



City of Groton
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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

May 6, 2015

5:30 PM

Minutes

1. Call to Order 5:32

Regular Members Present: J. Hodge, J. Walsh, K. Alves , Ken Capano,
Alt. Members Present: J. Moriarty,
Liaison Present: G. Keeler, Al Valente

Absent: P. Matt Nemeth (advisor), J. Jones, P. Hoops, S. Froshauer, S. Bailey (liason), F. Gillern, W. Jervis (liason), Mayor Galbraith (Ex-officio)

Staff Present: B. Goodrich, Staff,

2. Introductions and Public Comment

No public comments

3. Minutes:

A. **April 1**, 2015 Meeting

Motion: To approve the minutes of the meeting of April 1, 2015.

Motion/Second: K. Alves/J. Moriarty

Action: Approved unanimously

4. Additions to the Agenda: None

5. New Business

A. Market Analysis: Kristin Clarke.

Kristin Clarke, Economic Development Specialist from the Town of Groton gave an overview of the planned Market Analysis and current Zoning Regulations Audit planned for the Town of Groton. Two consultants have been hired: VHB, who will focus on the regulatory side, and Camion Assoc., who will do the market analysis/economic modeling. The analysis will take a holistic look at Groton's strengths/assets and prime development opportunities while also looking at the development/permitting process to identify areas for improvement. While the audit portion of the analysis will only focus on the Town of Groton's regulations, all other aspects of the project will consider Groton as a whole (City, Town, Noank and GLP).

The kick off meeting will be May 27th at 6pm in the Town Hall Annex. The process will continue with 4-6 focus groups **meetings** open to the public, but consisting of selected representatives from boards, Commissions, organizations and area stakeholders. There will also be targeted interviews by the consultants.

By doing a shift-share analysis, the consultants hope to reveal any specific industry concentration that provides economic benefit to Groton as well as identify any notable deficiencies. They will be looking at Groton's economy with and without the influence of the sub-base, specifically on income demographics.

When asked how the City EDC could supplement or compliment the process, it was suggested that once the Town defined the process for the analysis, the City could simultaneously conduct its own similar focus groups and interviews (using the same questions/format) and share the information with the consultants.

The conversation continued with a general discussion about business retention efforts, existing real or perceived roadblocks to development, and the influence of some of the larger industries on local efforts to attract businesses.

With respect to business retention and expansion, K. Clarke said that they will be looking at the existing industries and extensive supply chains to understand how they all relate and identify deficiencies and ways to expand. The Town's goal is to be as helpful and useful to existing (and new businesses) and to continue their business visitation program and events. They will be trying to better integrate the Town EDC in the process. The EDC is going through a work planning process to better define their role which could include planning a series of events or getting directly involved in a project as a way to energize the commission. K. Clarke is also working on expanding/shifting the Airport Development Zone and discussed the benefits of both the ADZ and the existing Enterprise Zone in Groton for businesses located within.

Re: real or perceived roadblocks to development, the following were identified:

- Perception of a lengthy review process
- Outdated shopping centers that do not meet the needs of new retail tenants (needs have changed, desire more flexible layout, etc.)
- Older office space and the need to facilitate property updates to attract quality tenants
- Underutilized or overlooked industrial land (possibly due to unique location near reservoir, rocky terrain, or lack of utilities or other infrastructure)
- Absentee or inactive property owners unwilling or unable to invest in their properties
- Businesses too busy or understaffed to research funding or programmatic opportunities that would facilitate expansion.
- CT tax policies and the high cost of living
- General perception that CT is business unfriendly

Re: influence of some of the larger industries on local efforts to attract businesses, the question was raised as to Kristin's thoughts on whether the presence of businesses like EB and Pfizer caused the town to be less aggressive with business attraction efforts – due to the over reliance on these high tax payers. Kristin did not agree that it had a great effect on town practices, but that work was needed with respect to business attraction. This study will hopefully ask the hard questions, and identify infrastructure needs, underutilized and overlooked properties, and any wasted efforts on current strategies, efforts or policies that are not working. K. Capano suggested that towns begin to look at future national and regional economic and demographic trends to better inform current efforts for business attraction (e.g. growth of e-commerce or aging population are factors that will greatly affect the economy). Kristin stated that the analysis would include a housing needs analysis and that the audit of zoning policies will also allow an opportunity to better align with and accommodate future trends/needs.

Other discussion focused on the benefit of our location near Boston and NY and a lower cost of living than those two metropolitan areas; our location on the rail line; and proximity to the shore. All these can be used to attract businesses here. Many former Pfizer scientists identified the great location and QOL as a primary factor in their desire to remain here rather than relocate or retire elsewhere. This has resulted in a great untapped resource – a pool of educated

entrepreneurs/Scientists. One strategy must be to facilitate new start-ups by creating sufficient incubator space like CURE or UCONN TIP and easy access to programs and venture capital. Detailed up-to-date information about lab or work space, funding, SBA programs etc. on websites a must in order to match entrepreneurs with abundant resources.

B. Administrative Tasks:

1. **By-Laws:** B. Goodrich and P. Hoops met, and P. Hoops is preparing a draft that will be ready before next meeting. The Commission Members will review prior to the June meeting to facilitate a better discussion and possible vote.
2. **EDC Draft Mission Statement:** J. Hodge and J. Walsh read the draft mission statements from each of the sub-committees. J. Hodge will combine them and e-mail them to the full Commission for comments and suggested edits.
3. **Report of Sub-committees:** Many participated on the walking tour of Thames St. and 5 Corners (or went on their own). A discussion followed about how best to move forward as a Commission to address the glaring issues observed – namely blight, vacancy, disrepair, underutilized waterfront, etc. B. Goodrich discussed the City’s Blight Ordinance and the recent changes to place the enforcement in the hands of the police rather than the Building or Zoning Department. This has lead to a better response from property owners in violation of the ordinance. We must remember that the definition of “Blight” is very subjective. J. Moriarty and K. Alves discussed the desire for the whole commission to focus in on very specific small areas and concentrate group efforts and resources there...and that we should not split into subcommittees until we better define the issues etc. Others felt that we should come up with a focus for the whole area and identify the overall issue that is impacting development and go from there. J. Hodge suggested that we still keep the big picture in mind, each identify areas of primary concern, and look for areas of overlap (potential projects) but not to abandon the overall vision/strategy and use all resources for one small project. This discussion about the area and what to focus efforts on will be continued next month.

6. Old Business

All old business continued:

- Mobile App for Start-up Companies
- Continued Discussion and Review of the recommendations in the *Report of the Community and Economic Development Committee*

7. Adjourn : Meeting adjourned at 6:53pm

Motion/Second: J. Walsh/K. Capano

Action: Approved unanimously

Next meeting will be held on June 3, 2015 at 5:30pm

Respectfully submitted,

J. Hodge