

Old Lyme Economic Development Commission

Regular Meeting

March 1, 2023

MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Old Lyme Economic Development Commission was held on Wednesday, March 1, 2023 in the Town Meeting Hall.

Present: Cheryl Poirier, John Stratton, Mona Colwell, Joe Camean, Wendy Russell, Scott Smith, Terry Lewis, Jean Wilczynski. MJ DeRisio arrived after the meeting began.

1. Welcome & New Appointment

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 PM.

Cheryl welcomed Terry Lewis, a new appointment, to the Economic Development Commission.

Joe Camean stated that he has not made it to the Town Clerk's office to be sworn in, so he will be a non-voting member tonight.

2. Approval of February 1, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Mona Colwell made a motion to approve the February 1, 2023 regular meeting minutes. Wendy Russell seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 7 (Poirier/Stratton/Colwell/Russell/Wilczynski/Smith/Lewis) in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining and 1 (Camean) non-voting.

MJ DeRisio was not yet present for the vote.

3. Officer Election

a. Motion for 2023 Timeframe

Cheryl stated that the Commission needs to discuss when Officer Elections should take place. The Commission discussed timeframes.

Cheryl also stated that the Commission can elect a Co-Chair, Vice Chairman etc. should the Commission desire that. **Joe Camean made a motion to set the 2023 timeframe to start in January and end in December following the calendar year. Mona Colwell seconded the motion.** John reminded the Commission that elections are in November and that the Commission has to think ahead through November and December. MJ stated that the Commission is making it too complicated. She suggested keeping things the way they currently are.

Joe Camean made a new motion for the timeframe to be from March 1st to the last day of February. Mona Colwell seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 8 (Poirier/Stratton/Colwell/Russell/Wilczynski/Smith/Lewis/DeRisio) in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining and 1 (Camean) non-voting.

Jean Wilczynski made a motion to nominate Cheryl Poirier to be chair. Wendy Russell seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 8 in favor (Poirier/Stratton/Colwell/Russell/Wilczynski /Smith/Lewis/DeRisio) in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining and 1 (Camean) non-voting.

4. Economic Indicators

a. Real Estate Update

MJ stated there is no new reporting of closed businesses. She stated that there are still a lot of commercial vacancies and businesses for sale. She advised the Commission that there has been a \$100,000 price drop on the former Black Hall Kitchen listing and no feedback on Cherrystones. MJ stated that 4 Davis Road sold.

MJ stated that for residential properties, inventory is down 50%, compared to last February, but that houses are still selling a little bit above asking price.

b. Business Openings and Closings

Cheryl stated that Kokomo's appears to be planning on reopening, the owner of a lot at 58 Hartford Avenue recently went before zoning asking to open it as an employee parking lot for Kokomo's staff.

Cheryl stated that the liquor store at Point O Woods is open. She stopped in and is waiting to hear back from the owner.

Cheryl stated that Papi's will do a ribbon cutting. They will be closed the next couple of days, taking a well-deserved vacation, but that Saturday March 25th at 11am is the potential ribbon cutting date.

The Commission discussed 4 Davis Road and even though they are not a "new" business Jean will reach out to them to ask if they would like to do a ribbon cutting.

MJ asked if there is a seasonal opening for all the summer businesses. Cheryl asked the Commission what ideas the EDC has to promote the summer businesses in town. John stated that was a seasonal opening was a great idea and good opportunity to re-list the business name. Mona suggested running an ad in the New London Day or another paper. Cheryl stated that the EDC could do social media posts and link to a story on Explore Old Lyme.

Cheryl stated that she will check in with Sapore to see how they are doing and anticipated reopening.

5. Marketing & Promotion

a. Eastern Regional Tourism District (ERTD) Update

Wendy stated she will have more after the March meeting the following day, but that they are working on their re-branding to "Eastern Connecticut." She did advise the EDC that at the March meeting they will decide who will be getting the grants the Commission discussed last month. She stated that she will have more to share next month.

b. Town Website

Cheryl showed the Commission the new Town website and how to get to the Economic Development Commission page for the agenda and minutes.

c. Communications/Building a mailing list

Mona and Cheryl have been discussing how to proceed with a business mailing list. Cheryl stated that the new Town website has a “notify me” sign up for Town news. Cheryl stated that they should be able to create a “notify me” sign up so that interested business owners and others can receive e-newsletters from the EDC. The Commission discussed a “notify me” sign up. Scott stated that the drawback with that is that people have to create an account in order to sign up. He stated that some people might not want to do that. The Commission discussed sending out a promotional piece to get people to sign up. Wendy suggested putting a QR code on it to bring them to the link to sign up. MJ suggested putting the promotional piece with the QR code in places like the Town Clerk’s office and any other office in Town Hall where people would do business. Cheryl stated that she can do a Facebook post leading people to the latest business update and hopefully people will sign up. Cheryl stated that in one of the First Selectman’s newsletters they can add a reminder to sign up and share with a friend.

Cheryl and Mona will continue to work on an email list of brick and mortar businesses in Old Lyme.

Mona wrote a draft email to send out regarding what the EDC can do to support businesses during the Midsummer festival and on the Explore Old Lyme page. Cheryl and Mona will work together to get the email out the week of March 20th.

d. Midsummer Festival Participation:

Mona stated that the EDC will need to schedule staffing for the Midsummer Festival. Last year the table was staffed with two people rotating every two hours.

Cheryl stated that she will be ordering the tent and table cloths with the ARPA award to the EDC.

e. Eco-Tourism Literature: Cheryl stated that the Commission will re-visit this.

f. Reprint of 2022 Materials: Cheryl stated that she will get a reprint of the 2022 materials.

g. Photography: Cheryl stated that the EDC has money for photography and that they will re-visit this topic next month. .

6. Economic Revitalization Efforts

Joe brought the Connecticut Riverway Trail project map to show the Commission. The Commission reviewed the maps and discussed the former proposal.

a. Shoreline Gateway

Joe stated that the Shoreline Gateway recently met and at the last meeting the topic of discussion was dedicated to the blight issue.

Eric Knapp, Old Lyme's Land Use Coordinator, stated that blight is a very difficult issue because many times it involves hoarding as it relates to mental health issues. Joe stated that Eric suggested that the town ordinances have to be very specific and carefully constructed. It is a very sensitive because once enacted it can start a lot of neighbor to neighbor issues. Joe did state that any ordinance would be impossible to enforce based upon the Town's current staffing. Joe stated that they also discussed commercial property blights and what constitutes something that could impose a public hazard.

Joe stated that the Shoreline Gateway is going to put together a mission statement for what they are trying to accomplish.

b. Halls Road

Cheryl stated that the Zoning Commission decided in its last meeting that they wanted to fine tune the wording in the Halls Road zoning change request. They wanted to make sure the individual size of buildings cannot be large and there will not be long length of facades.

7. New or Additional Business

a. Chamber of Commerce

Jean stated that the Lyme-Old Lyme Chamber of Commerce met with the Executive Director and Chairman of the Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce last week and that it was a great meeting. Jean stated that the Old Saybrook Chamber is very open to a collaboration and that 30% of the Old Saybrook Chamber businesses are not in Old Saybrook.

Jean stated that the biggest benefit is that the Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce has paid staff that provide many great services to members. Jean stated that there are a lot of marketing opportunities and that membership to join is reasonable.

Jean said that the Lyme Old Lyme Chamber will continue to review its options but feels that the Old Saybrook Chamber is a good option. Jean reminded the Commission that the Old Saybrook Chamber is working on rebranding themselves as the Greater Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce since they do not just serve Old Saybrook businesses. Jean also added that the Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce has a scholarship program as well.

b. Other Business

Cheryl stated that the strategic planning will be tabled till next month. She stated that the EDC has the funds and has to figure out how to finish the plan.

John presented his findings for researching Cold Spring Harbor's Laboratory. Joe stated that Old Lyme is filled with scientists, engineers and more professionals of that group. He feels that there is a potential to have a research type institute here. He stated that he is looking at the old velvet mill model where the Town made that happen.

8. Public Comment

There were no comments from the Public.

9. Adjournment

MJ DeRisio made a motion to adjourn. Mona Colwell seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 8 in favor (Poirier/Stratton/Colwell/Russell/Wilczynski/Smith/Lewis/DeRisio) in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining and 1 (Camean) non-voting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer D'Amato
Records Clerk for the Old Lyme Economic Development Commission