

**TOWN OF HADDAM  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
COMMUNITY CENTER  
7 CANDLEWOOD HILL ROAD, HIGGANUM, CT 06441  
WEDNESDAY, 11 OCTOBER 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
A	Mike Karam
X	Stacey Kinney
X	David Law
X	John Pember
X	Doreen Staskelunas, Secretary (Arrived 6:46 p.m.)
X	Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

**1. Call to Order**

Ms. Anderson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

The pledge was recited.

**3. Approval of Agenda**

**MOTION:** Mike Farina motioned to approve the 11 October 2023 agenda as submitted. David Law second. Motion carried unanimously.

**4. Public Comment**

There was no public in attendance.

**5. Welcome – New Member – Stacey Kinney**

Ms. Anderson welcomed Ms. Kinney to the Commission noting that her appointment was approved by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) on Tuesday, 10 October 2023. Ms. Anderson reported the Commission now has a full membership. Welcome, Stacey!

**6. New Business**

**a. CT Main Street  
Accelerator Program**

Ms. Anderson reported that she and Mr. Browne both attended the recent webinar and recapped what the program has to offer. Ms. Anderson stated the webinar received very low attendance, but it's recorded and is available to municipalities later. Ms. Anderson also stated the application is somewhat short and is due Friday, 3 November 2023, which is before the Commission's next meeting; therefore, a special meeting may need to be scheduled to approve the application.

Ms. Anderson stated the topics for tonight's discussion are: a) is there interest in submitting an application and b) what should the proposed project be. Discussion followed regarding what would be deemed a challenge (cultural, art, community space, negative perceptions); whether a main street has been determined (Route 154 or 81 or both); examples given during the webinar (more tangible); and the ability to run ideas by CT Main Street (CMS) representatives.

Ms. Kinney asked if examples from other small towns had been provided as she doesn't believe Haddam is unique in regard to the problems it is having. Ms. Kinney spoke in regard to economic problems such as keeping businesses open and filling empty spaces. Ms. Kinney also asked where the Main Street is noting that Tylerville is building up faster than Higganum.

Ms. Anderson stated one idea she had was how Haddam unites two distinctly separate centers. Ms. Anderson stated during a CMS presentation in February 2020, that question was asked and the response was sometimes you can't. Discussion followed regarding the two centers being completely different, finding a way to make them cohesive, possibly having two (2) Main Streets, and the potential of having a sidewalk and/or bike path that runs the length of Route 154. Mr. Farina reviewed some of the ideas/process that took place in Coventry (planting of daffodils, addition of sculptures, and holding a daffodil festival). Mr. Browne stated the project or mini-projects could apply to both centers.

Mr. Pember stated the project needs to be driven more as to what the Commission wants/needs to be coached on not necessarily the money as the grants range from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Mr. Pember asked if there's a way to somehow start identifying Higganum and Tylerville the same perhaps through culture and/or arts. Mr. Law spoke in regard to a theme such as flags/banners within the two centers and then flags sporadically dispersed through Haddam Center. Ms. Kinney mentioned flowers. Mr. Pember suggested tying it into the shad museum and shack – history being on the river; and asked if there was a town seal. Ms. Anderson and Mrs. Batzner stated yes. Mr. Farina stated the shad would seem the easiest way to go.

Mr. Browne stated the deliverable for the closing is in the summer and then reviewed the balance of items and their due dates. Mr. Browne asked if there were any events that could be tied into these time frames. Mr. Pember stated CMS will be teaching members how to proceed. Mr. Browne stated the Commission would be executing the project on 27 June 2024. Mr. Browne stated Mr. Pember makes a good point about how CMS will walk the Commission through the process. Discussion followed.

Mr. Pember stated the Commission is trying to determine whether they would like to apply and then what the project would be. The Commission felt the theme of connecting the two centers would be doable as well as wayfinding (discussed small towns in Litchfield County that have small signs indicating businesses as well as destination spots). Discussion followed regarding CMS's grant as a potential financial starting point and additional money, whether from a separate budget line item or other groups assisting with funding, could make the project bigger. Ms. Kinney suggested using other assets such as the Goodspeed Opera House especially with the addition of a sidewalk on the bridge as well as connecting Haddam Neck, if possible. Also discussed working with other towns to change things with the season. Mr. Law asked what the unifying factor throughout town is. Mr. Browne stated the town does not have branding. Mr. Browne stated spring is coming and perhaps some type of spring display could be created – a banner/flag "Welcome to Spring!" with some flowers. Ms. Kinney spoke in regard to Main Street Middletown with the flower planters. Mr. Farina talked about a flower bridge. Discussion followed how people by pass Haddam by driving on Route 9 rather than jumping off onto Routes 154 or 81, with the empty spaces there's not a lot of choices for food, etc., natural resources being a key (signs would direct people to these areas), and cleaning up areas (the Beautification Committee and/or other groups and planters/flowers).

Mr. Pember stated the question tonight is does the Commission want to apply and not focus on a specific project. The role of CMS will be to teach the Commission what is doable. Ms. Anderson reviewed time commitment per month – approximately five (5) hours – if selected. Discussion followed regarding

stakeholders/volunteers – potentially a representative from Tylerville and Higganum. Ms. Anderson will speak to Bridget Marshall of Oh, Fudge and Taylor and Jarrett Lemon of Higganum Hardware.

Discussion followed in regard to people being burnt out hearing the same rhetoric and development still in limbo for Scovil, Rossi, and HES. Ms. Kinney stated she liked the idea of signage, beautification, and connection because it's simple, it can be done, and people see something accomplished. Ms. Kinney asked if CMS is the right forum. Mr. Pember agreed, stating that signage, beautification, and connection would be something the Commission could do themselves. Ms. Kinney stated there are huge things that will be happening, but until that takes place it makes it difficult to do specific things.

Mr. Farina stated CMS has a template that could be customized to the town. Mr. Browne stated prior to 3 November 2023, CMS is willing to chat with the Commission. Mr. Pember stated if CMS picked Haddam's project, the Commission can decline. The Commission discussed how to get the community to buy in on the project. Ms. Kinney asked what's stopping the Commission from trying. Mr. Browne stated he likes the signs and flowers, but there needs to be branding – communication, perceptions. Mr. Pember stated 1) establishing identity and continuity between distinctive centers and 2) connecting two (2) main streets. Mr. Pember suggested the idea be floated by CMS as the Commission does not know what CMS can do. Discussion followed regarding what the visuals will be to create the continuity making people realize they are in the same town or in a specific place in town.

The Commission agreed to apply, the deliverable will be the application and getting representatives from Tylerville and Higganum, and float the idea by CMS. Discussion followed in regard to the stakeholders' team (potentially including some floating alternates) and scheduling of a special meeting prior to the application deadline. Commission agreed to meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, 1 November 2023, at 6:30 p.m. Mr. Browne and Ms. Anderson will meet (in-person, by phone, or by email) before the special meeting to discuss/work on the application.

**Potential Stakeholders' Team:** Kate Anderson – decision maker (BOS), Curtis Browne (EDC), representatives from Tylerville and Higganum, and Doreen Staskelunas (alternate).

Mr. Browne asked the Commission to think about what they would like to name the project noting they have a description – establish an identity in Haddam and bringing continuity between the two centers.

## **b. Seasonal Events**

**River Days – Follow Up** – Used the rain date of Sunday, 1 October 2023, and the event went smoothly.

**Grim's Haunted House/Fall Festival – Follow Up – Grim's** - Friday-Sunday, 27-29 October 2023, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. **Fall Festival** – Saturday, 28 October 2023, 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Events to be held at HES, 272 Saybrook Road, Higganum. Looking for volunteers. Anyone looking to be a "Trunk" to hand out candy for Trunk or Treat to contact Ms. Anderson. Nothing is being asked of EDC for this event.

**Holiday Decorations – Schedule Date** – Bogue Farm has offered to donate a large Christmas tree (7 to 8 feet) for the gazebo. Public Works will be taking care of the snowflakes and garlands on the poles. EDC is only responsible for the gazebo. Mr. Law stated the gazebo brings a lot of focus to the Center, it is something people like to see, and the longer it is lit for the season the better. Mr. Pember suggested the Commission contemplate retaining the Christmas tree's root ball and planting it after the season. Ms. Anderson will speak to the Bagues. Discussion followed in regard to decorating the bottom – tree skirt, decorating boxes as presents. Mr. Law stated additional icicle lights are needed. Ms. Anderson stated Bogue's asked about planting a tree on the green, but she recommended that it wait until after the community septic had been installed. All agreed.

Tentative dates: Saturday or Sunday, 25 or 26 November 2023, 9:00 a.m. Leaning toward Sunday. Will discuss further at the November meeting.

**Holiday Pop Up Market** – Event returning to HES beginning Friday, 17 November 2023, until Sunday, 17 December 2023. There will be multi-vendors and they will be adding a lot of extras – theme days, workshops, engage local businesses, Santa will visit several times during the event, etc. Noted the Pop Up Market has been incorporated as a non-profit and they can be followed on their Facebook page. Nothing is being asked of EDC for this event.

**Tylerville Tree Lighting – Friday, 1 December 2023** – A couple of meetings ago, the Commission voted to give them \$500 for their tree lighting which has been deposited into their account. The tree is located on the front corner of the River Valley Provisions property. The group provides gifts for the kids.

### **c. Updates**

Ms. Anderson reported on the following:

**Rossi Property** – A developer is still interested in the parcel and continues to work with town hall as to what they would like to see there.

**HES** – The architect that has been hired to do the space utilization study was in town hall interviewing groups to see what kind of space they need. Conceptual ideas as to what could be at HES will be put together, how much it will cost, etc. Community meetings will be scheduled.

**Higganum Cove** – Mrs. Batzner reported per an email from Bill Warner, Town Planner, dated 11 October 2023, work on the overlook is scheduled to begin on Monday, 16 October 2023, (weather permitting) and that their Thursday, 12 October 2023, meeting had been cancelled. A brief discussion followed regarding the natural aspects that are available at the Cove

**Scovil Hoe** – Announced at the BOS meeting that the developer has signed a lease with a single tenant – The Connecticut Wedding Group (wedding planner). Ms. Anderson stated there is a special permit that limits the different types of businesses that can go in the buildings, but it's up to Parker Benjamin what they want to do with it. Mrs. Batzner stated they can always come back before P&Z. Ms. Anderson stated she believes Connecticut Wedding Group recently acquired a business out of New Jersey that had a lot of property and that they own/operate the Barns at Wesleyan Hills and the Pavilion at Crystal Lake. Mr. Pember asked if it would be a wedding venue or storage. Ms. Anderson stated she believes they plan on using a part of the buildings as a wedding venue. Ms. Anderson stated it is her understanding that they do not intend to take up the entire space for themselves and that they will be subleasing to other small businesses, but they will get priority. Discussion followed with the proposal, as it is currently known, being different than what was expected, but it is a positive thing.

**Community Septic** – Design work continues. Mrs. Staskelunas stated this has been in the design phase for some time; and asked if this was normal. Ms. Anderson stated the engineers have not been designing the system for the entire time, but have been waiting on authorization from the state (final clearance came this summer).

**New Businesses** – Izzy Rose Gift Shop, 323 Saybrook Road, Higganum, has opened. Ms. Anderson will stop in and introduce herself.

**Swan Hill** – The Haddam Land Trust (HLT) have scheduled a couple of clean up days – one this Saturday and one in November. Volunteers sought. Ms. Anderson stated she hiked Swan Hill this summer and it has become very overgrown and believes the HLT have received a number of comments to that effect. Mrs. Staskelunas stated when HES was open, the fourth grades would help to clear the trails and with the school closed as long as it has been there has been sufficient time for it to become overgrown.

## **7. Old Business**

### **a. Tylerville Businesses/Swing Bridge Construction – Update Grant Application Update**

Ms. Anderson thanked the subcommittee and Commission members who attended the special meeting on Wednesday, 4 October 2023, and noted that the BOS approved the Commission's recommendations pending those applications that had minor modifications.

### **HK Now Advertising**

Ms. Anderson reported that she will be putting a pause on the half-page ad that is current being run and will update it to reflect the Tylerville Tree Lighting event.

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

Current runoff reflects recent expenditures. Mr. Farina questioned the expenditure for Legal Notices. Ms. Anderson stated that is for all of the Tylerville businesses ads.

### **c. POCD Action Items**

Tabled.

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

Ms. Anderson reported that the last Market for the season will be held Saturday, 14 October 2023, and noted that it was an interesting season. Believes there will be a debriefing in a couple of weeks to discuss what went well, what didn't go well, what can be done better, etc. Ms. Anderson stated that due to Mrs. Benson Amarante recently opening her own business, she will no longer be available to be the sole market master and they are looking to take a group approach for next season. The thought is for multiple people to take on a small task – booking musicians, vendor line up, social media, etc. Looking for volunteers (other groups and/or residents) not just EDC.

### **e. Wayfinding Campaign**

Tabled.

## **8. Chairman's Report**

Ms. Anderson had nothing additional to report.

**The Truck Bar** – Mr. Law spoke in regard to an article in the Hartford Courant about the Higganum location having a pickle ball court. A brief discussion followed in regard to not knowing whether the business is open or not as the lighting is very dim (lighting could be better).

**Jail** – Ms. Kinney asked if the scheduled event had been held. Mrs. Staskelunas stated yes, it was this past weekend. Ms. Kinney asked where the money raised goes. Ms. Anderson stated the Historical Society held the event and it was a fund raiser for them. Ms. Kinney stated scheduling events at the Jail would be a good way to get people to come to town.

## **9. Approval of Minutes – 13 September 2023 and 4 October 2023**

Tabled.

## **10. Review Next Meeting Date & Location – Wednesday, 8 November 2023, Community Center**

**Special Meeting** – Wednesday, 1 November 2023, 6:30 p.m., via Zoom.

**Regular Meeting** – Wednesday, 8 November 2023, 6:30 p.m., Community Center, 7 Candlewood Hill Road, Higganum.

**Former Citizens Bank** – Mr. Law suggested a recreational type business be sought for this building such as a bike shop (sales/repairs/rentals), kayak rentals (transport service too; shuttle down to kayak launch at Cove and pick up at the boat launch). Mr. Pember stated a bike trail would be tremendous. A brief discussion followed in regard to rails to trails or a trail along side of the track (recreationally connecting Middletown to Haddam).

## **11. Adjournment**

**MOTION:** Doreen Staskelunas motioned to adjourn. David Law second. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

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

**SPECIAL MEETING – WEDNESDAY, 1 NOVEMBER 2023, 6:30 P.M., VIA ZOOM**

**The next regular meeting is Wednesday, 8 November 2023,  
at the Community Center, 7 Candlewood Hill Road, Higganum, CT.**