

From: Lois Laczko February 6, 2009 3:00:03 PM
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Cc:

ADOPTED

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MINUTES
January 8, 2009
REGULAR MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission was called to order at 7:35 AM in the Main Meeting Room of the Simsbury Town Offices. Commission members Mark Deming, Nancy Haase, Alan Levesque, Alan Needham, Chuck Minor and Kevin Crimmins were present.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES of December 11, 2008

Commissioner Crimmins made one edit to the December 11, 2008 minutes.

Commissioner Levesque made a motion to approve the December 11, 2008 minutes as amended. Commissioner Minor seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

III. Status Report

Web Site

Commissioner Crimmins stated that he met with Rick Bazzano last week regarding the website. He stated that the Town has extended their engagement with Virtual Town Hall (VTH). The Town has committed to upgrading the website. The net effect is that there will be a higher level of graphics and updates will be made easier. The entire website will have a fresher look and feel. Commissioner Crimmins suggested that when making the transition to the new website for the Economic Development Commission that Chairman Frank's introduction be moved to the first page. Links could then be decided and changed on a monthly basis. Making changes to the website will now be easier. The EDC can tell Mr. Bazzano of the changes that they would like to make. He stated that all of these changes could be done at no cost to the Commission within the Town's agreement with VTH.

Commissioner Deming questioned what the timeframe was for the new website. Commissioner Crimmins stated that it may have already happen. He stated that Mr. Bazzano would like this Commission to be one of the first to transition to the new website. He will need information from the EDC within the next month. Commissioner Haase suggested making a sub-committee and giving them the flexibility to meet and discuss the website. She also suggested including Main Street Partnership in this. Commissioner Crimmins volunteered to work on this with other volunteers of the EDC. Commissioner Haase also volunteered herself and Ms. Floroski from the Main Street Partnership to start the initial work. They will come to the EDC with their proposed changes for review and feedback.

IV. PRESENTATION - SIMSBURY MAIN STREET PARTNERSHIP

Sarah Floroski stated that Main Street Partnership did many great things this year, including the Talcott Mountain Music Festival (TMMF) and managing the vendors there. Sales for the vendors were approximately \$21,000; all of this money was kept local.

Regarding gift checks, Ms. Floroski stated that the Main Street Partnership had a goal of getting 15 new businesses on board; they got 22 new businesses to join. There has been \$78,500 in gift check sales since the beginning of the program; over \$14,000 was sold in gift checks last year alone. This money is also spent locally. Ms. Floroski stated that gift checks can be purchased at the Simsbury Bank. They have not done much advertising for the gift checks; most advertising has been done by word of mouth.

Main Street Partnership held a Bridal Review at the River View, which is the largest banquet facility in the area. This was a way to highlight new businesses.

Main Street was also involved in the "Staycation Destination Packages". Ms. Floroski stated that they sold three different packages: a wine package, a bike package and a picnic under the stars package. She stated that all of the packages worked out well, although the wine package was the most popular. They are looking forward to doing this again next year.

Ms. Floroski stated that Main Street Partnership also has a Design Committee. This Committee tackled the final designs for the outer gateway signs and also the Welcome to Simsbury signs. Regarding grants, Ms. Floroski stated that the Main Street Partnership has received a grant for \$8,750, which was matched by the Town for the preservation study at Eno Memorial Hall. She stated that not only does Eno need updating for aesthetic purposes, it also needs updating for safety reasons. The Design

Committee has also tackled the redesign of the front entryway at Eno and they have also made plans to move the Veteran's Memorial that is out in front.

Ms. Floroski stated that Main Street has a brand new partnership with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). She stated the Main Street members will be listed on the SBDC website.

Main Street Partnership has also done a lot of work with branding Simsbury. Ms. Floroski distributed a brand new brochure to the Commission members. They have worked on this brochure with the Trails Council and the Farmington Valley Visitor's Association (FVVA). This brochure is much more durable and it also has a map section, which fits into biker's pouches for convenience. The brochure is also very user friendly. She stated that Main Street is very proud of this brochure.

Ms. Floroski stated that Main Street is currently looking at the same level of funding this year. She feels that the value of what they provide is worth more, although they are sensitive to the economic times. Approximately \$35,000 of in-kind services has been donated to Main Street this year. She stated that for every dollar the Town gives to Main Street Partnership, they get a 3 to 1 return on their investment. Main Street is a great investment to the town. She stated that she is very excited to move forward into this next year.

Commissioner Haase asked Ms. Floroski to talk in more detail about what Main Street did in addition to what was on their work plans. Ms. Floroski stated that they have added many significant things to their work plans, including: work on getting the gateway signage; they did more work than was expected at Eno Memorial Hall; they put together the "Staycation" packages; and they are also holding the top 10 taxpayers event.

Ms. Floroski stated that Main Street Partnership is asking the Town for \$44,000. She stated that this would be a cut considering all the additional work that they have taken on.

V. PRESENTATION - FARMINGTON VALLEY VISITORS ASSOCIATION

Nancy Anstey, Director of the Farmington Valley Visitor's Association (FVVA), stated that this organization was formed in 1994 to promote the Farmington Valley. She stated that the FVVA does not get any Federal funding; it is funded by 7 Towns with membership dues. Every year, FVVA tries to increase their membership.

The biggest production piece of the FVVA is the Guide to the Farmington Valley brochure. FVVA also has expanded their visitor's center and will

now be calling it a Valley Wide Visitor Center. Ms. Anstey stated that they have a wealth of information, including member events. This same information goes into a newsletter, which is sent out to approximately 500 people, and is also on their website.

Ms. Anstey stated that the FVVA also puts out a restaurant guide, which needs to be updated several times per year.

Ms. Anstey stated that FVVA also has a Historic Site Commission, which they also hold events for. She stated that they are also looking into taking over the barn tour.

The Guide to the Farmington Valley brochure is used as a seasonal getaway. Ms. Anstey stated that the FVVA has a getaway program with discounts and a coupon book. This brings many people into the Valley. They produced 90,000 guides; they currently have only 500 left. She stated that this is the most expensive part of their budget.

Ms. Anstey stated that a big part of the FVVA is the bike trails. The FVVA has collaborated with the Watershed Association, the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Partnership, etc. Ms. Anstey stated that the bike trails are a vital part of the Valley and are vital to Simsbury. There were approximately 150,000 visits to the trails in 2007; the figures for 2008 are not yet in.

Commissioner Deming questioned if the FVVA has gotten any feedback from merchants regarding the bike trail. Ms. Anstey stated that they have gotten great feedback. People would like to see the communities built up around the trail; they would also like to see more ice cream parlors and restrooms near the trails.

Commissioner Deming asked if the FVVA was anticipating putting signs on the trail. Ms. Anstey stated that the FVVA has discussed this issue. There are currently several kiosks already on the trail; they would like to put up more kiosks. Although it is a slow process, the FVVA would someday like to have Bed and Breakfast packages along the trail so people can ride through the State and stop overnight along the way.

Regarding the Farmington Valley Film Commission, Ms. Anstey stated that the FVVA is working to create a Farmington Valley production guide. They would like to have this finished by the spring.

Ms. Anstey stated that the FVVA has put together a proclamation stating May 14, 2008 as Farmington Valley Day. She stated that if the FVVA is not visible within the State and beyond, then only the people in the Valley will know who they are. It may be, in the near future, that FVVA will be

the only regional organization left in the area to promote the 7 Towns in the Farmington Valley.

Ms. Anstey stated that FVVA has a very small budget of approximately \$100,000. They receive \$17,000 for Town dues and approximately \$35,000 for membership, which is their income. They also hold several fundraisers throughout the year. Regarding their expenses, Ms. Anstey stated that their operating budget is very low, although the cost of the Guide and advertising are significant. The cost for postage for the Guide is approximately \$6,000. Ms. Anstey stated that FVVA has never increased their dues; they are asking the same amount of \$4,000 this year for dues.

Commissioner Deming questioned what new initiatives FVVA would be involved in this upcoming year. Ms. Anstey stated that they would be expanding their e-mail system and their website. They would also be continuing to have getaway packages.

Commissioner Crimmins stated that most Towns are under budget reductions. He questioned what the FVVA's contingency plan was. Ms. Anstey stated that they are still discussing this issue, although their initial reaction would be to cut administrative salaries and also office supplies. She stated that Simsbury is the first Town that she has spoken with, so she is unaware of what other Towns will be doing. Ms. Anstey stated that, the bottom line would be, if their funding is cut significantly, they will have to close, which would be a terrible tragedy for the Valley.

Jan Losee, General Manager of the Simsbury Inn stated that the Guide that the FVVA puts out is so important to all of the hotels in the Valley. She stated that this is what sets the Valley apart as a destination. She stated that the Guide is so helpful to them and to individuals and groups that are coming in from all over the country. Ms. Losee stated that she contribute a great deal of their business to the Guide.

Nelson Adame, Manager of the Avon Marriott Residence Inn stated that they also use the Guide. He stated that the Guide not only attracts people to the Valley, but also helps them to know what they can do while in the area. He stated that the Guide is a great vehicle to promote the Valley.

VI. PRESENTATION - METRO HARTFORD ALLIANCE

Mr. Vose distributed copies of MHA's overview of strategic goals for 2008-2011. He stated that they have the same 6 objectives, although their goals have changed. Mr. Vose read a list of alliance investors, which represents in excess of \$85,000; they have approximately 1100 members. The overview of services included: loan fund programs; brownfield assessment grants; a business visitation program, which helps retain their current

business base; and insurance and financial services, which has made available grants for retaining workers when they face layoffs.

Ms. Vose stated that MHA dues have not gone up and there are several ways to offset dues, including the CERC discount.

Regarding the Legislative agenda, Mr. Vose stated that MHA is stepping up their strategy in this area; they are becoming much more active in promoting legislature. He stated that they have gotten a great deal of positive feedback regarding this.

Regarding Bradley International Airport, Mr. Vose stated that MHA worked very hard with the airport to get the flight to Amsterdam reinstituted. It will be effective June 2, 2009. MHA has given \$250,000 of marketing and in-kind service events to make this happen.

Mr. Vose stated that MHA is the key to helping small businesses grow. He stated that they make sure they get funding and other business resources.

Mr. Vose stated that next year they will be moving forward with their development corporation. They will be helping Municipalities get projects off the ground.

Mr. Vose stated that the Economic Development Commission does not always have an objective return; it needs to be a constant effort. He stated that they need to be visible during the bad times. He stated that it is important to take this opportunity to have regional initiatives. He stated that MHA is the only agency that brings together business, government, educational institutions and non-profit organizations. He stated that MHA has a good reputation in moving things forward and he hopes that Simsbury will continue their relationship with MHA.

Commissioner Haase stated that the Simsbury Chamber of Commerce is a member of MHA. She questioned what MHA offers the Chamber and if there was a redundancy between the Town and the Chamber. Mr. Vose stated that the Chamber and the Town are at different levels. Their needs for services are quite different.

Commissioner Deming questioned if MHA would be raising their Town dues in the upcoming year. Mr. Vose stated that they would not be raising their dues this year. He stated that the dues are still 20 cents per capita; it is approximately \$4,600 for Simsbury.

Commissioner Deming questioned what MHA's top priorities would be for the next year or two. Mr. Vose stated that they would be focusing on and helping small businesses develop.

VII. BUDGET DISCUSSION AND DECISION

Commissioner Deming stated that the Town is requesting that the EDC cut their budget by 5%. He stated that he received an e-mail from Commission Peterson suggesting that they cut their budget across the board 5%. Commissioner Needham stated that he agreed with this also; a 5% cut would not amount to much. Commissioner Crimmins stated that they would need to either cut 5% across the board or eliminate one line item.

Commissioner Deming stated that there is not a line item for continuing their membership with MHA. Commission Haase stated her concerns with this. She stated that this Commission is being asked to make these decisions, although they do not control the monies. Commissioner Deming stated that the EDC will have to make the case if they feel they should continue their relationship with MHA. He stated that he feels MHA is valuable to the Town; the Town needs to have regional support. He stated that the dues for MHA last year were \$4,732. Commissioner Levesque suggested negotiating with MHA regarding possibly lowering their dues.

The EDC members continued to discuss the budget and what could be cut. Commissioner Haase stated that the MHA should not be included in their budget because it was not paid for out of their budget last year, although the EDC should make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. Regarding advertising and the unspent portion of the budget, she stated that if these figures relate to the booth at the Developers Showcase and/or advertising, she stated that she would like to see these numbers fed back into the Main Street Partnership. She feels that more than 5% could be taken from FVVA and given to Main Street. Commissioner Needham agreed. Commissioner Crimmins stated that this could convey a message regarding relative support for these two groups. Commissioner Haase stated that the Town has paid \$4,000 to FVVA last year; \$2,000 for dues and \$2,000 was additional dollars for things they have done. She stated that it is not her intention to favor one group over another.

After some discussion the EDC agreed on the budget cuts.

Commissioner Crimmins made a motion to cut 5% across the board and to eliminate the line items for advertising and postage. The part-time help line item would stay the same. They would then allocate \$42,522 to Main Street Partnership and \$3,800 to Farmington Valley Visitor's Association. The EDC will also be sending their budget to the Board of Selectmen with a letter stating that they recommend that MHA be funded, if not at the level of last year, than at least with a 5% cut. The total Economic Development Commission budget is \$47,070. Commissioner Haase seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Haase stated that there will be a Developer's Showcase in March, which, in terms of the budget, the EDC needs to decide if they would like to participate. She believes that the cost of the booth is \$450. She stated that the EDC has participated in this event for the past five years, although there was a lower turnout last year. She stated the importance of the EDC having a presence at this event, even if they do not have a booth. Commissioner Haase stated that she would e-mail the Commission members information regarding the costs involved in this event.

The EDC discussed if there was money in the budget for this and how this event was funded in the past. Commissioner Crimmins stated that the Developer's Showcase has not been presented in the budget figures and they should not expect the funds will come out of the EDC budget, unless they are willing to, in the future, de-fund one of the line items.

Commissioner Needham stated that he is looking for approval to proceed regarding the Sign Committee participating in a sign awareness month in April 2009. This Commission would furnish a written document that reviews the signage regulation as they currently exist and invite local businesses to put in their feedback regarding the regulation. The EDC would also write a letter describing the benefits of shopping locally. The EDC members agreed to write these letters.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Haase motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 am. Commissioner Crimmins seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.