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Kate Egan
BRANFORD TOWN CLERK

Economic Development Commission Branford, Connecticut

Meeting MINUTES

November 1, 2023 8:00am

Joe Trapasso Community House - 46 Church St – Branford

Meeting was called to order at 8:02am. In attendance were Commissioners Al Canosa, Jim Fennell, Frank Hird, Karen Ragonese, Rich Sgueglia (Chair), Shoreline Chamber of Commerce President Dee Jacob

Approval of Minutes: Motion to accept October 4th Minutes by A. Canosa, Second by J. Fennell, Passed.

Reports:

Staff Report: "An Evening with the Spirits" was held on October 21st at the Blackstone Library. The event was well attended and successful. The Branford tree lighting will be held on Saturday November 25th. A parade runs from the Branford High School to the Branford Green, followed by lighting of the community tree on the Green – attendance is 4-5,000 people. A BACA event will be held in the old Board of Education building that weekend.

Planning & Zoning Report: The apartment development at 26 Cherry Hill Rd and 4 lot subdivision at Totoket Rd both continue. Sports field additions were approved at 61 Industrial Rd. This facility will include indoor and outdoor pickleball and paddleball courts. Wells Fargo exterior lighting modifications are still pending. The annual "Sip and Stroll" will be held downtown on Thursday December 7th.

Chamber Report: D. Jacob reported that Chamber staff visited small businesses in town yesterday (10/31) in costume. November marks the start of Small Business shopping season, which the Shoreline Chamber is currently promoting with the tagline "Shop Local, Shop Home, Shop Branford". More marketing is planned to support the small businesses that support our local community. Upcoming events include the Health, Wellness and Aging Well fair at the Soundview YMCA on Saturday 11/4. On 11/8, the Chamber is sponsoring a Legislative Forum at the Blackstone Library featuring 4 legislators from the area, who will make statements then break off into discussion groups. At 1:30, Wednesday 11/22, the Chamber will hold a ribbon cutting for the new Branford Coworking space on Montowese Street.

Despite extensive planning, the Chamber's Fall Festival, held on Saturday October 13, was lightly attended due to rainy weather. A discussion followed on the difficulties artisans have faced due to inclement weather and higher cost of doing business.

The subject turned to downtown small businesses and the challenges they are facing with higher rents with shorter terms, vacant storefronts reducing foot traffic, increased overhead, higher employee salaries, cost of goods, and online competition. D. Jacob mentioned that pressure on rents, vacant storefronts, don't provide a contiguous shopping experience and some storefronts are not attractive. R. Squeglia has seen the impacts of higher salary requirements and that attracting more activity to town can help small business. A. Canosa stated that retail and restaurants are struggling while medical and non-profits are doing better. The long-term trends are concerning, K. Ragonese stated these factors will make downtown revitalization difficult. Commissioners agreed this is a priority that requires further consideration.

Selectman's Report: No Report

Old Business: An application by Shirley McCarthy and Peter Hentschel to revising landscape regulations has been denied without prejudice by P&Z. The consensus is that more information is needed along with feedback from various stakeholders impacted and the proposal will be revisited next February. The EDC agrees that it will not favor this proposal if, after consideration, it determines the regulations will have a negative impact on economic development. By way of example, F. Hird described how decision in Madison requiring a property demolition and rebuild, has made that property economically unviable for any buyer under current market conditions.

New Business: The commissioners discussed changing the meeting date to third Wednesday or leaving it as is. It was agreed to continue meeting on the first Wednesday. A suggestion was made that Perry send a meeting invitation out prior to each meeting to make it easier for commissioners to include it on their calendars. The commission received no demolition applications, no letters, and there was no public comment.

Next Regular Meeting December 6th, 2023

Motion to Adjourn was made at 8:45 by A. Canosa and Seconded by K. Ragonese

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Fennell

<https://www.bestcitiesforbusiness.net>

475-837-3622 pmaresca@branford-ct.gov

Perry Maresca · Economic and Business Development Manager

Elena Cahill · Al Canosa · Jim Fennell · Frank Hird · Karen Ragonese · Jared Schulefand · Alisa Waterman
Richard Sgueglia (Chair) edc@branford-ct.gov
First Selectman Jamie Cosgrove [ex officio]

Branford Economic Development Commission - 1019 Main Street - Branford, CT 06405 - 203-315-0637 - www.branford-ct.gov