



TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 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, Vice Chairman Donna Resutek, Regular Member Cynthia Soto, and Alternate Michael Swanson (arrived at 7:10 PM); Via Zoom: Chris Todd

ABSENT: Regular Member David Hurley, and Alternates Amos Smith and Sam Chang

STAFF

PRESENT: Via Zoom: Lisa M. Houlihan, Town Planner; In Person: Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk

OTHERS

PRESENT: In Person: John Rainaldi, Town Assessor

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Sean Kelly called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

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

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Tax Incentive/Abatement Programs

- a. Review of Draft Ordinance Pursuant to CGS §12-81m - Municipal Option to Abate up to 50% of Property Tax for Farming Operations.

Chairman Kelly said the draft tax abatement policy captures the requirements the commission has laid out in past discussions to identify the farms that are eligible. The draft policy states that a farm must have \$15,000 in gross sales or incurred expenses and a minimum of 20 cumulative acres of farmland.

The last sentence of Section 4b of the draft abatement policy states “An eligible farm shall cumulatively include a minimum of twenty (20) acres of farmland upon which an individual entity owns and is doing business as an eligible farm, otherwise such abatement application shall be denied.” Vice Chairman Resutek questioned the usage of the term “individual entity”, asking if that meant anybody can own the land. Commissioner Todd said “individual entity” is meant to identify that the business or the individual landowner can own the abated land, and Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, added that the parameters the commission intended to set were not for leased land. Commissioner Todd suggested the sentence be rewritten to say, “an eligible farm shall own”, and Lisa suggested it say, “An eligible farm shall own cumulatively a minimum of 20 acres of farmland.” Commissioner Todd recommended the sentence say, “An eligible farm shall own a minimum of 20 cumulative acres of farmland and is doing business as an eligible farm”. The commission indicated support for this revision.

Chairman Kelly indicated that even though the commission got support from First Selectman Lori Spielman on the new abatement program, he believed it would face some tough questions from the Board of Selectmen on June 10, 2024. Commissioner Todd recommended including fiscal years 2022 and 2023 and projected fiscal year 2024 with the abatement in effect, adding that selectmen will see increased tax revenue even with the new policy.

Lisa outlined the process for getting the ordinance approved; after it is presented to the Board of Selectmen, they could say that they have additional questions or send it to their Ordinance Committee. The Ordinance Committee would analyze it further before sending it back to the Board of Selectmen for approval. If they are in favor, then the new policy would be voted upon at a town meeting.

Commissioner Swanson asked why the abatement program does not include beef cattle. Chairman Kelly said the abatement is based on the state statute, which does not include beef farms. If a farmer in town owned a beef farm and wanted an abatement, the town would not be able to grant it. If the state statute was changed, then the abatement program could be amended.

Commissioner Todd said ever since he has been a member of the Economic Development Commission, the town has been in pursuit of economic development and growth while maintaining the town's rural character, and that this policy aligns closely with that vision. Commissioner Swanson asked if an eligible farm sells a piece of land, does it get charged back at true assessed value. John Rainaldi, Town Assessor, said the ordinance doesn't address that issue explicitly, but with Public Act 490 land, the owner would file a new application based on the land that's left. Chairman Kelly said if the cumulative amount of land drops below 20 acres after the sale, then the farm automatically becomes ineligible for the abatement and subject to recapture, and Commissioner Todd added that if the farm still meets the land criteria after the sale, then nothing changes. Lisa said she believed the current language is firm the way it is, and Vice Chairman Resutek pointed out that the Town Assessor would have to be notified of the sale of any property, which would trigger a reassessment.

Chairman Kelly suggested adding the following language to address the issue: "Upon sale of the property, or upon sale of a portion of the property or cessation of eligible farming operations, the property owner must pay to the town a percentage of the original amount of the taxes abated on the applicable land pursuant to the following schedule." Lisa was unsure if the language was needed, and Vice Chairman Resutek believed Section 5 would resolve the potential issue. The commission agreed to leave the language as-is.

MOVED (KELLY) SECONDED (SWANSON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE AS MODIFIED THE DRAFT MUNICIPAL ORDINANCE PURSUANT TO CGS §12-81M TO ALLOW ABATEMENT FOR 50% OF PROPERTY TAX FOR ELIGIBLE FARMING OPERATIONS AND REFER TO THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN.

2. Report: Tolland County Chamber of Commerce

Nothing new to report.

3. Agricultural Initiatives

The abatement that the commission passed for Oakridge Dairy, LLC's bottling plant is going before the Board of Selectmen on May 13, 2024.

4. CEDAS Best Practices – Customer Service Satisfaction Survey Results

Nothing new to report.

5. Report: Current Economic Activity

Construction continues at the Big Y Plaza. The businesses that are confirmed for that location are Starbucks and Hartford Healthcare GoHealth. Commissioner Swanson said he heard Select Physical Therapy may open a location there.

Holiday Pizza has opened their new location at 117 West Road and there is a Mexican restaurant moving into their old location on Main Street.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

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

Nothing new to report.

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

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

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

a. The Patch article - Ellington Dairy Farm Getting Long-Term Climate Resiliency Grant, dated April 17, 2024.

There was an article in the Ellington/Somers Patch about Oakridge Dairy, LLC, receiving a grant to put towards using less energy and capturing more organic energy.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (SWANSON) SECONDED (RESUTEK) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk