

Regular Meeting
JOINT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
AND TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 11, 2021
VIA ZOOM ONLY

PRESENT:

TCRC: Marilyn Ozols, Chair; Darlene Briggs, Jim Crawford, Hiram Fuchs (arrived at 7:15 p.m.), Deborah Rie, Libby Waldron and Alternate Kathy Richard

EDC: Jim Crawford, Chair; Darlene Briggs, Phil Cocchiola, Kristen Meyer, Kathy Richard and Deborah Rie

Eric Knapp, Planning and Zoning Development Coordinator

JOINT MEETING:

1. Call to Order

M. Ozols called the joint meeting of the Economic Development Commission and the Town Center Revitalization Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Guest Speaker – Sadie Colcord of AdvanceCT re: Ways AdvanceCT can Assist in Promoting Economic Development in Westbrook.

AdvanceCT is a nonprofit organization that works to engage, retain and recruit businesses and advance overall economic competitiveness in Connecticut. In collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), AdvanceCT strives to build a place where business, government, higher education, and nonprofits come together to implement high impact and inclusive economic development solutions for the state. Originally established in 1993 as the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc., the economic development entity changed its name to AdvanceCT in 2020.

S. Colcord explained that AdvanceCT works to attract businesses from out of state and to retain the businesses already in CT. They work with economic partners such as municipalities and chambers of commerce. They're funded 50% by the State and 50% by their Board. They're focusing on business retention, recruiting, expansion and marketing.

S. Colcord spoke of the importance of gathering community input, which Westbrook has done, through surveys and community discussions with business owners. She recommended providing the public with visuals, for example, an architectural rendering of what the Town could look like if various initiatives were taken. Information about expenses and potential tax revenue should be prepared for public review.

Recognizing that the Town's staffing capacity is limited, S. Colcord suggested leveraging the work of organizations that work regionally or at the State level such as AdvanceCT, the Department of Economic and Community Development, CT Office of Tourism or the CT Main Street Center to attract and retain businesses.

S. Colcord suggested that another thing to focus on is what Westbrook wants to be. Think about the selling points for the Town based on that vision. Utilizing social media is a great way to start by putting information out there such as community events, real estate available, and other things that would make Westbrook attractive to various types of businesses.

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Implementing programs for business recruitment like a local tax incentive program or grant funding such as microloans to various businesses is also a good way to attract and retain business. Farmers markets are a wonderful way for local businesses to sell their products and gain exposure.

J. Crawford asked how willing AdvanceCT would be to get involved with Westbrook and a push to launch a tax incentive or microloan initiative once TCRC/EDC has all of the information on the wastewater studies. S. Colcord said AdvanceCT would be able to help once they know what real estate is available so they can direct the appropriate businesses to Town, and they will give guidance on the land use process and help promote it to the businesses in town. AdvanceCT helps to make connections.

J. Crawford asked S. Colcord about the public mural that the TCRC/EDC has been working on getting in the Westbrook downtown. She said that public art is a draw and there are ways to promote the mural and at the same time suggest other things that the public can do and see when they come into Town. It could be marketed as a package.

AdvanceCT runs an online commercial real estate database. They've recently made membership to municipalities free. Businesses are looking for places to locate, and municipalities can market their towns to the businesses.

D. Rie inquired about ways to encourage building owners to fix up their properties in the Town Center. S. Colcord said there are options for funding town center revitalization such as TIF (tax increment financing). The incremental tax revenue can be used for public improvements like signage. That money can be recycled back to the developer for building that development.

D. Rie asked about attracting remote workers to relocate to Westbrook. S. Colcord said that CT has a good quality of life to offer. That needs to be marketed.

3. Community Connectivity Grant – Town Center Sidewalks – Project Update

E. Knapp reported that they are anticipating the permit approval from the Department of Transportation (DOT) for the modification of the portion of the sidewalk on Route 1. The goal is to have that work started as soon as possible after April 1, 2021. Once E. Knapp gets the official start date, he will notify business owners.

4. STEAP 2020 Sidewalk Grant

The Town is still waiting for the paperwork from the State.

5. Septic Study Progress Report

J. Crawford has received a copy of the report. It appears that the charge for that study was not exactly the same thing the TCRC/EDC was looking for. It would be helpful if the TCRC/EDC could have some direct conversations with the engineer. The TCRC/EDC would then like to have a joint meeting with the WPCA to coordinate TCRC/EDC goals with the WPCA requirement to provide and capacity for properties that do not have adequate septic. There are ways to expand the capacity and be true to the importance of the Ted Lane field area. They want to maximize without overreach.

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H. Fuchs would like to see the ballfields revitalized. He said there is an opportunity there to do something great. Wren Park has not been looked at as part of the study.

The next steps are to have a meeting with the WPCA, facilitated by the Board of Selectmen, to flesh out capacity. An engineer will need to be selected through the QBS process in order for Westbrook to be eligible for grant funding. The Board of Finance is requesting numbers for the Capital Plan. This can include the cost to expand the parameters of the study.

H. Fuchs noted the potential for increased use of Wren Park. The Westbrook Foundation may be willing to help with a project to revitalize Wren Park. It could potentially be connected to the Town Center, and it's very close to the elementary school. Living close to a beautiful park is an allure for young families.

6. Initiatives

a. Westbrook Place - mural project

J. Crawford explained that the owner of the building, Nell McCusker, has passed away. J. Crawford spoke with Nell's husband Jim McCusker, and he and J. Crawford plan to meet soon to discuss whether or not J. McCusker would like to proceed with the mural.

b. Town Center Facades and Building Rear Improvement Program/Tax Incentives Program

J. Crawford suggested that if the mural is approved, it would be good to talk with business owners about the opportunity that the mural may offer in enhancing the downtown.

c. Historic District Gateway Signage

M. Ozols is planning to meet with L. Waldron and D. Rie next week and plans to have a report about historic district gateway signage at the next TCRC/EDC meeting.

7. Minutes

The minutes were tabled.

8. Bills

TCRC		EDC	
Recording Secretary	\$ 27.03	Recording Secretary	\$ 27.03
Stormwater Compliance LLC (Porous Vacuum Sweep)	\$1,000.00		

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J. Crawford made a motion to approve the bills. P. Cocchiola seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

9.

Adjournment

J. Crawford made a motion to adjourn the joint meeting of the Town Center Revitalization Committee and the Economic Development Commission meeting at 8:12 p.m. D. Briggs seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION:

1. **Call to Order:** J. Crawford called the meeting of the Economic Development Commission to order at 8:12 p.m.

2. **Update on New Development Applications**

E. Knapp has recently talked with the owners of four separate restaurants who would like to move their restaurants to Westbrook in existing town spaces.

There was discussion about having food trucks in the Town Center. E. Knapp suggested the EDC look at Clinton's Zoning Regulations for Vendors.

There was also discussion about outside dining after the Governor's Executive Order on outdoor dining expires. E. Knapp said he is not expecting the Emergency Order will be extended after April 20, 2021. No one knows at this time what will happen with permitting for additional outdoor dining. This is in front of the legislature now.

3. **Adjournment**

D. Rie made a motion to adjourn the meeting of the Economic Development Commission at 8:29 p.m. P. Cocchiola seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE:

1. **Call to Order**

M. Ozols called the Meeting of the Town Center Revitalization Committee to order at 8:29 p.m.

2. **"Quick Hits" / Adopt-A-Spot Projects**

D. Rie had nothing new to report.

4. **Adjournment**

D. Briggs made a motion to adjourn the Town Center Revitalization Committee at 8:30 p.m. J. Crawford seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

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Respectfully Submitted,
Kathleen King, Recording Secretary