

**TOWN OF HADDAM  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
COMMUNITY CENTER  
7 CANDLEWOOD HILL ROAD, HIGGANUM, CT 06441  
WEDNESDAY, 9 AUGUST 2023  
UNAPPROVED MINUTES  
*Subject to Approval by the Commission***

**ATTENDANCE**

X	Kate Anderson, Chairman
A	Kristy Benson Amarante
X	Curtis Browne
A	Cortney Emshwiller Swokla
X	Mike Farina
X	Mike Karam (Arrived 6:44 p.m.)
A	David Law
A	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 6:40 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

The pledge was recited.

**3. Approval of Agenda**

**MOTION:** Doreen Staskelunas motioned to approve the 9 August 2023 agenda as submitted. Curtis Browne second. Motion carried unanimously.

Upon Mr. Karam's arrival, he asked if CT Main Street could be added to the agenda. The Commission agreed to the amendment. Item to be discussed after the Tylerville Update.

**4. Public Comment**

There was no public in attendance.

**5. New Business**

**a. Tylerville Businesses/Swing Bridge Construction - Update**

Ms. Anderson provided a brief synopsis of last month's meeting pertaining to the grant, advertising, and yard signs.

**Yard Signs** - Ms. Anderson thanked Mr. Browne for obtaining the yard signs in such a timely manner noting that she has already received positive comments about them. Mr. Browne reported that the businesses designed the sign.

**Advertising** – Ms. Anderson reported a half page black/white ad would cost \$150/per week and a color ad would cost \$250/per week. Ms. Anderson stated that the price was a bit more expensive than she was anticipating. Ms. Anderson also stated although the businesses wanted a color ad, based on the cost it would exhaust EDC's budget; therefore, she decided to go with a black/white ad. Ms. Anderson showed

the Commission the ad which mimics the yard signs with a graphic of the swing bridge. The ad will run every week in the Haddam-Killingworth Now until they are told to stop. Ms. Anderson noted that the messaging and image can be changed at any time. Mr. Karam asked if the businesses names could be included in the ad. Ms. Anderson stated they could, but for timing purposes it was best to get the ad out as it stands.

Mr. Farina asked if the State agrees to contribute funding to this, could EDC be reimbursed in order to use the funding for other projects. Ms. Anderson stated if EDC needs additional funding, it can go before the Board of Finance (BOF) with a request and supporting documentation. Ms. Anderson stated she will be requesting additional funding for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

**Business Interruption Grant** – Ms. Anderson reported the BOF will be funding the grant up to \$500,000 from monies the town received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The ARPA funds were designed to assist with economic recovery and public improvements. The maximum a grant applicant can receive is up to \$20,000 (According to the BOF chairman, if it were to go over that amount, it would trigger additional reporting requirements).

Ms. Anderson stated the Board of Selectmen (BOS) held a special meeting on Monday, 7 August 2023, to set the public hearing and town meeting date. Public hearing and town meeting are scheduled for Wednesday, 23 August 2023, 6:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., respectively, at Haddam Volunteer Fire Station #1, 439 Saybrook Road, Higganum. Ms. Anderson noted that this will be an in-person vote only.

Ms. Anderson stated the application and guidelines are almost finalized (copy of draft has been sent to the subcommittee and the Tylerville businesses). Mr. Browne, a subcommittee member, stated the documents look good. Ms. Anderson stated payments will be retroactive this year (June, July, August, and September). Businesses will need to demonstrate a loss of sales revenue compared to last year and can be reimbursed up to \$5,000 per month.

Ms. Anderson stated that during the public comment portion of the BOS meeting, a resident voiced concern about the disclosure of financial information. Ms. Anderson explained the process (information to be reviewed under executive session). Ms. Anderson noted that the tax collector will sign off on the application after confirming the business is in good standing. Ms. Anderson also noted that if a business goes out of business after receiving funds, they will be required to pay the loan back; however, if they stay in business, the loan will be forgiven.

Mr. Karam asked if the business limits as to who can apply had been determined. Ms. Anderson stated she has not seen the final language regarding the limits and that it would be up to EDC and the subcommittee to approve or deny a business. Mr. Browne noted that a business must be a brick and mortar.

**DOT Roundabouts** – Ms. Anderson reported that DOT held a public information session – reviewing proposals and benefits of the roundabouts. DOT asked for input from the businesses regarding the timing of construction. Noted that businesses are concerned that the roundabouts are undersized for the area, and it has been brought up more than once. The roundabout at Bridge Road is supposed to be only one lane. DOT has been asked to consider a second lane and they do not see a need for it. DOT has indicated that the roundabouts are not meant to relieve traffic.

Mr. Karam stated the Garden Club is interested in the planting plans for the centers of the roundabouts and was shown plans of what the Garden Club would like to do. Ms. Anderson stated the Garden Club should let DOT know of their interest. Ms. Anderson will provide Mr. Karam with the name of the webinar presenter. Ms. Anderson stated she believes DOT has not yet developed their landscape design.

Mrs. Staskelunas commented if the Garden Club cannot plant in the roundabouts, she would welcome them to work at the Senior Center.



Ms. Anderson stated that Bob McGarry and Irene Haines, First Selectmen for the Towns of Haddam and East Haddam, have been following up separately on other matters such as the posting of a larger sign in Tylerville. Ms. Anderson also stated they are working with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce to see if there are any other resources for the business beyond what the town is doing.

#### **b. CT Main Street**

Mr. Karam reported that the webinar was very informative, that there were a lot of tools, strategies, and information that could benefit the town; and felt it would be beneficial for all Commissioners who were unable to attend to view the recording (link to be provided). Mr. Karam asked if CT Main Street could be invited to an EDC meeting as a follow up to their webinar.

Ms. Anderson spoke regarding the Main Street Accelerator Program that is offer by CT Main Street. Ms. Anderson read what the program has to offer - the town has to have a project in mind, apply to the program, and CT Main Street will assist until the project is completed. This is a six-month program.

Mr. Karam spoke about a more holistic approach as to how the whole Center should look in terms of developing the various properties, specifically the town green, Scovil Hoe, Rossi, and HES, so that there is a more cohesive look. Mr. Farina stated that Town Planner Bill Warner had discussed potential proposals (power point presentation given). Mrs. Staskelunas asked if he could make the presentation again. Discussion followed regarding the various studies that have been compiled. Mr. Karam stated perhaps new grant money could be obtained to develop a new plan. Mr. Browne stated CT Main Street would be oversight to a project.

Mr. Karam asked if it would be fair to say EDC recognizes the need for a larger holistic plan for economic development for Higganum Center with the new things that are happening and proposing a process for development whether through Mr. Warner's existing presentation and revisiting it.

Ms. Anderson stated applications for the Accelerator Program open on 12 September 2023 and are due 3 November 2023. Ms. Anderson stated she does not believe the actual application has been posted and noted that it is limited to ten (10) communities making it a very competitive application. Mr. Browne stated they will be looking for critical success factors. Discussion followed.

Mr. Karam stated he believes Mr. Warner should be made aware of EDC's interest in a holistic plan.

Mr. Karam asked if the webinar recording had been sent out. Mr. Browne stated he thought it had and will check his email; and if it has, he will provide the link to everyone.

#### **c. Budget and 2023/2024 Goals and Strategic Plan**

**2023/2024 Goals and Strategic Plan** - Ms. Anderson redistributed copies of the 2023-2024 Goals and Strategies page and reviewed the Commission's mission statement and the various goals/strategies within the buckets – Forging Connections and Building Relationships, Attracting and Retaining Businesses, and Community Pride - the Commission will be working on.

Mr. Browne asked who would drive the merchants to pull together their association and if it would be for all of Haddam or specific to the different areas. Ms. Anderson stated Tylerville wants their own association and probably Higganum would want the same. Mr. Browne stated if they're kept separate, they will never get along and believes it should be one association. Ms. Anderson stated when CT Main Street originally presented in February 2020, the question was asked and Kim Parsons Whittaker's advice was to keep them separate, don't try to force a united front. Mr. Browne stated he understood, and it makes sense. Discussion followed about different challenges, customers, etc. Mr. Karam stated he would suggest a joint business association with Tylerville and East Haddam. Mr. Farina stated EDC tried that and there was a good relationship at that time.



Ms. Anderson stated when meeting with some of the Tylerville businesses, they asked how an association would work, and they were told it's what you want it to be – as simple as contact information only to business dues to build a website. EDC is happy to get it up and running, but it will not be EDC's to own.

Mr. Karam stated it would be nice to have a representative from East Haddam, Tylerville, and Higganum to attend EDC meetings. Mr. Browne stated he can look for a template for the businesses to look at and reach out to them. Mr. Karam asked if Greg McKenna, Nutmeg Pharmacy, would be interested in this. Ms. Anderson stated Cortney Emshwiller Swokla, HK Fitness, had offered to be the point person.

Ms. Anderson asked if there was any need for adjustment in the subcategories.

Mr. Karam stated he met with Mr. McGarry and presented some thoughts on inclusivity and how to make Haddam more welcoming to LGBTQ+ specifically and believes it would fall under all the buckets. One of the initiatives is how to make businesses more welcoming in general such as placing stickers in their windows that say, "All are Welcome", etc. Mr. Karam stated Rebecca Degnan, Prism Counseling & Support, LLC, Killingworth, who joined the meeting with Mr. McGarry has literature and thoughts on the matter. Mr. Karam suggested Ms. Degnan attend an EDC meeting to make recommendations on how to approach businesses to put the sticker in their windows.

Mr. Farina asked what the stickers would say. Mr. Karam stated the stickers could say anything such as "All are Welcome" or depict a LGBTQ+ flag. Mr. Farina stated he has a problem with that, noting that he's a part of the LGBTQ+ community, and he's tired of the whinny and moaning. Mr. Farina stated that this does offend other people and it doesn't need to be pushed in their face. Mr. Karam stated a business owner could decline, but there may be others who would like to participate. Mr. Farina stated it could end up being where everything would need to be added; and asked where it would end. Mr. Farina stated he understands Mr. Karam's point because he too doesn't like anyone messing around with others, but sometimes it becomes too much. Mr. Browne stated he can see both sides of the coin. Mr. Farina stated it may be a generational thing.

Mr. Karam stated there is an initiative and interest to make businesses more welcoming to LGBTQ+ in our community and he would like to invite Ms. Degnan to a meeting to talk about how EDC might be able to help businesses do that. Mr. Browne stated the first question a business owner will ask is what business I am going to bring in and how will it increase my sales. Mr. Browne stated he was not trying to be negative, that he understood where Mr. Karam wants to go, and that overtime Haddam will get there. But if approaching a small business, they're going to want to know how they will make money by putting a sticker in their windows or a flag or yard sign on their building or yard. Mr. Karam stated he understood not every business would be interested, but they can be offered something easy to do. Mr. Browne stated why not suggest something that brings everybody in, so every business is comfortable in doing what is being discussed. Mr. Karam stated he didn't say what they should or shouldn't do, that he had just gave an example of "All are Welcome", which has nothing to do with LGBTQ+, and noted there are multiple other messages that could be used. Mr. Browne agreed.

Mr. Karam stated community pride and attracting businesses was part of his strategy in talking to Mr. McGarry as Haddam is the only town in the immediate area – Deep River, Chester, Essex, Middletown, East Haddam - that does not have a single LGBTQ+ sticker, flag, or sign not only all year round but during pride month, and this shows where Haddam is falling. Mr. Karam stated there are a lot of people like him and it makes him think twice. Mr. Farina stated he doesn't think about it and if people do not like it, don't think about. Mr. Farina spoke in regard to talking to a local priest about this subject and the church would not address it. Mr. Farina stated he finds it more offensive to see such things and he doesn't know of anyone who's been thrown out of a store. Mr. Farina stated he may be out of the loop.

Mrs. Staskelunas stated she can see each other's points and that there are some businesses that have signage that's not so welcoming. Mr. Browne talked about building standards. Mr. Karam stated he told Mr. McGarry there are things the town can do and there are things that EDC can offer businesses to



make Haddam more welcoming and this is his goal. Mr. Karam stated he believes this matter is a part of EDC and if open to it, would like to invite Ms. Degnan to a meeting. Mr. Farina stated he is open to it.

Mr. Farina stated no pressure no judgement. Mr. Farina also stated there may be more push back than Mr. Karam is aware of because sometimes when this type of subject is brought up it takes a while for people to come around. Mr. Karam is aware of push back and this is one small thing that he's trying to bring into the conversation for economic development and for the town.

Ms. Anderson stated if Ms. Degnan would like to attend an EDC meeting, she's agreeable to it. Ms. Anderson stated careful consideration needs to be taken on how this subject is framed, as she believes this is not something that can be forced on the businesses, but it is something that's being looked at and if a business is interested in learning more or participating EDC can discuss it with them. Mr. Browne stated it appears that there are things, such as signs and flags as they've been mentioned several times over the past few meetings, that are making Mr. Karam feel uncomfortable, and he understands that. Mr. Browne stated if you want people to be happy there needs to be consistency in how buildings look; and perhaps some minimum standards need to be in place. Mr. Browne made it clear he was only asking Mr. Karam a question.

Mr. Karam stated community pride, attracting and retaining businesses, and making Haddam a more welcoming environment is his goal. Mr. Browne asked for LGBTQ+ or for everyone. Mr. Karam stated everyone. Mr. Browne stated that was not what Mr. Farina and he were hearing. Ms. Anderson agreed, stating that's where she felt the push back would come from. Mr. Karam stated what he took Mr. McGarry through had examples of LGBTQ+ because that is the big part of the conversation about making everyone feeling welcome. Mr. Karam believes it ties into making Haddam a more welcoming and attractive place for families and business and that inclusivity is a proven way of doing that. Mr. Karam stated current signs do not feel welcoming to a lot of people. Mr. Browne told Mr. Karam he had heard him loud and clear on that point and stated that in some towns certain signs are not allowed. Mr. Browne stated he doesn't see consistency with buildings or signs and understands it takes time to get there. Mr. Karam stated there are design guidelines for the villages (new construction only) and sign regulations. Ms. Anderson stated part of the problem with consistency is that everything already exists. Discussion followed regarding the need for infrastructure (sewer/water), incremental success on individual projects without infrastructure, and businesspeople looking for infrastructure and traffic flow.

Mr. Karam stated Mr. McGarry and Mr. Warner have done a great job in getting studies and grants and, therefore, it's important to have a holistic plan as well as infrastructure. Mr. Karam stated EDC's job is to make sure the town retains and attracts businesses, bring together a merchant's association, etc. Mr. Farina stated it's like a puzzle and everything takes money and time, and everyone is aware of it. Mr. Farina stated Haddam is what it is, and it will never be an Essex, Chester, Essex, or Old Saybrook. Ms. Anderson stated we can embrace it, but we can also improve it. Mr. Farina agreed.

Mr. Farina stated he had no problem with Ms. Degnan or anyone else attending a meeting to discuss the subject. Mrs. Staskelunas stated every business as a right to put whatever signage they want up, to an extent; however, she did have a problem with EDC providing that signage, as EDC would need to provide other signage whether EDC agreed with it or not and wants to be careful with that. Mr. Karam stated yes, he understood, but it can't be political and doesn't believe an LGBTQ+ flag is political. Mr. Karam stated "All are Welcome" isn't political. Mrs. Staskelunas agreed that "All are Welcome" is not political.

Mr. Karam asked Mr. Farina to refrain from saying insensitive comments if Ms. Degnan is invited and attends a meeting. Mr. Farina stated that she must be aware of differing opinions, and he comes from a different perspective. Mr. Karam asked Mr. Farina to be respectful to her. Mr. Farina asked what he said that was disrespectful; and that he is only commenting on what is his perspective, what he sees as an EDC commissioner and a resident of Haddam, and how this may affect other people. Mr. Browne stated it will go where it will go on its own and the starting point needs to be very generic. Mr. Karam suggested the Commission move on.



**Budget** - Ms. Anderson stated the Commission has expended about half of its budget for the year. A brief discussion followed regarding expenditures. Mrs. Batzner stated the Commission had approved the following expenditures: \$2,500 for advertising, \$250 for signs, and \$500 Christmas tree lighting. Mrs. Batzner will obtain a current budget runoff and email it to all Commissioners.

Mr. Browne asked who owns or will facilitate these items. Mr. Browne stated he thinks it would be best to take "one bite at a time", work on it, and that will lead to other accomplishments. Mr. Browne stated the Facebook page should be up to the Tylerville merchants and not EDC. Ms. Anderson stated next month perhaps Commissioners can select what interests them and move forward with it.

Mr. Karam asked if attracting family friendly businesses could be added to the second bucket. Mr. Karam stated he could speak to Parker Benjamin to see what types of businesses they are attracting to Scovil and find out what EDC can do to support them and to attract others.

Ms. Anderson stated she is aware that the developer for Scovil has/had one (1) tenant interested in the entire property and would not disclose the name of the tenant. Discussion followed as to parameters for tenant(s) with Ms. Anderson stating it's her understanding that the town has no say of what tenant will go into the buildings; that perhaps one (1) tenant would work better with the available parking; and the property sold as creative maker space (what got the town excited about the proposal). Mr. Karam asked when the environment work would start. Mrs. Batzner stated she thought Mr. Warner stated the work would begin in the spring of 2024.

Ms. Anderson stated she will add developing holistic cohesive plans for any ongoing or potential projects and then come up with something for attracting businesses. Mr. Browne stated that would be a marketing plan or program. Mr. Karam stated the plan he was talking about earlier would be how the green, Scovil, Rossi, HES would all work together, and that he does not look at it as marketing.

**Community Challenge Grant** - Ms. Anderson stated the State has asked a number of questions which is a good sign, but no announcement has been made to date. Mrs. Staskelunas asked if the State would award a portion of the requested funding. Ms. Anderson stated she had asked Mr. Warner the same question and he had said that would be unlikely.

#### **d. POCD Action Items**

Ms. Anderson reported she will paste the Commission's Action Items to the back of the Goals and Strategies paperwork and in that way the Commission can keep track every month.

#### **e. 2023 Farmers' Market – Update**

Ms. Anderson reported the traffic has picked up which is great, and the Market has a great vendor crew this year. The Farmers' Market will be taking a break the last and first Saturday of August and September, but will resume on Saturday, 9 September 2023. Overall, everything is going very well, and have received good feedback from customers and vendors.

Mrs. Staskelunas asked if the move to the upper parking lot (closer to the building) had affected the Market. Ms. Anderson stated two weeks ago during kid vendor day there was the threat of rain, and the multi-purpose room was opened. Vendors and residents liked it; however, with this change the visual has been lost and they need to figure out how to attract people. Ms. Anderson stated it makes a big difference and the awning has helped with some of the vendors.

#### **f. Updates**

Ms. Anderson reported on the following:

**Rossi Property** – Still talking to the developer who submitted on the Request for Proposals (RFP). Unclear where the conversation stands. The developer is interested in purchasing the entire parcel not



just the front portion. Still talking about that. Anything related to buying, selling, and/or building would need to go before multiple committees.

**HES** – Received five (5) bids from architects for the Space Utilization Study. Believe three (3) will be interviewed. Submitting bids ranged from \$23,000 to \$77,000. A brief discussion followed. A consultant should be selected by the next meeting.

**Higganum Cove** – Cove Committee doing a lot of great work. Recently had several trees removed.

**Scovil Hoe** – Previously discussed under Budget and Goals and Strategies.

**Haddam Center and Bridge Road Sidewalks** – Odds and ends getting cleaned up.

**212 Saybrook Road, Higganum** - P&Z approved the conversion of the main building into ten (10) apartments.

**Dollar General, Killingworth Road, Higganum** – Very close to opening. Mr. Browne stated they were not open today, but they are hustling to do so.

**Hairpinz (former)/Izzy Rose (new), 323 Saybrook Road, Higganum** – Mrs. Staskelunas stated Hairpinz is no longer in the building; and asked if anyone knew what was taking place. Mr. Karam stated there was something posted on Facebook, and it appears to be gift shop.

**Phantom Brewery (next to Dunkin Donuts, Higganum)** – Mrs. Staskelunas asked for an update. Ms. Anderson stated it's her understanding that the project is still moving along. Mr. Karam stated he heard there will be food available. Mrs. Batzner stated through a discussion at P&Z, they could not have a kitchen/cooking in the building, but they can bring food in.

## **6. Old Business**

### **a. Wayfinding Campaign**

Mr. Karam stated he spoke to someone from DOT about the process and how it works – limitations and rules. Once a plan is developed and site specs are available, the process can move further along. Mr. Karam stated there can only be three (3) to five (5) destinations on the sign and cannot assign a location twice. Need to find the right vendor, develop a plan, site specs, materials to be used as well as paint colors for the sign, etc. Mr. Karam reported he has contact information for Chester (email out to them regarding their sign). Mr. Karam stated his DOT contacts are Rick Chapman and Gary Brigham. Ms. Anderson stated she thought DOT would have pre-qualified contractors (sign vendors). Mr. Karam will continue to provide updates.

Mrs. Staskelunas asked if the State would pay for the signs. Mr. Karam stated no, this will need to be a Capital project due to cost. Mrs. Staskelunas asked if grant funding would be available. Ms. Anderson stated that should be looked into.

**Muckets** – Mr. Farina asked for an update. Ms. Anderson stated Mr. McKenna has one and HES has the other. Mrs. Staskelunas asked if anything will be done to celebrate the Muckets. Ms. Anderson stated it's unclear at this time.

## **7. Chairman's Report**

Ms. Anderson reported on the following:

**EDC's September Meeting** – EDC's meeting falls on the same night as the Board of Education's (BOE) meeting night which should be their final community conversation about their master plan. Although Ms. Anderson encouraged everyone to attend, she felt EDC had a lot that needed to be addressed. Discuss-

ed rescheduling EDC's meeting with the Commission deciding to keep their meeting date and continue with the discussions that have been initiated.

**Potential Primary for First Selectman** - Mr. Farina asked if Kenny Vallera had decided too primary. Ms. Anderson stated as far as she's aware, no. Mrs. Batzner stated if needed, primary day is Tuesday, 12 September 2023.

## **8. Approval of Minutes – 12 July 2023**

**MOTION:** Mike Farina motioned to approve the 12 July 2023 as submitted. Kate Anderson second. Motion carried with Mrs. Staskelunas abstaining.

**Assignment of Tasks** - Mr. Browne asked Ms. Anderson if there was anything that he could do during the month, as he had the time and would be more than happy to do so. Ms. Anderson stated CT Main Street would be a great start. Mr. Browne stated okay.

Obtain DOT contacts for Garden Club, CT Main Street Accelerator Program link, update Goals and Strategies, obtain DOT sign vendors and standards – Ms. Anderson

Distributed CT Main Street Webinar Link – Mr. Browne or Mr. Karam or Ms. Anderson.

**Nut Megz, Tylerville** – Mr. Karam stated the business has opened.

**Bittersweet Bistro, 176 Route 81, Building 5, Killingworth** – Ms. Anderson reported that Mrs. Benson Amarante could not attend tonight's meeting as she is preparing for her Grand Opening on Saturday, 2 September 2023. Bittersweet Bistro is in the plaza across from Dunkin Donuts, behind the Barrel House Brewery.

**Beautification Committee** - Mr. Karam stated he purchased five (5) large planters for in front of the Village Market and will plant mums once the season starts. This purchase will be out of pocket until additional funding can be obtained. Mr. Farina asked Mr. Karam is he was the one who had done the mowing at the bank. Mr. Karam stated yes, and additional people have reached out. Mr. Karam stated there was an article in the Middletown Press regarding the Beautification Committee.

Mr. Karam stated the town has a problem with the lack of maintenance. Ms. Anderson stated there is a problem and its external forces as is there is a lack of labor everywhere. Ms. Anderson stated the town is paying a landscaping. Mrs. Batzner stated the town has a contracted landscaper who is mowing town owned property per the contract and the portion of HES were the Shad Museum is located was not part of the bid as originally there was no grass on that section.

## **9. Adjournment**

**MOTION:** Doreen Staskelunas motioned to adjourn. Kate Anderson second. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Bunny Hall Batzner*  
Bunny Hall Batzner  
Recording Clerk

**The next meeting is Wednesday, 13 September 2023,  
at the Community Center, 7 Candlewood Hill Road, Higganum, CT.**