

Minutes of the Suffield Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting
January 19, 2023

Members Present: Sue Thorner - Co-Chair, Brian Banak - Co-Chair, Howard Orr, John McGuire, Gayle Demko - Alternate, Bob Kelly - Alternate

Also Present: Colin Moll - First Selectman, Bill Hawkins - Director of Planning and Development, Ellie Binns - Recording Secretary

1. Susan Thorner called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the December 15, 2022 regular meeting were approved unanimously.

3. Public Input – None

4. Business Contact Committee Report

John McGuire distributed a report to the members on the Business Interview Initiative. The report summarized the 22 interviews that were conducted with Suffield businesses in 2022, giving details of the responses and information gathered from the interviews. He stressed that the survey answers were kept anonymous so that those interviewed could be candid with their responses.

The take away from the interviews was that the initiative was very successful in developing a rapport with the businesses in Town. Mr. McGuire stated that those interviewed were interested in continuing communication with the committee. There was discussion about expanding the program in the coming year and revising the questionnaire, as well as having material to leave with the businesses about programs and assistance available from the Town. The goal is to follow up with those already interviewed and to talk to 50 additional businesses in 2023.

5. Electronic Message Board Signs Update

Gayle Demko reported on her presentation to the Board of Selectman (BOS). The plan calls for the message boards to be located at the police station and the fire stations. The schools are also interested in having message board signs. The BOS asked for more information on the safety aspects of the signs as well as content/message guidelines other municipalities might be using and their experience with these signs.

6. Light Industrial Update

Mr. Hawkins was contacted by the new owner of the property that was formerly owned by C&S Wholesale Grocers. They own a vacant 53-acre property accessed from Ucar Street and are interested in building a warehouse/distribution building on the property. He also noted that the Town Attorney is working with ATR Realty on a purchase and sale agreement for 1140 and 1148 South Street.

7. Commercial/Town Center Update

Mr. Hawkins reported that the owner of the West Suffield Shops (1365 Mountain Road) is working on renovating part of the building for a restaurant and met with the Design Review Board (DRB) who approved the proposed changes to the outside of the building. A new restaurant, Fire on the Mountain, located at 82 North Main Street has opened to the public and is working with the DRB and the Historic District Commission for sign approval. The EDC Commission members have been invited to a ribbon cutting for Turning Point Wellness scheduled for 11:30AM on 1-25-23 at their new location at 1 Mountain Road.

Other related projects

Mr. Hawkins updated the Commission on progress with the proposed solar array at the landfill. The Board of Selectmen selected two companies, Verogy and EDF Renewables and the Town is currently negotiating option agreements with the two companies. Mr. Hawkins noted that the Planning & Zoning Commission adopted the 2022-2032 Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) on 12-19-2022. He reported that the Community Challenges Grant Program application, which was submitted for the Bridge Street Park, was not selected for funding and staff is reviewing other potential funding sources. The Town was awarded a \$2M Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for Housing Authority improvements and are waiting for the Department of Housing to issue an assistance agreement so the contractor selection process can begin. The Joint Facilities Committee is meeting on January 31st to discuss bonding capacity for large building projects. Mr. Hawkins also reported that 98 acres of land at 380 N. Main Street will be preserved with a DEEP OSWA grant and there was discussion about public access to these properties and the need for signage to make people aware of the access points. The position of EDC Coordinator was reposted on January 6th, with a revised job description and there have been applications submitted.

Ms. Demko presented a plan for a scavenger hunt for Suffield restaurants to participate in with a March timeframe in mind. She will get more details to the Commission members.

There was discussion about inviting guests for the meeting in February and staff will follow up to make arrangements.

8. Adjournment

With nothing further to come before the Commission, Ms. Demko moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 AM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kelly and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellie Binns, Recording Secretary