



# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2023, 7:00 PM**

**IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE: TOWN HALL ANNEX, 57 MAIN STREET, ELLINGTON, CT  
REMOTE ATTENDANCE: VIA ZOOM MEETING, INSTRUCTIONS PROVIDED BELOW**

**PRESENT:** In-Person: Chairman Sean Kelly, Regular Member Chris Todd, and Alternate Mike Swanson  
Remote Attendance: Vice Chairman Donna Resutek (arrived at 7:07PM) and Regular Member David Hurley (arrived at 7:13PM)

**ABSENT:** Regular Members Jim Fay and Alternates Sam Chang and Amos Smith

### **STAFF**

**PRESENT:** Lisa M. Houlihan, Town Planner (In-Person), and Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk (Remote)

### **OTHERS**

#### **PRESENT:**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Sean Kelly called the Economic Development Commission meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

**II. PUBLIC COMMENTS** (on non-agenda items): None

### **III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:**

1. Report: Tax Incentive/Abatement Programs.
  - a. Discuss CGS §12-81m – Municipal Option to Abate up to 50% of Property Tax for Farming Operations.

The commission talked about the tax abatement program that will affect the town's dairy farms. Last meeting, Seth Bahler for Oakridge Dairy in Ellington and a representative from the Connecticut Farm Bureau asked the commission to consider crafting an abatement on property pursuant to a state statute that allows municipalities to grant abatements exclusively to dairy farms. Chairman Kelly noted that at the end of discussion on this item at the last meeting, the commission was only discussing abating property tax, however the farmers were also interested in abating buildings. Chairman Kelly asked a question about the 2022 Farm Building Exemptions list, however Ms. Houlihan said she was unsure of how to interpret the list meaningfully and suggested it would be good to have John Rainaldi, the town assessor, present for discussion at the next commission meeting. She did ask Mr. Rainaldi for an example, who said that 48 Upper Butcher Road, which is the first farm on the list, has a gross assessment of

\$165,420 and a building exemption of \$28,470, which gives the farm a net assessment of \$136,950. The existing farm building exemption is limited to \$100,000 per building, which means smaller buildings would automatically be exempt. The buildings must have an assessed value of more than \$100,000.

Commissioner Todd asked – if this was a property abatement – if it would apply to vehicles. Ms. Houlihan said it would only apply to structures, not machinery or vehicles. He then asked if this would apply to temporary structures. Chairman Kelly indicated that it could if it was a dairy farm. Ms. Houlihan added that the statute allows for the abatement of housing for farm help, which would need to be clarified in the written ordinance. The statute says that up to 50% can be abated for dairy farms, fruit orchards, vineyards, vegetable farms, nurseries, hydroponics, tobacco farms, and commercial lobstering and any building for seasonal residential use by workers. Chairman Kelly indicated it would be helpful to have Mr. Rainaldi break down the numbers for the commission.

At the last meeting, representatives from Oakridge Dairy gave the commission the impression that they were asking for property tax on land to be abated, but later clarified that they were referring to buildings and structures, which changed the numbers involved in the conversation. Chairman Kelly said 50% abatement of the assessed value of dairy farms at \$7 million and 3.5 mil would be a lot more than \$40,000 coming off the property tax revenue. He also stated that farmers get a lot of relief due to having equipment already being abated, which must factor into the discussion. No other industry or taxpayer in Ellington gets this kind of consideration. He added that it's important to be friendly to farmers in town while also not inducing hardships on other taxpayers. Commissioner Todd said that Mr. Rainaldi, at the last meeting, said the town was receiving \$143,000 in taxes on real estate from the 249 farm properties. The town also receives \$3.7 million in property tax for farm buildings and structures. Vice Chairman Resuthek asked if there could be a percentage of abatement that would not hurt taxpayers but would still benefit farmers. She also said she recognized this impact and suggested a different abatement amount, such as 20%, would not hurt the town. Chairman Kelly added it would be important to craft language in the ordinance to include leased land for tax abatement.

Chairman Kelly said the commission can craft the ordinance to abate taxes on just dairy farms, just like Bolton and Voluntown does. Ms. Houlihan said she can also ask the assessor what percentage of farms are dairy and add land to the list. In response to the commission's request, she would also ask Mr. Rainaldi to run scenarios if only 20% of assessed value was abated as well as 30% and 40%.

Chairman Kelly tabled the discussion until next meeting so the town assessor can be in attendance.

## 2. Report: Tolland County Chamber of Commerce – 2023 Business Awards Nomination.

Commission members discussed nominations for town businesses for awards given out by the Tolland County Chamber of Commerce at their 2023 Business Awards on October 18, 2023. The nominations will be reviewed by the Chamber's Economic Development Committee. The businesses must be members of the Chamber of Commerce in order to be eligible for an award.

Last year, Earthlight Technologies won the Economic Development Award and LuAnn's Bakery won a Corporate Citizen Award.

The four categories are as follows:

- Economic Development: Awarded to businesses who experience business and job growth.
- Corporate Citizen: Awarded to businesses based on their civic contributions and involvement.
- Beautification: Awarded to businesses who have improved their grounds and facilities.
- Best New Business: Awarded to remarkable new businesses.

Commissioners discussed nominating Dzen's Garden Market for the Beautification Award if they are members of the Chamber. Commissioner Swanson mentioned nominating Barber Utilities for donating things like lights, however they are not a member of the Chamber. Other businesses were mentioned but were not members of the Chamber or did not meet the criteria for an award.

After doing a search on the Chamber's member directory, Ms. Houlihan noted that Ellington Agway are members. Commissioner Todd listed numerous reasons why Ellington Agway should be nominated for the Corporate Citizen Award, including, but not limited to, hosting the John Deere Day of Play event, the Stuff a Pumpkin event, hosting of scout packs, and sponsoring local Little League teams. Chairman Kelly said they are redoing the outside of their store, so they could be nominated for the Beautification Award next year.

Chairman Kelly said having Priority Urgent Care, 105 West Road, was very positive for the town during COVID-19. He said the care center adjusted protocols to accommodate all patients, did not turn patients away, and was in continuous operation during the entire public health emergency. They also continue to follow-up with patients after visits. He said he would consider them for the Corporate Citizen Award. Ms. Houlihan added that she has seen health clinics like these becoming more customer service oriented and put more effort into patient care and personal touch.

Commissioner Todd reiterated Ellington Agway's civic involvement and contributions, and Chairman Kelly added that they participate in the Shop Ellington event, and said he would feel comfortable nominating them for the Corporate Citizen Award based on their numerous examples of community involvement.

**BY CONSENSUS, THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION NOMINATED ELLINGTON AGWAY FOR TOLLAND COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S CORPORATE CITIZEN AWARD.**

3. Agricultural Initiatives.
  - a. Plan of Conservation and Development, Chapter Six – Economic Development, Agriculture as an Economic Sector and Considerations/Strategies.

A draft amendment for special permit for agriculture as an economic sector was given to commissioners. The changes that were included in the draft pursuant to discussion on June 14, 2023. Chairman Kelly went through the changes that were made to the amendment at the last meeting, starting with Agricultural Related Uses in Section D:

D-4: A change was made to say that "Buildings and structures shall be located a minimum of 200 feet from all property lines" instead of 100 feet, and that "areas used for outdoor activities like outdoor seating and tastings shall be located a minimum of 150 feet from all property lines" instead of 200 feet.

D-5: This subsection was added and reads that “Access shall be from a public road and have adequate line of sight for in/egress based on Connecticut Department of Transportation Standards.”

D-6: This subsection was changed to read that “Refuse areas shall be properly screened from public view and shall be located adjacent to buildings and at least 150 feet from adjacent properties” instead of 100 feet.

D-7: The buffer standards were changed to include a 10 foot wide vegetated buffer, a six foot high privacy fence, or a combination thereof might be required alongside and rear yards. This subsection was also changed to include “When plantings are required, they shall comply with Section 6.1.C – Buffer Requirements.”

D-10: This was changed to reflect that outdoor entertainment may be permitted during hours of operation, which leaves the matter to the discretion of the special permit process.

D-13: This subsection permitting temporary structures between March 28 and December 1 was stricken from the draft amendment.

Chairman Kelly also went over the changes made to the definition of agricultural related uses. This definition was changed to include banquet spaces as an agricultural related use. The commission agreed that the draft amendment can be referred to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

**MOVED (HURLEY) SECONDED (SWANSON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE DRAFT TEXT AMENDMENT DATED JULY 6, 2023, TO SECTION 7.14.3 AGRICULTURAL SPECIAL PERMIT USES OF THE ELLINGTON ZONING REGULATIONS AND REFER THE DRAFT AMENDMENT TO THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION FOR CONSIDERATION.**

b. Ellington Farm Day 2023.

The Ellington Farm Day 2023 will be held on Saturday, September 23 from 10AM – 3PM. Ms. Houlihan said Farm Day has been highly marketed on social media, the newsletter, and at town facilities and businesses. She also plans to ask Big Y to display the brochures and put up yard signs.

The participating farms are as follows:

- Back to Roots Mum Farm, 112 West Road
- Back to Roots Veggie Stand, 222 Windsorville Road
- Charter Acres Beef, 516 Somers Road
- DeCarli Equestrian Center, 189 Sadds Mill Road
- Dzen Garden Market, 187 Windsorville Road
- Ellington Farmers Market, Arbor Park, Main Street (9am-noon)
- Ellington Historical Society, 70 Main Street
- Greenwood Holistic Farm, 43 East Porter Road
- Hall Memorial Library, 93 Main Street
- Hillside Stable, 267 Jobs Hill Road

- Johnny Appleseed Farm Fruit Store, 185 West Road
- Oakridge Dairy & The Modern Milkman, 11 Jobs Hill Road
- Star Hardware, 64 Main Street

Chairman Kelly encouraged commissioners to check out the event and share it with their family and friends.

4. Review Economic Development Sections from the 2023 Sustainable Connecticut Certification Action Overview Worksheet.
  - a. Section 2.4 Provide Resources and Supports to Local Businesses.

The Board of Selectmen passed a motion to establish the Ellington Sustainability Team. Ms. Houlihan and Tom Modzelewski, Public Works Director, have put together a 12-person team and have been meeting since June. The team is made up of town officials and a citizen representative for the Ellington Board of Education and is working towards applying for bronze certification from Sustainable Connecticut in April 2024. She said if the application was submitted right now, the town would qualify for about 90 points due to efforts in open space, natural resource information, the arts, community gardens, and other areas.

5. Connecticut Economic Development Association Best Practices – Customer Service Satisfaction Survey.

The customer satisfaction survey was approved by the commission and has started to be handed out this month. So far, three surveys have been completed with high remarks for the Planning Department. Chairman Kelly shared a comment from one of the completed surveys, which said “Ellington, by far, has the most accommodating and helpful staff.”

6. Report: Current Economic Activity.

Ground has broken on the parcel of land to the north of McDonalds. Three businesses will be going into that facility, including Starbucks, which will have a drive-thru. Hartford Healthcare-GoHealth Urgent Care will occupy two tenant spaces in the building, and the last tenant space is currently unfilled. Ms. Houlihan said there was conversation about putting a Jersey Mikes in that location, but that discussion has ended.

Ms. Houlihan said next month commissioners will receive a copy of the tax abatement application for the Ellington Racquet Club which will be going along Lower Butcher Road. The facility will be about 45,000 square feet and will have four tennis courts and four pickleball courts. Chairman Kelly said the business owners were deciding whether to present to the commission at tonight’s meeting, however they yet to have all the prerequisite staff reviews to begin the abatement process. The owners opted to present at the next meeting.

#### **IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:**

1. Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget & Expenditures update.

The budget balance is currently \$4,950. Some funding will be used for the Ellington Farm Day and the Shop Ellington event.

2. Approval of the July 12, 2023, regular meeting minutes.

**MOVED (RESUTEK) SECONDED (HURLEY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE JULY 12, 2023, MEETING MINUTES AS WRITTEN.**

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

- a. Notice of Petition for Declaratory Ruling for a 5MW battery energy storage system, KCE CT 5, LLC, Village Hill Road, Willington/Stafford, CT.

The commission was presented with a notice of petition about a 5.0-megawatt battery energy storage system on Village Hill Road in Willington near the Willington/Stafford town line. The commission was notified according to statutory requirements.

- b. Notice of Petition for Declaratory Ruling for a 3MW solar photovoltaic facility, USS Somers Solar, LLC, 19.2 acres, 360 Somers Road, Industrial (I) Zone.

The commission was presented with a notice of petition regarding a proposed 3-megawatt alternating current ground-mounted solar photovoltaic system to be located at 360 Somers Road. The petition will be presented to the Connecticut Siting Council. The commission was notified according to statutory requirements.

**V. ADJOURNMENT:**

Due to technical issues, the Zoom call was disconnected and Vice Chairman Resutek, Commissioner Hurley, and the recording clerk were not present at the time of adjournment, however the three remaining commission members and Ms. Houlihan adjourned the meeting.

**MOVED (TODD) SECONDED (SWANSON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING AT 8:11 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk