

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING via Zoom
May 12, 2021

Present: Chairman Janet Peckinpaugh, Brian Weinstein, Peter Decker, Susan Malan, Robert Day and Betsy D'Amico

Absent: Tom Nichols

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Peckinpaugh at 4:00 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Motion made by Peter Decker to approve the April 2021 minutes. Brian Weinstein seconded.

INTRODUCTION:

Janet introduced Amy D'Alessio, who is the owner of J. Alden Women's. She took over as the President of the Essex Board of Trade. This is her 4th year and 2nd time as the president. Welcome! Janet asked what are you doing now for your business now that the Covid requirements are lifting and Is there anything that we can do to support you? Amy responded that 2020 was a tough year for small businesses. It was a struggle. It is starting to tick up now that things are starting to lift. There are still some people that are afraid to come out and visit businesses. Hopefully as the restrictions are lifted, they will feel more comfortable. They are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. They definitely survived this by expanding their online business presence. Her and her husband, Jim, opened up under the Alden Clothiers, J. Alden Women's. This was open in January of 2020. They put up their website and were running strong on social media. Instagram saved their business and many others as they could connect with people in their own home. Their peers in the village either did the same or suffered the harshness of the Covid crisis. She has urged all small businesses in town to use Instagram. Her and Jim work every day to find a way to greet customers where they are, where they live. As far as what we can do to help- continue to tell the community to support local businesses. Love your local business- so many people don't shop in local downtown Essex. They feel it is unaffordable or they are unattainable. This is not the case- we care about our customers and are affordable and attainable.

What is going on with the Board of Trade? They have a director's meeting on Friday that will be in person. They will continue to do Al Fresco Thursday's during July and August- downtown Essex, Centerbrook and Ivoryton businesses open up for business after hours. They have music, specials and trunk shows. The businesses will be open until 8p.m. This is the 4th year doing it. The flags will go up in the next 2 weeks before Memorial Day to welcome everyone. The boat show was held. Many were disappointed that it was small. Maybe need to be a bit more transparent with who is going to be there. There were many people in town, and it was very safe and respectful. Most wore a mask, if they did not, they were asked and complied. A question was asked if the Board of Trade had a listing of business emails. Yes, they do but they definitely try to protect them. What would it be used for? It would only be used for important things that come up. If we sent something to you, would you send it to the emails you have. Yes, Amy could do that. The other thing that Amy was hoping for help with was parking. Downtown Essex has plenty of parking if you know where it is. If the parking in front of the buildings is

taken up by the people that run the businesses it takes away from the customer parking. They don't know where else to park and it may mean they don't visit a business because there is no parking. Janet said she would pass this along. She did not even think about it and is sure that most business owners don't either.

Chris Shane was introduced. He is part of the Ivoryton Alliance. Updates on how it is going and what can we do to help. Chris said there will be a July 4th parade as of right now. Norm and Lisa, who works with the health issues, has cleared it. Theater indoors is opening. There will be no farmers market this year. There is tremendous loyalty with the locals. Noone that they are aware of contracted Covid. May 19th will be opening even more. Chris wanted everyone to know that businesses survived due to local help. He also said we could help with parking problems. Amy mentioned one for downtown Essex. There are no issues with Ivory St. to the left of Gathering Again parking on one side of the street. There is a no parking sign at the corner that confuses people as to where they can and can't park- it is just a matter of telling locals they can park there. Maybe signs can go up in areas that they can park in so that it is clearer. Betsy said she would talk with Ryan about it. Peter suggested that in Old Saybrook a section on Main St. square has lines across it is clearly marked there is no parking there. You cannot miss it. Maybe something like that can be done. Maybe can put up a small sign that says additional parking on Ivory St? Chris just wanted to let everyone know that a founding member of the Ivoryton Lions, Nan Crowell, who also owned the Ivoryton Tavern, passed away last week due to a stroke. She was very active and did a lot in the community and used to own the tavern. All are grieving. Everyone wished their condolences. He also mentioned that he would send a list of email addresses for businesses and restaurants. How we can help- put that on the website. Who we are and what we can do/help with?

Janet wanted Amy and Chris to know that a project that we have been working on for a while finally has gotten the go ahead and are very excited about it. The UConn Engineering Students helped design a partial sidewalk on Ferry St. This would be to help with parking and safety. Safer for bikes and pedestrians. It has been baby steps with this project but has been approved with the Board of Selectman. Janet explained the location and what will be done. Since there will be flowerpots, who will maintain them? Janet said initially they would be responsible for putting in the initial plants but hopefully the Garden Club will take it over and maintain it. It could be them though. After this, the next step will be putting in more benches around town for visitors to sit on.

Visitors: Amy D'Alessio & Chris Shane

Updates: None

Planning and Zoning Report:

Janet explained that she had emailed everyone the Planning and Zoning Report prior so there is no sense going line by line. Does anyone have any questions about this? Peter asked about the Rte. 9 gateway area. Robert explained that right now, the zoning rules are you have XYZ property and you can do ABC parameters. If you go through about 5 more steps, the property that might not necessarily be in the correct zoning parameters, might be approved with these extra steps taken. It was brought up about the Essex Spa. Certain people had different ideas for the property, but it would have been outside of the zoning regulations. If you met the criteria with the 5 or so extra criteria, Planning and Zoning might entertain the idea of approving it. It

was brought up that these extra criteria may be very expensive for the people that are asking to modify the zoning requirements. Would it be possible if someone else did a traffic study in the area, to use that same traffic study to cut down on costs? Even if you go through all the criteria, it is not a guarantee that you will get approved. Discussion on the marina and parking. It was brought up that parking regulations should be abolished. If you own the parking areas, you have to follow the regulations but if the parking areas are not by businesses, the regulations don't need to be followed. It is unfair for some to follow the regulations while others do not.

The following applications relating to businesses and business use have seen activity since the last submission to the Essex EDC:

Approved Zoning Permits:

Application No. 21-47 – 2 Essex Square– Replace sign with Art Gallery Sign

Application No. 21-62 – 37 Pratt Street- Renovation to restaurant space- formerly Abby's Restaurant- becoming Dockside.

Application No. 21-67 – 17 Industrial Park Road- Remove demising wall between units 5 and 6 to allow 9 Town Transit to park vehicles inside overnight.

Special Exception Applications:

None

Site Plan Review Application:

None

Petitions for Text Amendments:

PZC Application 21-3 Text Amendment to the Zoning Regulations Section 40I.2 Accessory Buildings- Essex Planning and Zoning Commission proposing text amendment to allow detached accessory structures 15 ft in height or less to be located not less than 5 ft from a side or rear property line and no less than 10 ft from side and rear lines for parcels deemed rear lots.

Parking Regulations

The PZC discussed a possible text amendment regarding parking requirements for marinas. Currently one parking space is required for slips, docks, and moorings, regardless of whether the boater is a "member" from Essex or is a transient boater who arrived via boat and would not have a car. Carey Duques is going to meet with Doug Dumaine and Jeff Going to discuss possible proposals for having a parking ratio of slips, docks, moorings, to number of parking spaces. This was continued to the June meeting.

Accessory Dwelling Units

An application for a text amendment to add the River Road Residential (RRR) to the zones permitted to have Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) will be submitted at the June meeting. It seems that this zone was inadvertently omitted from the zones allowed to have ADU.

Route 9 Gateway Special Development District

The PZC is considering an overlay district that focuses on the Route 9 gateway area. It would require that property owners interested in this overlay rezone their property (minimum of 2 acres) and also a Special Exception would be needed for proposed development. Details of the proposed regulation are attached. This is going to be discussed further by the PZC in June.

News:

The Land Use Office is working with the EDC to gather contact information for businesses throughout town, in hopes of developing a master list.

ACTION ITEMS: None

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

Upcoming Guests and Meeting Locations:

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 9, 2021.

ADJOURNMENT:

Janet wants to keep every meeting within an hour, and we are over that. Can we make a motion to adjourn? Motion was made by Robert Day to adjourn the meeting at 5:07 p.m. Peter Decker seconded the motion. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cindy Sadlowski, Commission Clerk