replied that he gets updates from brokers and realtors and can also see when properties go on and off the market by going online.

Commissioner Turner asked if he has a list of all business-type properties in general, to which Mr. Tereso replied that he does not and that this would be a very large list. He stated that he would like to have a working list for the Commissioners so they can know what is available in town.

Commissioner Stroiney asked if there is a way to motivate the businesses with these properties to reach out to the town and register so the list is available to the public. Mr. Tereso stated that he is not sure they can advertise private properties to the public. He stated that the list has been developed by calls and emails from brokers who have reached out to him.

Commissioner Turner stated that the town does not have a list of places that can hold businesses. Mr. Tereso stated that he does not have such a list, to which Commissioner Turner replied that she does not know how they tax them if they do not know who they are. Ms. Zoppo-Sassu stated that they do know who they are as they have them on the assessor's list. Commissioner Turner stated that she likes the idea but it could be more robust.

Commissioner Santanella asked if the Commission is familiar with Wegmans. He stated that they are opening up a location in southern Connecticut and the mall location is an amazing spot for a concept like Wegmans. Mr. Tereso stated that it is also a good location for Trader Joe's and he brought it up to Namdar. He stated that they have the property to the market and a grocer is part of one of the concepts.

Commissioner Turner asked the Commissioners to consider whether it is possible to move this meeting from the third Thursday. She stated that she will put it on the agenda.

Adjournment

Commissioner Stroiney made a motion to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned.