

**TOWN OF HADDAM
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR PUBLIC MEETING
HADDAM YOUTH CENTER
Wednesday, 9 March 2011, at 7:00 PM
UNAPPROVED MINUTES
Subject to Change by the Commission**

A	Heather Batzner
X	Joseph Bergin
X	Dan Dachelet
X	Barbara Fernandez
X	Michael Fortuna, Chairman
X	Peter Gillespie
X	Lori Maggi
A	David Papallo
X	Edward Vynalek
X	Tom Gidius, EDC Coordinator
X	Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

1. Call to Order

Mr. Fortuna called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. Attendance

Attendance was taken.

3. Approval of Agenda

Add: Under Presentation – b. Jim Bucko, Land Swap

4. Presentations

a. Susan Oehl, Rails to Trails – Ms. Oehl explained that rails to trails is the converting of rail lines into walking/biking paths and why rail lines are being used. Mr. Dachelet noted there are a number of these trails throughout the country. Ms. Oehl stated that Haddam has been concentrating on development, but not necessarily tourism noting that a number of people use these types of trails and are looking for places to eat, etc. Ms. Oehl stated a trail from Tylerville to Middletown (nine miles one way) would be beneficial to the Town of Haddam.

Ms. Fernandez asked who would be responsible for building/maintaining such a trail. Mr. Dachelet stated it's usually a non-profit group that's founded specifically for the purpose of building/maintaining these types of trails and noted a website which gives step-by-step instructions (funding, how to build, support, etc.) on how to proceed.

Mr. Dachelet stated that Walt Zilahy and several others have spent hours with DEP, DOT, National Park System, etc., working on this issue. Mr. Dachelet stated once these organizations say they're no longer interested in using the rail line north of Tylerville, there's a good chance for using the line from Tylerville to Middletown for such a project.

Ms. Oehl stated that initially there was resistance against the idea of a trail in Cheshire; but since its development, the townspeople have changed their minds. Ms. Oehl again stated that she believes this would be beneficial to Haddam.

A brief discussion followed in regard to how the line might be constructed (whether rails and ties would need to be removed or stone and black top would be laid over top of them). Mr. Gillespie asked what the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) called for in regard to the rail corridor. Stasia DeMichele stated that it appears as if Valley Railroad would prefer not coming any further than Tylerville as children and adults would become bored. Mrs. DeMichele also stated a trail would be a good way of connecting Tylerville and Higganum Center.

Mr. Gillespie suggested that the State Rail Plan be reviewed to see what the plan recommends for the section in question as there still may be time to provide public comment. Mr. Dachelet stated he will follow up with Mr. Zilahy and Liz Glidden, town planner.

b. Jim Bucko, Land Swap – Mr. Bucko stated for the third year in a row, he and his partners are trying to obtain the 17 acres around the Riverhouse at Goodspeed Station for the 87 acres in Higganum (former Walkley Hill Subdivision, Phase II). Mr. Bucko stated in the past the Goodspeed Opera House was taking part in the proposal, but would not be this time; however, if the land swap happened, he and his partners would solicit the Goodspeed for a new theatre.

Mr. Bucko stated that the intent of the partners has always been to construct an inn next to the Riverhouse. Mr. Bucko stated that an inn would be beneficial to Haddam as well as enhance the Riverhouse as there are no hotel facilities within the immediate area.

Showing the Commission new concept sketches, Mr. Bucko stated the main focal point would be a theatre whether it is the Goodspeed or another entity. In one of the sketches Mr. Bucko pointed out that a new theatre would be backed up to the base of the hill (DOT garage behind it) and could be viewed from the Goodspeed Opera House (symbolic of showing past and present). The other sketches showed retail shops, train stop, and boat dock.

Mr. Dachelet asked the impact on the Opera House. Mr. Bucko stated that the Goodspeed has always stated they would not close the Opera House as they have a great following and would hold small, intimate shows. Mr. Bergin stated his impression from the last joint meeting of the EDC commissions was that East Haddam was concerned. Discussion followed in regard to economic opportunity.

Liz Bazazi asked Mr. Bucko if consideration had been given to creating a village effect rather than a mall. Mr. Bucko stated a number of ideas have been contemplated and noted that the sketches are merely conceptual. Ms. Bazazi stated she'd like to see streets rather than parking lots.

Mrs. Maggi asked how the project would bring revenue to Haddam. Mr. Bucko stated preliminary numbers show a \$60 million project, 300 construction jobs, 400 permanent jobs (the hotel having 107 alone), \$130,000 in property tax, and \$3 million in sales and property revenue tax to the state. Mrs. Maggi stated it would appear as if this proposal would be financially beneficial to Haddam's tax base. Mr. Bucko stated that it would be four times the highest tax base. Mr. Gidius stated the proposal would also avoid the development of the 87 acres alleviating additional students in the school system.

Mr. Bucko stated the Higganum property was appraised at slightly less than \$200,000 more than the 17 acres. Mr. Bucko also noted that the Higganum property is four times the amount of land. Ms. Bazazi stated everything she has read in regard to the proposal claims up to 87 acres and not the entire parcel. Mr. Bucko stated that the entire 87 acres would be swapped for the 17 acres.

Ms. Fernandez asked how the proposal would impact the water situation in Tylerville. Mr. Bucko stated what a better catalyst to bring water/sewer to Tylerville and that a proposal of this size would need it.

Mr. Gillespie asked how the project stands politically. Mr. Bucko stated all over the place, but each individual needs to make their own decision as to whether or not it's a good proposal.

Ms. Fernandez asked if Bridge Road would need to be widened. Mr. Bucko stated it is unknown at this time (study needed), however, there's an existing entrance to the 17 acres. Mr. Bergin stated a street widening project may tie into sidewalks. A brief discussion followed in regard to traffic issues due to the bridge and the use of the Chester-Hadlyme Ferry.

Mr. Bucko stated that due to the bill for the land swap having not yet been written, a legislative hearing scheduled for Monday, 03/14/2011, may not be held (probably be delayed by two weeks). Mr. Fortuna stated that Paul DeStefano and Mark Walter, first selectmen for Haddam and East Haddam, respectively, will be testifying at the hearing. Mr. Bucko stated Tom Marsh, first selectman for Chester, would also be testifying. Mr. Bucko also stated that he would be meeting with East Haddam's EDC on Thursday, 03/10/2011.

Mr. Vynalek suggested that the map be drawn to scale and emphasize that the 17 acres is not directly on the river, but between the DOT facility (western boundary) and the railroad tracks (eastern boundary). Discussion followed in regard to people not realizing that the parcel was a former gravel pit; that Charlie Robertson, the previous owner of the 17 acres, was paid \$1.3 million by the State and did not designate in the deed that the property be protected prior to the sale; that Gina McCarthy, former DEP Commissioner, to be contacted; that a presentation be made to the Gateway Commission; and that the language in the bill needs to change to reflect all of the 87 acres being swapped.

Discussion followed in regard to the Commission previously writing a letter of support with Mr. Bucko requesting anyone who is available to testify to come to the hearing in Hartford. Mrs. Maggi asked that an email be sent with the specific hearing date and time. Mr. Fortuna stated that if Mr. Bucko would email the information to him, he would forward it to the rest of the Commission.

5. Approval of Minutes

Tabled.

6. Public Comment

None.

7. EDC Coordinator's Report

a. SiteFinder Participation – Mr. Gidius stated there are several properties listed – the Rossi property; 66 Killingworth Road - 4,000 square feet for lease; the former Higganum Drug Center building; 1618 Saybrook Road – the former party rental business; and the former Brookes property next to the Saybrook at Haddam – for lease or sale.

23 and 27 Killingworth Road - Mr. Gidius stated that the Higganum Pharmacy owners have purchased 23 (Higganum Physical Therapy) and 27 (former dry cleaner) Killingworth Road. Mr. Gidius stated that Greg McKenna would like to speak to the Commission. Discussion followed in regard to a potential concept.

8. Old Business

a. Joint Meeting of East Haddam and Haddam EDC's - Update

Mr. Fortuna stated the meeting was productive and believes East Haddam EDC voiced their concerns about a potential land swap. Mr. Fortuna stated there was discussion in regard to linking the two towns with a footbridge attached to the swing bridge and shared use of East Haddam's sewer system.

b. Worrell Technologies Proposal - Living Machine

Mr. Fortuna stated that Worrell had submitted a preliminary design proposal, dated 03/09/2011, (copy available in Town Clerk's Office) at a cost of \$8,000 (funding not available). Mr. Fortuna stated that it's important the townspeople understand the need for infrastructure and that a public hearing would be beneficial. Ms. Bazazi stated that Higganum Village Group (HVG) supports the need for infrastructure and will be holding meetings with individual civic groups

Mr. Fortuna stated he sees a fundamental difference between HVG's and EDC's approaches and believes it's working against implementing the basic infrastructure. Mr. Fortuna stated EDC has put together a series of very clear, definable steps to move forward with the development of the village – streetscape, zoning, infrastructure as opposed to the visioning group which is supposed to be imagining what the future is rather than defining the vision. Mr. Fortuna stated that the problem he has in defining the vision is that people (property owners, developers) believe the town is trying to dictate how they want the center to look.

Ms. Bazazi distributed copies of HVG's mission statement (copy available in the Town Clerk's Office). Ms. Bazazi stated she didn't see a problem in asking people what they would like and that the POCD has already done that. Ms. Bazazi stated that David Platt, former EDC chairman, had told her to get guidance as there was no guidance during the streetscape improvements. Mr. Fortuna asked for clarification. Ms. Bazazi stated HVG compliments what EDC does. Mr. Fortuna stated he did until recently noting that there are various groups of like-minded people who think it would be premature to install a sewer system when the total vision for the center is not complete. Mr. Fortuna noted that there is only one town owned parcel in Higganum Center that could house the sewer system. Ms. Bazazi stated she doesn't see it has a problem and if the residents go with the Living Machine then let the engineers determine the locations. Mr. Gidius stated the HVG vision could be clouding the issue and that at this time waste water needs to be discussed. Mr. Gidius stated the town may not necessarily be better off from a tax standpoint by just filling the center. Mr. Fortuna stated the vision needs to be clearer and if the vision group believes infrastructure is needed than that needs to be said.

Discussion followed at length in regard to a conceptual sketch and nasty letters which Ms. Bazazi had received. Mrs. DeMichele clarified that the conceptual sketch was created only after she had witnessed a near accident in front of the drug store and had contacted the first selectman who in turn suggested Phil Goff, Assistant Director, Public Works, be contacted. Mrs. DeMichele stated that the sketch was merely conceptual and nothing more.

Mr. Fortuna stated he believes the Commission's next step should be the scheduling of a public hearing. Ms. Bazazi suggested the Commission wait to schedule a public hearing until the vision group has finished their visioning sessions.

9. New Business

a. New EDC Projects/Initiatives/Discussion

None.

b. Discuss Relationship of the Higganum Village Group (HVG) to the Committee for the Advancement of Haddam Villages (CAHV) and the EDC

Previously discussed under Worrell Technologies Proposal – Living Machine.

c. Discuss Purchase of 23 and 27 Killingworth Road Properties

Previously discussed under EDC Coordinator's Report.

d. Discuss Implementing a Local Bidder Preference Ordinance to Assist Local Contractors/Businesses

Mr. Fortuna stated that he feels this is an item which needs to be discussed. Mr. Gillespie stated that Wethersfield has such an ordinance. Mr. Fortuna stated what got him thinking of this was the planned road work over the next few years and that such an ordinance would send a message to business community. Mr. Gillespie will send a copy of Wethersfield's policy.

e. Tylerville Group

Mrs. DeMichele stated she's not sure which direction the group should go and that she would like EDC's input as the Commission is a critical component. Mr. Fortuna stated there's value in having the group and they will find their way. Mr. Fortuna also stated EDC is comfortable with the direction the group is going. Mr. Gidius stated that Mrs. Glidden has begun working on the Tylerville regulations.

Discussion followed in regard to the 17 acre parcel currently zoned industrial and the need to change it to commercial should the land swap take place; to a lot of misinformation having previously been presented – water front property, deed wording, property value; and Gina McCarthy, former DEP Commissioner, having initiated the proposal to begin with.

Mr. Fortuna stated that he sat in on a meeting that included Mr. Gidius, Mr. DeStefano, Mr. Walter, and the developers who agreed to accept deed restrictions to not develop the land until the village zoning regulations are in placed. Mrs. DeMichele stated she felt better about the proposal.

Mrs. DeMichele asked if EDC had done anything previously. Mr. Fortuna stated the Commission had prepared some mapping, drew some property lines, and defined what the village was. Mr. Fortuna will send the power point presentation to Mr. Gidius. Mr. Gidius stated the group is currently working with material from 1999.

Discussion followed in regard to the Higganum parcel. Mr. Fortuna stated at the meeting there was a picture of what the parcel would look like if it were developed. The Commission further discussed the developers going to as many commissions both in Haddam and East Haddam in order to obtain support. Mr. Fortuna noted that EDC supported the proposal a year ago and still does.

10. Adjournment

MOTION: Ed Vynalek made a motion to adjourn. Lori Maggi seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bunny Hall Batzner

Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 13 April 2011, 7:00 p.m.