

Town of Montville
Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes for Monday, November 16, 2015
7:00 p.m. – Montville Town Hall - Room 203

1. Call to Order

Commissioner Toner called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Roll Call

Present were Commissioners Marge Gatheral, Walter Hewitt, Christopher Napierski, Jim Toner, and Dianne Williams. Absent were Commissioners Karl Butzgy and John Protz. Also present was Town Council Liaison Joe Rogulski (7:07 p.m.).

Due to the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair, Commissioner Toner agreed to act as Chair for this evening's meeting. Acting Chair Toner welcomed Commissioner Napierski to the Commission. Commissioner Napierski stated that he has attended previous Commission meetings, is happy to be a member, and is looking forward to meeting and working with everyone.

4. Remarks from the Public regarding items on the Agenda (3 Minute limit)

Donna Geary, 11 Depot Road, commented on items 9(b) and (c), New and Lost Businesses. She questioned the types of new businesses the Commission would like to see established in Town and is interested in learning the reason(s) behind why a business(es) has(ve) failed. She is also looking forward to receiving more information regarding item 10, Feedback from the Townspeople and Businesses.

5. Alterations to the Agenda – *none*

6. To Consider and Act on a Motion to approve:

a. The Regular Meeting Minutes of Monday, October 19, 2015

Motion made by Commissioner Gatheral, seconded by Commissioner Hewitt. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 4-0-1. Voting in Favor: Commissioners Gatheral, Hewitt, Napierski, and Toner. Voting in Opposition: None. Voting in Abstention: Commissioner Williams. Motion carried.

7. Unfinished Business

a. EDC Website Design (Commissioner Protz)

Ms. Geary stated that, while anxious to move forward, she is not aware of the current status of the website design project.

b. Tax Abatement for Commercial Solar Improvements (Commissioner Hewitt)

Commissioner Hewitt stated that a plan to provide commercial businesses with the opportunity to apply for a personal property tax exemption for solar installations, as is afforded to individual homeowners, per State Statute, was discussed at their last meeting. A number of

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Towns have already passed such a resolution and he recommended requesting the Town Council to follow suit. The passage of such a policy would also provide the Commission with the opportunity to promote the EDC by publicizing the new Policy and advertise Montville as a business- and solar-friendly Town.

Acting Chair Toner introduced Town Council Liaison Rogulski, who agreed to send the Policy, which he felt is a good step forward for the Commission, to the Town Council. He also agreed with Commissioner Gatheral, who recommended an organized presence of the Commission at the meeting to help strengthen their request.

Motion made by Commissioner Hewitt, seconded by Commissioner Gatheral, to send the Tax Abatement for Commercial Solar Improvements Policy to the Town Council for consideration and approval. Discussion: Commissioner Williams recommended the Commissioner(s) include the Commission's belief that the Plan is in line with Montville being a solar-friendly community in their presentation. Acting Chair Toner agreed, adding that both Chairman Butzgy and Commissioner Hewitt, a Solar Ambassador, are ideal candidates to present the Policy as they have both installed solar panels on their residence. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor. Motion passed.

8. New Business

a. Blight Ordinance

The issue of sandwich boards, a zoning violation, in relation to blight was introduced.

Councilor Rogulski will obtain the existing Blight and Zoning Ordinances for distribution, review and discussion.

b. Approval of the Meeting Dates for 2016

Motion made by Commissioner Gatheral, seconded by Commissioner Williams. Discussion: All EDC meetings are held on the third Monday of every month, unless the meeting date lands on a holiday. In such case, the meeting will be held on the third Wednesday of that week. There are no provisions for snow dates. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor. Motion carried.

9. Status of Businesses

a. Existing Properties/Businesses

1) Drive-in Property – the property has been, reportedly, sold, but no confirmed updates have been received.

b. New Businesses

An informational sheet for new businesses, created by the EDC, is available at the offices of the Town Clerk, Planning & Zoning, Tax Assessor, Mayor, and on the Town website. In the past, the Commission has spoken with new businesses to investigate whether they can aid them with any needs they might have and discovered that, while they were able to help the few businesses that were experiencing minor difficulties and/or were not properly prepared, most

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of the businesses appeared well prepared with comprehensive business plans, adequate funding, and proper paperwork.

The question of how to encourage business owners to establish a new business in Montville was raised. Acting Chair Toner reported that he and Lt. Bunnell, dressed as a civilian, visited and interviewed 18 of approximately 40 businesses with a list of EDC-approved questions in 2011. They discovered that individuals set up their businesses in Montville for a variety of reasons, including their love for the Town or a particular area of the Town, the reasonable tax rates, the ability to own more land, and a very helpful staff who aided them in the process. With the exception of three of the businesses, all were satisfied with the progress of their business.

The EDC and Town Council minutes regarding the interviews with the various businesses conducted in 2011 will be distributed for review and discussion regarding the re-institution of the program and/or any adjustments to the strategy.

In addition, Acting Chair Toner will contact Town Planner Vlaun and provide the Commission with a monthly list/report of new businesses in Town.

c. Lost Businesses

Lost Businesses are tragic in many aspects as many are financed through a 401k or credit cards. It is very rare that such businesses contact anyone for help. As such, the EDC worked with the offices of the Mayor, Finance, and Tax Collector to include an insert in the tax bills of each of the businesses in town offering any help they might need. Out of 200-300 businesses to whom the mailers were sent, Commissioners Butzgy and Toner each received two to three calls. It is unknown as to how many of the inserts actually reached the business owners rather than a clerk, who may have ignored the insert.

In addition, the EDC hosted a Business Expo at the Mohegan Fire Company attended by the Mayor, CT State Agencies, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF), Connecticut Licensing Info Center (CT-CLIC), and SCORE in 2014. The invitation was mailed to approximately 100 businesses. Following the event, three to four businesses visited SCORE for guidance and positive feedback was received from those who attended the Expo. The Commission, at that time, agreed that it was an important event that should be continued.

Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of determining a leading indicator of (potentially) failing businesses and for the Commission to adjust their approach and improve and better target businesses in despair. It was agreed, in previous discussions, that delinquent taxes for businesses might be a good indicator of a struggling business. The possibility of sending a circular to the businesses located in a particular target area of a struggling business was introduced.

The Commissioners were tasked with introducing additional ideas for targeted mailings to those businesses that are delinquent in their taxes for further discussion.

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While many closed/closing businesses may contact the Town regarding their inventory or taxable equipment, businesses are not required to file any paperwork with the Town regarding the closure or impending closure of their business. The Mayor and Town Planner have been made aware of large businesses in despair in the past and have arranged for State-sponsored business loans to help resolve their financial issues, but, due to issues of confidentiality, the EDC is not made aware of these cases. In contrast, smaller businesses rarely seek help and simply fold.

d. Prospective Businesses

- 1) Water Park Rumors – no updates – Former Councilor Tom McNally reported at a previous meeting that he had received unconfirmed reports that the Mohegan Tribe is proposing a waterpark, possibly located at Fort Shantock. Acting Chair Toner reported that he is aware that the Tribe is planning to start a business of lending money.

10. Feedback from the Townspeople and Businesses

The institution of a Montville Tax Incentive Plan, introduced by Commissioner Hewitt, was discussed. The Plan, which is in effect in the Town of Colchester, is, in the opinion of Acting Chair Toner, a well-written program in which businesses complete a form that is reviewed by the EDC, sent to the Town Council, and sent to a Town Meeting for a final discussion and decision. He tried unsuccessfully to contact the Town and their EDC for additional information regarding the number of applicants received and approved for tax incentives and the success of the program since it has been instituted. Commissioner Hewitt stated that the strategy of the program goes beyond the tax incentive, itself, and involves a marketing approach, providing an opportunity for the EDC to begin a conversation with the businesses and, if necessary, help them ensure the success of their business. Acting Chair Toner discussed the Rent Subsidy Program instituted by the Town of New London to help new businesses. While a number of businesses closed following the expiration of the Program, the Program was, overall, successful. The expectation of the businesses completing the application, the time it takes for the process to come to completion, and the issue of confidentiality were discussed. It was noted that, statistically, the Town of Colchester is doing very well in attracting new businesses.

The Commissioners were tasked with visiting the Town of Colchester website and reviewing the document for further discussion.

11. Proposed Recipients for Business Recognition Award

The Commission reviewed the guidelines, list of previous Awardees, and Business Recognition Award form, as developed by the EDC. The Awards are jointly presented to the recipient by both the Town Council and the EDC to small local business owners residing in Montville. Awards are given to those who have contributed to the community by improving their property, extensive community service, and the like, making the Town a better place to live.

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The possibility of allowing residents to nominate particular businesses by making the form available to the public was introduced. The necessity of reviewing, clarifying, and revising the Program rules was discussed.

The Commissioners will review and discuss any necessary modifications to the Program at their next meeting.

12. Report from Town Council Liaison Joe Rogulski
Councilor Rogulski requested some guidance from the Commission regarding those items which they would like to have him present to the Town Council in his monthly report so as not to leave them unprepared should they be confronted.
13. Communications – *none*
14. Remarks from the Public (3 Minute limit)
Donna Geary remarked on the need for control in relation to the sandwich signs. She reported that she is currently attending a free workshop entitled: *Develop an Effective Social Media Strategy for 2016*, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut. She recommended the Commission review, discuss, and, possibly, revise their How to Start a Business form, as it was last revised in 2010. She added that the comments provided by Councilor Rogulski were worthwhile and recommended the Commission establish their goals and vision and provide new members with the appropriate orientation into the Commission.
15. Remarks from the Commissioners
Commissioner Gatheral confirmed that the new members were provided a copy of their bylaws and noted the exclusion of the election of new officers from this month's agenda. It was noted that, because the officers were recently elected, the item was purposely omitted from the Agenda.
Acting Chair Toner concurred with Ms. Geary and requested the How to Start a Business form be included in the Commission's December Agenda packet for review. In addition, he spoke positively of Miranda Creative, Inc., who is presenting the Social Media Strategy workshop and who, undoubtedly, is conducting a very good workshop.
16. Adjournment
Motion made by Chairman Gatheral to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Agnes Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Montville