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Cc:

ADOPTED

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MINUTES
October 16, 2008
REGULAR MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Economic Development Commission was called to order at 7:30 AM in the Main Meeting Room of the Simsbury Town Offices. Chairman Thomas Frank and Commission members Mark Deming, Chuck Minor and Kevin Crimmins were present. Rick Bazzano and Richard Sawitzke were also present.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - August 14, 2008 and September 11, 2008

The minutes could not be approved because there was not a quorum of members present at the meeting.

III. WEB SITE IMPROVEMENTS

Chairman Frank stated that they did receive information from the Metro Hartford Alliance regarding what could be on the Town website. He also had a meeting with Rick Bazzano regarding some of the changes that might be made, although there are still a few problems. One problem is that they will need people to make these changes to the website, which is very time consuming. Another issue is the funding; there are costs involved with some of the changes.

Commissioner Deming stated that he thought the Commission had agreed to hire a vendor to make the changes to the website. The vendor would make the changes and the members of the EDC that make up the Sub-Committee would maintain the website.

Commissioner Crimmins stated that Virtual Town Hall is managing the website. He stated that content changes to the website can be done at no charge; there is a charge for big structural changes and adding new blocks

of data.

Commissioner Crimmins distributed a letter from Mary Glassman indicating that the Town has retained the firm CIO Collaborative and has begun a global Town-wide website review. Mr. Bazzano stated that this firm is comparing Simsbury's website with other Towns with the same structure and size. He stated that the Town is currently in a phase called Demand Management, which prioritizes the first needs of the Town.

Commissioner Deming questioned what Virtual Town Hall (VTH) does for Simsbury. Mr. Bazzano stated that VTH is a corporation; they are an internet host site that also provides services.

Mr. Bazzano stated that VTH has a new Economic Development product that they would like to try out on Simsbury. He stated that this would be very unique for the EDC's webpage. There are many different features including macro media and different links that would be available.

Chairman Frank stated that the EDC was aware of the larger Town project for the website improvements, but this Commission did not want to wait for their smaller changes to be made. A Sub-Committee was formed in order to begin this project. Chairman Frank stated that this project, making the EDC changes, needs a project director. Because the EDC members have full time jobs, they do not have the time to volunteer. He stated that the project needs to be delegated to someone; they need to hire a consultant. If someone is not hired, the project will not get done.

Commissioner Deming questioned if there were any funds in the budget to hire a consultant. Chairman Frank stated that there were no funds available in their budget, although he has spoken to Mary Glassman about the funding. She had stated that if the EDC would like to hire someone for the short-term, she might be able to find funds in the IT budget now for this. Chairman Frank stated that this Commission needs to decide how the project will be managed prior to getting started. They will still need someone to decide what changes should be made and to gather and organize the information. Commissioner Crimmins suggested having VTH come to their November meeting to discuss what they could do for the website. He also suggested that the EDC members have a special meeting, a working session, in order to come up with direction for the service provider.

Rick Bazzano gave the Commission members the web address MerrimackValley.info; Virtual Town Hall is basing their EDC presence on this website. He stated that this is a very unique site that will help them understand what VTH is getting involved with.

IV. UPDATE ON CHARRETTE INITIATIVE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SURVEY

Chairman Frank updated the Commission members regarding the Charrette. He recalled that there was a meeting of the Charrette Sub-Committee in which they approved to proceed with asking that the 3 consultants make their presentations. After these presentations were made and at their latest meeting, the Sub-Committee discussed what consultant they should go forward with, although they could not come to an agreement. However, they will continue discussions with 2 of the 3 consultants. They have asked Mr. Peck to find out the exact costs and if the consultants might reduce these numbers. They would also like to find out if the principles of these consultants would be involved in the Charrette process. After these questions are answered, the Sub-Committee will meet again to select one of the consultants and bring their decision before the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Frank stated that although the Chairman of the Board of Finance has stated his strong point of view, he will not stand in the way of the Charrette or form-based code development. The strong opinion of the Board of Finance Chairman is regarding how to fund the Charrette. He would like this process to be put into the normal budget process, subject to public review.

Regarding the timing for the Charrette, Chairman Frank stated that the process was initially supposed to be done by the end of the year. Now, based on the Board of Finance wanting this in the normal budget process, it could be November or December of 2009 when the process is completed.

Commissioner Crimmins suggested that the EDC invite the Board of Finance to their meeting to discuss the impacts of economic development. He would like to know how the Chairman of the BOF rationalizes not standing in the way of the Charrette but at the same time would like to move forward with the Charrette in a way that would delay the process for one year. Chairman Frank stated that the BOF Chairman feels that this process should be subject to more public scrutiny; that it should be a part of the normal budget process; and that monies should not be transferred out of reserves to fund unbudgeted projects.

Chairman Frank stated that the results of the public opinion survey have been completed and a report has been prepared. Mr. Peck has offered the EDC to have the first look at the results. The Commission discussed having a Special Meeting for this purpose on October 24th at 8:00 a.m. and other times that might work better for some members. Chairman Frank stated that he would notify everyone when the final date and time has been worked out.

V. REPORTS FROM BOARD/COMMISSION LIAISONS

There were none.

VI. STATUS REPORT ON SIMSBURY MEADOW REPORT

Richard Sawitzke stated that the consultant has finished the study of the airport; the full report is on the Town's website. He stated that the study was very comprehensive. They looked at the financial feasibility alternatives within the study.

Commissioner Crimmins stated that although he did not read the full report, there are several things in the report that he would like to discuss. The financials that the consultants relied on ignored some significant sources of revenue that the airport currently has, most significantly, the Fly-In. If this revenue was included, all of the scenarios in the study would have been positive rather than negative. Also, the report states that because the airport has not generated a significant presence of businesses around it to date, it should not be expected to in the future. Commissioner Crimmins stated that this is absurd. He stated that it is this initiative that has driven the EDC's interest in the airport project from the beginning. The problem with the Simsbury airport, to date as a driver of economic development, has been the private ownership and the lack of stability that comes with private ownership. Commissioner Crimmins stated that although he feels that this study was a great process for the Town to go through, there are flaws in the report. He hopes that the final report will be more reflective of the actual financial condition of the airport.

Commissioner Deming stated that if this is to be a Municipal airport, he believes that business would grow in the areas near the airport.

Commissioner Crimmins stated that this would be even truer if Wolcott Road becomes a State Route, which there has been talks about in the past.

Chairman Frank stated that this raises questions whether or not the EDC should take an official stance regarding this now that the report has been completed.

Mr. Sawitzke stated that if the Town would like to pursue this further, the next steps would be the Stage 2 report. Chairman Frank stated that the EDC should decide if they want to encourage or not encourage the Town to go to that next step. Commissioner Minor stated that if the Town is going to proceed forward, it would be unfortunate if they are making decisions based off of net balances of negatives that are not true. He stated that, at a minimum, this needs to be corrected.

Chairman Frank questioned when the Board of Selectmen would need to decide if they were going to proceed to Stage 2. Mr. Sawitzke stated that there is a timeline in the report in terms of staying on the FAA schedule. The Town would need to determine if they will proceed with the investigation by the end of this year or early next year; this would be before the next FAA

grant round, which is in the spring of 2009. Chairman Frank stated that this issue would be put on the next agenda so the Commission could decide whether or not to take action.

Chairman Frank left the meeting at 8:25 a.m.

Regarding Simsbury Meadows, Mr. Sawitzke stated that this property has been studied extensively over the past years; 8 reports have already been done. He stated that the purpose of this study was to compile all of this information together in one report.

Mr. Sawitzke stated that the total parcel is approximately 350 acres. There are a lot of marshy areas and wetlands on the property. The land is very sensitive because of these environmental reasons, although there are a lot of well-drained isolated areas, which are not federally regulated soils. He stated that utilities, water sewer, gas, pedestrian access and existing parking are positives to this property, although there are drainage issues. In conclusion, this study was a good start to take a look at the feasibility of where the fields might be located. He stated that he believes that there is a lot of potential for informal practice fields in the natural high areas, although if someone is looking to put in a competitive, high value facility, this property is not the answer.

Commissioner Deming questioned if some of the fields that are currently there could be used for multi-purpose, such as a fair ground several times a year. Mr. Sawitzke stated that they would be able to be used as multi-purpose. He stated that when the Charrette was done for the Town Center in the late 1990's, their recommendation was to explore the fair-ground type functions on the Simsbury Meadow property.

Commissioner Deming questioned if hiking and walking trails would be precluded from any part of this property. Mr. Sawitzke stated that there is tremendous potential for a whole range of passive recreation events. This potential is strong because of the past agricultural uses.

Commissioner Deming also questioned if an additional boathouse could be constructed next to the existing one. Mr. Sawitzke stated that this would depend on the size; there may be some permitting issues. He stated that there have been discussions about a better boat launch in that area.

Mr. Sawitzke stated that he believes that a high level of 10-11 lacrosse fields on this property would be difficult and expensive, although he could visualize 2-3 fields in the existing area.

Commissioner Deming stated that, on a longer term basis, a proposal of what could go in this area might be appropriate so people could see what choices

are available to them in this area. Mr. Sawitzke stated that he would recommend doing this type of Master Plan.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Crimmins motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 am.
Commissioner Minor seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.