

## *Town of Fairfield*

### **Office of Community & Economic Development Minutes of Economic Development Commission Meeting**

April 8, 2021

The Economic Development Commission of the Town of Fairfield held a special meeting via teleconference on Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kevin Lesko; Don Peterson; Steve Rosato; Alethe Fatherley; David Fogel

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jon Slavin

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mark Barnhart, Director of Community and Economic Development

**CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m.

**Minutes:** The minutes of March 4, 2021 were approved unanimously.

#### **Covid-19 Response and Reopening Plan**

Mr. Barnhart reported that through the work of the First Selectwoman, his office and the Town Plan & Zoning Department, temporary outdoor dining provisions will be extended through this season. He noted that there is also legislation pending at the State level to authorize these measures statewide, but that Fairfield wanted to act quickly so that business owners can plan accordingly. In response to a question as to how the occupancy requirements are enforced, Mr. Barnhart said that unless there is a complaint, reliance is on the management of the venue.

Mr. Barnhart provided an update on the use of funds from the CARES Act to offer mini grants to small businesses in town. He noted that this program has assisted 72 businesses to date, committing over \$275K to help these small businesses with operating costs and other expenses related to the pandemic. Mr. Barnhart stated that his office continues to receive new applications, and that the program will continue until funds are exhausted.

Mr. Lesko asked what funds might be coming to Fairfield from the latest assistance bill. Mr. Barnhart said he is waiting for information from town officials as to the amount of grants. Since future development in town will depend on infrastructure improvements, he is expecting that the funding of capital projects will be a priority.

## **Status Report on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**

Mr. Barnhart provided a brief update on the development of a regional economic development strategy. He noted that the consultants working with MetroCOG will be holding meetings with stakeholders to discuss business needs.

## **Economic Development Priorities/Plan of Conservation & Development**

Mr. Lesko suggested that Commissioners come to the May meeting with ideas of priority needs that would benefit Fairfield.

Mr. Barnhart said that the POCD is focused on broad land use policies on land use, but that these often suggest future changes in zoning regulations. Mr. Barnhart stated that some areas to consider changes include parking regulations, rezoning in areas such as Commerce Drive/King's Highway to add commercial acreage, developing commercial areas to serve as gateways into town. He stressed that many of these would require infrastructure to make the sites viable.

## **Update on Development Sites/Pending Applications**

Mr. Barnhart reported that with easing restrictions he has seen an increase in business activity in town.

Mr. Barnhart updated the Commission on the former Kohl's location, which is being repurposed for a discount flooring store, which expects to have a ribbon cutting in June. Mr. Barnhart stated that Aldi's will occupy the balance of the site.

Mr. Barnhart reported that the Joe's American site is scheduled for a code review for a new fast casual restaurant. Across the street, the former gas station located at the corner of South Benson and Post Roads will be redeveloped as an upscale pizza restaurant.

Mr. Barnhart also stated that Sally's Pizza has been issued a building permit and is converting the former Barbacoa space within the Trademark Building.

## **Chamber President's Report**

Mr. Barnhart reported that Ms. Balaz had a scheduling conflict today.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Goethner

