

**TOWN OF HADDAM
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
ONLINE VIA GOTOMEETING
WEDNESDAY, 13 MAY 2020
APPROVED MINUTES
*Approved as Amended at the 9 September 2020 Meeting***

ATTENDANCE

X	Prem Aithal, Vice Chairman
X	Kate Anderson, Chairman
X	Cortney Emschwiller Swokla
X	Mike Farina
X	David Law
X	Mark Lundgren
X	Cindy MacNeil Sola
A	Robin Munster
X	John Pember
X	Doreen Staskelunas, Secretary
X	Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

1. Call to Order

Ms. Anderson, chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge was recited.

3. Approval of Agenda

Amendments: Move Item #7 - Chairman's Report to Item #5 and to strike Item #8 – Approval of Minutes.

MOTION: Mike Farina motioned to approve the 13 May 2020 agenda as amended. Mark Lundgren second. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Anderson reminded everyone to state their name prior to speaking.

4. Public Comment

There were no comments from those in attendance.

5. Chairman's Report

Ms. Anderson gave a brief update from Bill Warner, Town Planner.

Higganum Center: Haddam Elementary School (HES) – Negotiations - Due to the COVID situation, Adelbrook has withdrawn from negotiations. This is not saying the deal is no longer non-negotiable, but it is on hold. If another interested tenant comes along and is ready to engage, then the town will hold discussions. **Trails** – The Haddam Land Trust and Conservation Commission are working on trails within the Center. **Higganum Cove** – A proposal is before the Gateway Commission to help with funding to clean-up the Cove. Mr. Warner has an outline of what his vision would be – some kayak launch points, general clean-up. Noted there has been some graffiti damage. **HES – Attempted Break-ins** – At the Board of Selectmen's (BOS) meeting, Monday, 11 May 2020, First Selectman Bob McGarry reported there have been two attempted break-ins. One window was broken and nothing was taken. Mr. McGarry is looking

into security measures on site whether that is the installation of video cameras or the use of existing cameras. **Brownfield Grant – Scovil Hoe Building** – Grant funding has been received. Tighe and Bond, environmental consultants, have been selected for this project. They presented an impressive plan and they will be doing some testing and reporting back. An attorney will also be involved to minimize the town's liability to take control of the building and do something with it. **Community Septic** – This project is moving along. The town will need to create a water pollution control committee to oversee the matter. **Rossi Property** – The Rossis have retained an NAI appraiser and are in the process of preparing an appraisal. Mrs. Sola stated the assumption is the appraisal is to sell. Ms. Anderson stated yes, but it would need to go through a number of meetings before that point. Mrs. Staskelunas asked if it was a good sign or a bad sign or just movement. Ms. Anderson stated it's good that Rossi is ready to take the step to make a serious offer for the town to consider. Ms. Anderson stated the town will also need to do site studies, meetings, etc.

Tylerville: Day Care Center – Project currently on hold due to COVID-19. **Bridge Road Sidewalks** – Project is in final design phase. A brief discussion followed in regard to reapplying for grant funding for a walkway on the Swing Bridge (approximately \$17 million) and whether this walkway is feasible on the bridge (would need to be counter balanced, but the age of the bridge needs to be considered – over 100 years old). Bridge is due for repairs in the next year or two. Mr. Farina stated the Arrigoni Bridge, Middle-town/Portland, is supposed to be under repair and both bridges cannot be shut down at the same time.

Haddam: Jail – Restaurateur no longer interested in the building. Noted they are currently unable to open two of their existing restaurants. **7 Island Dock Road – Former Marin Environmental** – P&Z approved a residential wellness and rehabilitation facility. Applicant is working on closing on the sale of the building/property.

BOS: At the BOS level, Ms. Anderson reported that the Board of Education (BOE) has been trying to reduce their budget. The original proposal had Haddam up by almost \$1.5 million and it's been reduced to \$388,000 with the BOE continuing to look for further reductions. If the public has any comments, the BOE does have a link.

At the town level, Mr. McGarry has requested revised budgets from all of the department heads. Mr. McGarry was looking into a way to have some sort of meeting/vote, but the governor has issued an executive order that there can be no public meetings held and the Board of Finance (BOF) is the only group that can approve the budget. The ultimate goal is to have no increase in taxes for Haddam.

Mr. Lundgren asked for clarification regarding the Regional School District #17 (RSD17) budget – it was originally \$1.5 million and now it's under \$400,000. Ms. Anderson stated yes, for Haddam's share. Ms. Anderson stated the BOE did have a public hearing/meeting where they read comments from the public; and if anyone has anything to say, please do so. Ms. Anderson also stated the BOE has a couple of documents on their website that breaks down everything they have cut. It appears to be an even split between personnel and tangible. Have not heard what savings there will be for current year.

Mr. Aithal stated the fall is a wild card regarding COVID and the school year is still up in the air. Mr. Aithal asked if consideration has been given to have a discussion with RSD17 in regard to renting HES to assist with social distancing within classrooms. Ms. Anderson stated she didn't know if the conversation had taken place, but the BOS did receive communication from a resident who suggested the same thing. Ms. Anderson stated it shouldn't be assumed the BOE knows that to be an option and will address the matter with Mr. McGarry and Mr. Moriarty. Mr. Aithal stated from a flexibility standpoint, every option needs to be put out on the table – whether financially, logistically, operationally – as everything is just a mess right now. Ms. Anderson agreed.

Local Businesses: Mr. Lundgren reported P&Z approved special permits for CrossFit (relocation to Kenyon Labs building, 12 Scovil Road, Higganum) and Truck Stop Family Entertainment Center (new business, Merle McKenzie, 66 Killingworth Road, Higganum). Ms. Anderson stated Mr. McKenzie will be requesting a liquor license, but it will not be for a full bar.

Ms. Anderson reported a couple of people have reached out to her as well as Mr. McGarry receiving phone calls regarding individuals violating social distancing etiquette/regulations. If there are concerns, call Troop F directly. A business can be fined, but they need to be actively caught in violation. Mrs. Sola stated she has had people reach out to her as well. Ms. Anderson stated Mr. McGarry commented that CrossFit was temporarily shut down by the health district; and after working with them, have since reopened. Ms. Anderson suggested everybody use their best judgement noting that it's a difficult time for everyone!

6. Old Business

a. Higganum Farmers' Market – Discussion

Mr. Aithal reported since the April meeting, he has contacted the vendors and solicited feedback on the COVID-19 rules as issued by the State of Connecticut. Mr. Aithal noted that he has informed the vendors the market will open on 17 July 2020. A survey was sent out on behalf of the EDC subcommittee and has received three responses to date – all are interested. Mr. Aithal reviewed the survey with the Commission. Safety is the biggest concern for both vendors and customers. Mr. Aithal stated he was on a ZOOM meeting with the State of Connecticut Dept. of Agriculture as to what other markets are doing, what can be done, etc. Mr. Aithal reported he has not yet official submitted the Higganum Farmers' Market as opening this season to the State; however, based on information from the State he does believe the Commission should pursue this event. Mr. Aithal stated he has asked the vendors if they would participate in a ZOOM meeting late May-early June to discuss some of the concerns, etc. Items to discuss: 1) should there be a limit on vendors, 2) the use of the HES park lot as it's already marked out with customers parking across the street, and 3) the need to be practical while being safe. Mr. Aithal stated everybody needs food.

Mrs. Sola suggested moving the opening date up as there's a huge demand for local produce and believes EDC can pull the event off especially with the way HES is set up. Mrs. Sola stated it would take the entire Commission to make it work and believes people will be respectful of the distance. Mrs. Sola also stated she has heard Durham is having a huge success with their market.

Mrs. Staskelunas asked if the other activities that had been previously discussed would be included in the market. Mr. Aithal stated entertainment and bands are prohibited and it would just be food, produce, honey, crafts, etc.

Mr. Aithal spoke in regard to the State of Connecticut, Department of Agriculture, COVID-19 Guidance for Connecticut Farmers' Market guidelines, updated 21 April 2020, (copy of guidelines emailed to all Commissioners and a copy is on file in the Town Clerk's Office). Mrs. Sola stated she believes this to be an important event to be held, committed to be there every Friday night, and believes the start date should be bumped up a few weeks. Mr. Farina spoke in regard to Durham's market. Ms. Anderson stated she agrees in moving forward, but the Commission needs to make sure the food and produce vendors are secured. Ms. Anderson also agreed that bumping up the start date would be helpful.

Mr. Aithal stated his only apprehension of opening early is safety and he would like to make sure the market is ready to go – marking off the areas, hand sanitizer, etc. Mr. Aithal stated one of the biggest purposes of the survey is to get vendors concerns/comments/suggestions to ensure their safety as well as the customers.

Mr. Law stated it's unclear what quantities of produce are available at this time and talked about doing something novel such as what the restaurants are doing – curbside delivery – the customer could pick what they'd like and it would be pre-packaged waiting for them for pick up. In addition to limiting the number of people going through it would increase the amount of interest. Mr. Aithal stated there are markets proceeding with drive-thru markets – pay in advance, touch list purchasing – the more that can be encouraged the better.

Mr. Farina asked about liability should someone become ill. Mr. Lundgren spoke in regard to his wife's business and her insurance carrier looking for insurance that will cover her and at this point she would be liable.

Mr. Lundgren asked if any vendors in the past had used credit card payments. Mr. Aithal and Mrs. Sola stated yes. Mrs. Sola stated for a drive-thru it would take extra people on the vendors' part to fill boxes and bags for orders and this should be a question addressed to them. Mr. Law stated it would come down to the type of business you want to do. Ms. Anderson stated she's concerned about social distancing and liability; and although she believes people will try to social distance, she thinks naturally there will be issues. Ms. Anderson asked Mr. Aithal what would be the consequences to the market and/or the Commission – would the State be sending people out to monitor the market. Mr. Aithal stated he would have to check and report back. Mrs. Sola suggested allowing only one person per household in light of the situation. Mr. Farina stated there are a lot of stores who are already doing that; and spoke in regard to the perception of being anti-social and potentially sending people away. Discussion followed at length with Mr. Lundgren suggesting if needed, a special meeting be called to help move this matter along.

Ms. Anderson suggested putting out a poll on Facebook to see if the townspeople are interested in attending the market. Ms. Anderson also suggested the question be framed in a manner letting them know about social distancing, and shop, pay, and leave. Mr. Law stated the responses now could be completely different than responses next month. Mr. Lundgren stated he believes there's a need and doesn't want to be the last one to the show; and suggested if other markets are open, see what they're doing and copy it.

A brief discussion followed in regard to coordinating a ZOOM meeting with the vendors and dates/times (Durham – Thursdays, East Haddam – Saturdays, Colchester – Sundays) and visiting other local markets to see how they're set up and handling things. Mrs. Batzner noted that Chester will be holding their market but in a different manner and location and perhaps Ian Gibson, Wellstone Farm, may be able to help by providing information.

Mr. Aithal to set up meeting and Commissioners look out for a special meeting, if needed, before June.

7. New Business

a. Local Business Support in Response to COVID

Ms. Anderson spoke in regard to two emails she had sent today and apologized for the short notice.

Disaster Recovery Plan: The Town needs to come up with a Long Term Disaster Recovery Committee, this is specifically in response to COVID; however, in the future it will be a permanent committee that will handle any disasters in the future. Mr. McGarry is looking for suggestions for members – town personnel, business owners, commission/board members, residents. Very vague at this time and unclear what the mission is at this time. Mrs. Sola stated she didn't believe there have been disaster plans since World War II. Mr. Lundgren stated the Town had a disaster plan after the Flood of 1982. Ms. Anderson stated the companies she has worked for have had their own disaster recovery plans; therefore, it would make sense for the public sector to have their own plan.

Gift Card Raffle to a Local Business: Mr. Warner's email concerned the Durham Economic Development Commission. In an effort to support and stimulate their businesses they came up with a weekly raffle – a gift card to a business. To be eligible to enter 2 purchases from a local business, \$15 or more, required, and submit proof of receipt.

Ms. Anderson stated one of the reasons the Commission decided to postpone Mucket Madness and Rivers Days was due to money saving measures; however, she spoke to Mr. McGarry in regard to the raffle to get his thoughts and he suggested it be discussed amongst the group and see what their thoughts are. Ms. Anderson voiced concern over how Durham handled this noting that when looking at their website there were specific businesses that you had to buy from and was not sure how they came up with the list. Ms. Anderson stated although she feels it's a good idea, she questions how to select a

business and handle the raffle. Mr. Law stated there are a number of transactions in which a receipt is not given making it difficult to come up with that proof. Mrs. Staskelunas talked about a punch or stamp card. Mr. Law suggested a photo in front of the store where the purchase was made. Discussion followed in how to randomly pick a winner (Mrs. Staskelunas stated there are random picker apps), potentially using the farmers' market as a test market for the raffle (raffle off a prize to a vendor; noted not all vendors will be from Haddam); collaborate with the Merchants' Association once they're up and running; incorporating tradespeople as well as retail businesses and the more times you use the different businesses the more chances you get.

Ms. Anderson will reach out to Durham EDC to see how they handled the raffle and how successful the raffle was. Ms. Anderson will report back.

Merchants' Association: Ms. Anderson stated this is still on the table and that she had another small business owner (a tradesman) reach out to her regarding the association. Ms. Anderson stated she did start an announcement and with COVID it fell to the wayside, but is still in the works.

Ms. Anderson noted that she has spoken to some business owners who do get upset when a request for a service is made on Facebook and responses are for businesses outside of the town rather than one in town. It's understood it's a suggestion, but sometimes tradesmen without store fronts sometimes get forgotten. Mrs. Sola stated during this time of COVID, she has heard a number of people, including herself, who are doing nothing but shopping local.

8. Approval of Minutes

12 February 2020, 11 March 2020, and 8 April 2020 Minutes – The Commission agreed to table the approval of the minutes until the June meeting.

9. Adjournment

MOTION: Cindy Sola motioned to adjourn. Prem Aithal second. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bunny Hall Batzner

Bunny Hall Batzner
Recording Clerk

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 10 June 2020.