

Town of Fairfield

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

May 6, 2021

The Economic Development Commission of the Town of Fairfield held its regular monthly meeting via Zoom on Thursday, May 6, 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; Beverly Balaz, Fairfield Chamber of Commerce

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 8:36 a.m.

Minutes: The minutes of April 8, 2021 were approved unanimously.

Mr. Lesko announced the resignation of Mr. Richi due to his relocation and thanked him for his service.

Update on Covid-19 Response and Reopening Plan

Mr. Barnhart spoke about the on-going relaxation of capacity restrictions, mask rules and other pandemic-related regulations by the State, set to take full effect on May 19th. These changes will certainly help local restaurants and other businesses hard hit by COVID-19. Mr. Barnhart discussed changes that enabled restaurants to establish or expand outdoor dining opportunities, and expressed hope that some of these measures might be made permanent. Mr. Barnhart reported that the Town continues to provide direct financial assistance to small businesses impacted by the pandemic. The Town has received 99 applications to date of which 78 have been approved, totaling roughly \$300K. Mr. Barnhart said he sees an improvement in the business climate in town. Retail occupancy is about 15%. The opening of two stores, Floor Décor and Aldi's will be important additions.

Status Report on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Mr. Barnhart said he expects the consultant to complete a market and industry analyses which he will share with the Commission once it is available.

Economic Development Priorities/Plan of Conservation & Development

Mr. Barnhart asked for suggestions from the Commission as to areas that TPZ should focus on regarding economic development and the Plan of Conservation & Development.

Mr. Barnhart noted that prior suggestions included: 1) eliminating split zoning; 2) revising signage regulations; 3) allowing bed & breakfast uses; 4) considering development of the train station parking area. Other suggestions should be forwarded to his office.

Update on Development Sites/Pending Applications

Mr. Barnhart reported that the former Kohl's store at 290 Tunxis Hill will be converted to a Floor & Décor and Aldi's. Floor & Decor expects to have a ribbon cutting on June 16th; Aldi's expects to open in July.

Joe's American: presently in code review for a new fast casual restaurant.

The application for a 94-unit residential development at 4185 Black Rock Turnpike has been approved by TPZ (CGS 8-30g).

Both Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University have campus improvement projects in the works.

Mr. Barnhart reported on an application to convert the old gas/service station at 801 Post Road into a vintage gas station themed restaurant. Mr. Barnhart asked if the EDC would provide a letter of support, to which the EDC agreed.

Ms. Fatherley observed that the Fairfield Center Shopping Center across the street could benefit from some updating.

Chamber President's Report

Ms. Balaz said the recent Shop & Stroll event was well attended and welcomed by shoppers and retailers.

The Chamber's new visitor's guide will be available soon.

E-gift cards have brought in \$58,400 to date and that money will stay in the community. Ms. Balaz thanked the Town for its support of this program

The Chamber will celebrate its 75th anniversary in September.

Other Business

Mr. Barnhart said the town expects to receive a large infusion of dollars through the American Jobs Act. Given funding criteria, he expects that much of it will be used for capital improvements

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 3, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Goethner