



# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

55 MAIN STREET – PO BOX 187  
ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187

[www.ellington-ct.gov](http://www.ellington-ct.gov)

TEL. (860) 870-3120 TOWN PLANNER'S OFFICE FAX (860) 870-3122

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024, 7:00 PM

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

**PRESENT:** In Person: Chairman Sean Kelly, Regular Member Cynthia Soto, and Alternate Amos Smith (arrived at 7:13 PM)

Remote Attendance: Vice Chairman Donna Resutiek, and Regular Members David Hurley and Chris Todd (arrived at 7:19 PM)

**ABSENT:** Alternates Michael Swanson and Sam Chang

### STAFF

**PRESENT:** Lisa M. Houlihan, Town Planner and Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk

### OTHERS

**PRESENT:** Seth Bahler and Arlo Hoffman, Oakridge Dairy, LLC.; John Rainaldi, Tax Assessor

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

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

### III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

#### 1. Tax Incentive/Abatement Programs

- a. Review of Tax Abatement Application from Oakridge Dairy, LLC, to convert a pole barn to a 14,000 square foot bottling facility and new machinery, equipment and motor vehicles at 80 Meadow Brook Road, APN 090-017-0000, in the Rural Agricultural Residential (RAR) Zone.

Seth Bahler, manager of Oakridge Dairy, LLC., addressed the commission. Oakridge Dairy is building a bottling plant to bottle a portion of their milk in glass bottles. Currently, they bring their milk to a farm in Bolton to bottle it and bring it back to Ellington to distribute it through their Modern Milkman delivery service. They are looking to convert the cow barn at 80 Meadowbrook Road into a bottling plant and storage facility for the Modern Milkman. Seth said they currently bottle 2-3% of their milk in their own bottles and are looking to increase that percentage over the next couple of years. He said they hope to expand to other products, but currently the plant would support the Modern Milkman service.

Chairman Kelly said he was unsure if this would qualify for the abatement program since the abatement program is for new construction, however renovating and repurposing a building is considered new construction and expansion of an existing business. Under these conditions, the project would qualify for abatement. The structure would be taxed on the new value at the same rate, and the abatement would apply to the investment. Commissioner Hurley asked if the equipment is taxed as property tax. Chairman Kelly said the equipment would not be a part of the abatement but would be taxed as a part of the investment. John Rainaldi, the Tax Assessor, said he did not think the equipment would qualify for the farming

exemption since it would not be being used for farming practice, but probably would qualify for the manufacturing exemption. Seth said they have been adding at least one employee every other week to their Modern Milkman business, and they would be looking to add a minimum of 15 new employees with the building of the bottling plant.

Chairman Kelly said this abatement would support the town's efforts to protect and preserve open space and agriculture, support a local business that's investing in the town, and support providing a service to the townspeople. Commissioner Hurley said that it adds to the tax base. Vice Chairman Resutek said "this sounds like a grand example" of utilizing the abatement policy.

The motion will need to be passed by the Board of Selectmen before it goes to a town meeting. The motion will need to be passed at a town meeting before taking effect.

**MOVED (KELLY), SECONDED (SOTO) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO FIND OAKRIDGE DAIRY, LLC, AN ELIGIBLE FARM AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF A POLE BARN TO A 14,000 SQUARE FOOT MODERN BOTTLING DISTRIBUTION FACILITY AND THE ADDITION OF UP TO FIFTEEN (15) NEW EMPLOYEES TO MEET THE PURPOSE OF THE ABATEMENT PROGRAM BY ENCOURAGING GROWTH AND INVESTMENT IN FARMING OPERATIONS THAT WILL INCREASE LONG TERM TAX REVENUE AND FURTHER FIND THE ABATEMENT APPLICATION TO MEET THE OUTCOME OF THE PROGRAM BY HELPING SUSTAIN FARMING OPERATIONS IN TOWN AND PROVIDING POTENTIAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS. THE ABATEMENT SHALL BE A 50% ABATEMENT OVER THE 7-YEAR MAXIMUM TERM.**

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

To qualify for the abatement, the farm needs to have a minimum total of 20 acres and the abatement can only apply to buildings used for agricultural purposes. An analysis of existing farm operations in town determined the only agricultural operation that qualifies for the potential new program is Oakridge Dairy, LLC. Chairman Kelly said what they were looking to do was to "thread a needle" and do something that benefits Oakridge Dairy, LLC, while not having an impact on other Ellington taxpayers. Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, asked if the draft should say that an abatement can be up to 50% or would be just 50%. The commission agreed it would be simpler to make the abatement just 50%. Arlo Hoffman, Oakridge Dairy, LLC, asked if this mirrored what other towns have done, and Lisa replied affirmatively. She added that both the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance would need to support the new program for it to be adopted.

Lisa said what she was looking for was to see if the commission wanted her to draft a potential new abatement program that she would review with the commission next month.

**BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION AUTHORIZED THE TOWN PLANNER TO DRAFT A POTENTIAL NEW ABATEMENT PROGRAM PURSUANT TO CGS §12-81M FOR REVIEW AT THE NEXT MEETING ON MAY 8, 2024.**

- 2. Report: Tolland County Chamber of Commerce

Nothing new to report currently.

### 3. Agricultural Initiatives

- a. Discuss Farmer Resources Informational Event held February 27, 2024, Town Hall Annex.

Lisa said she helped the Connecticut Farm Bureau organize the event and reached out to local farmers who might have been interested. She said the room was packed and participants learned a lot about the help they could get with starting and preserving farms and establishing healthy soils. There was also information on available grant programs. A landing page was created with the information on the Conservation Commission's webpage on the town's website.

### 4. Review Economic Development Sections from the 2023 Sustainable Connecticut Certification Action Overview Worksheet.

- a. Section 2.3 Inventory and Promote Local Products and Services.

Lisa said the Sustainable CT working group created a business list that qualified for credit for this section. The business list does not include home-based businesses but does include ones that have storefronts. She provided the commission with a copy of the list and noted it's available on the commission's webpage on the town's website.

- b. Section 2.4 Provide Resources and Supports to Local Businesses.

Lisa said the annual Shop Ellington campaign met this action.

The working group submitted their application for Sustainable CT bronze certification on April 3, 2024, and certification lasts for three years. Lisa asked if the commission wanted to remove this item from future agendas.

**MOVED (SMITH), SECONDED (TODD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO REMOVE THE REVIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SECTIONS FROM THE 2023 SUSTAINABLE CONNECTICUT CERTIFICATION ACTION OVERVIEW WORKSHEET FROM FUTURE AGENDAS.**

### 5. CEDAS Best Practices – Customer Service Satisfaction Survey Results

No surveys have been collected since the last meeting. Lisa added that there is a lot of activity going on, but many interactions include employees from other departments, and they may only collect surveys for assistance solely by Planning Department staff.

### 6. Report: Current Economic Activity

There is a self-storage facility being built on West Road. There will be a gate that opens and closes and will have limited hours.

The Planning and Zoning Commission approved 94,500 sq. ft. of construction on a parcel south of Country Pure Foods on West Road. The three buildings will be owned by the owners of The Barn Yard and will be used as contractor rental space. Chairman Kelly said the spaces would likely be used as a place of operations for contractors, such as a painter who can't operate his business out of his home.

## IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

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

Nothing new to report currently.

2. Approval of the January 10, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes.

**MOVED (RESUTEK) SECONDED (TODD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 10, 2024, REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS WRITTEN.**

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

- a. February 5, 2024, letter from the CT Siting Council for Petition 1589 for a 3MW solar facility at 360 Somers Road, vote to issue declaratory ruling failed.

The CT Siting Council voted on Petition 1589 for a 3MW solar facility at 360 Somers Road failed. There was a majority vote that was needed to pass, however the vote ended in a tie. There was significant concern about the safety of skydivers landing in the area, which was the primary reason the vote failed.

Vice Chairman Resutek asked how many solar farms have been approved in Ellington. Chairman Kelly said there is the one between Route 140 and Reeves Road and one on Middle Road. She also asked if there is a list of the solar farms that have been approved by the CT Siting Council, stating an understanding that there are more solar farms east of the Connecticut River. Lisa said the CT Siting Council's website lists the solar farm applications they have approved and pending applications. Commissioner Hurley said that there could be more solar farms to the east of the river due to the terrain being flatter than the western side. He added that there seems to be a general agreement not to cut forests for solar farms.

Vice Chairman Resutek said there is pushback on constructing more solar farms in East Windsor since they seem to have a lot already. Currently the CT Siting Council has full authority over approving applications for solar installations. The CT Siting Council can receive input from public comments and town leadership, but still retain complete authority. Chairman Kelly said that issue must be solved legislatively. Commissioner Hurley stated that Connecticut is generally in favor of sustainable practices like waste management and green energy but would rather see other states contribute to fulfilling those objectives too. He added that space otherwise used for solar installations could be used to address another issue in the state: a shortage of housing.

- b. January 28, 2024, Hartford Courant article for Oakridge Dairy "We want to be the farm of the future".

A Hartford Courant article about Oakridge Dairy, LLC, was given to commissioners. Chairman Kelly lauded the piece and said it reinforces the town's identity. He added that Oakridge Dairy, LLC, has close to 4,000 cows and is the largest dairy farm in Connecticut.

**V. ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOVED (HURLEY) SECONDED (RESUTEK) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:55 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

---

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk