

Minutes of the Suffield Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting
February 16, 2023

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

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

1. Brian Banak called the meeting to order at 8:33 AM.
2. Minutes

The minutes of the January 19, 2023 regular meeting were approved unanimously.

3. Public Input

Jeff Girard, 378 Halladay Avenue East spoke about the plans for Bridge Street Park, stressing the need to have something great in the center of Town to attract people. He stated that there is a lack of a place that will create a critical mass of people in the center of town. He encouraged the Economic Development Commission to support the construction of a park with a pavilion, walking paths, and other amenities that would generate more use of the center of town and make it a destination.

4. Business Contact Committee Report

John McGuire reported that the subcommittee now has five members and they have revised the interview sheet. The goal is to interview 25 businesses in the coming year and follow up with the businesses that have already been interviewed. The committee has separated the 25 business they want to interview into categories to have an even sampling of farms, restaurants, retail, and industrial interviews. There was discussion about how to offer the businesses information and help from the Town when they are interviewed.

5. Guest- Miguel Rodriguez – Owner of 880 Burbank Avenue

Miguel Rodriguez introduced himself to the Commission and noted that he has owned 880 Burbank Avenue for the past 12 years. This property is a three floor commercial building with approximately 5,000 square feet of space on each level. The building is currently occupied by small office spaces on the first and part of the second floor with the third floor unfinished. There is also basement space that can be driven into for storage of equipment. There was discussion about the ideas for increasing the use of the building and commission members were interested in touring the building to discuss possibilities with Mr. Rodriguez.

6. Electronic Message Board Signs Update

Gayle Demko reported on her continuing research into the use of electronic message board signs in Town, and is making progress-compiling information to report back to the Board of Selectman (BOS).

7. Light Industrial Update

Mr. Hawkins was contacted by a real estate broker regarding the possibility of cannabis cultivation in a building in the industrial zone. He also made the members aware of an upcoming manufacturing forum on March 9th that is being hosted by the Bradley Development League. The manufacturers in town have been sent the information and he will email the specifics to the commission members. Mr. Hawkins reported that ATR Realty is working on cost estimates for construction at 1148 South Street.

8. Commercial/Town Center Update

There has been interest in the former People's Bank location at 1380 Mountain Road and the type of business that could be there. Mr. Hawkins met with the owner of 11 High Street to discuss signage. This property has frontage on both High Street and Mountain Road but most patrons of the building use the Mountain Road entrance where there is no permanent freestanding signage. The regulations permit one 12 SF freestanding sign for each lot having frontage and this property already has a sign on High Street. It was decided that a discussion with the Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) about the signage regulations would be an appropriate next step. The PZC closed the public hearing for the adaptive reuse application for 140 South Main Street. A decision is expected to be made at the February regular meeting.

In other related projects, seven members were appointed by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) to the Affordable Housing Committee. The goal of the committee is to meet and discuss implementing the affordable housing plan so that they can make recommendations to the BOS on housing issues. Two companies were selected by the BOS to work on a plan for a solar system at the landfill and they are negotiating option agreements with the Town. The Joint Facilities Committee met on January 31st to discuss bonding capacity for large building projects. The Town attorney is working on closing documents for the ninety-eight acres at 380 North Main Street to be preserved with a DEEP OSWA grant with the goal of closing out the project in the next 30 days. Mr. Hawkins reported that the Economic Development Specialist position was reposted on January 6th with a revised job description. There have been additional applications and interviews.

Mr. Hawkins reported information on the 2022 Grand List which had a net taxable increase of \$31,619,133 or 2.04% and he gave a breakdown by category.

It was noted that the North Central Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring a breakfast forum on March 16th at Asnuntuck Community College with a panel of speakers giving an economic update on the region. Members of the Commission are invited to attend.

Ms. Thorner reviewed the Commission members' terms of office and asked that those with expiring terms in the next few months advise if they would like to be reappointed and to think about others that might like to join the Commission.

9. Adjournment

With nothing further to come before the Commission, Mr. McGuire moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:43 AM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kelly and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellie Binns, Recording Secretary