

JOINT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
AND TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, May 5, 2016
Mulvey Municipal Center – North Conference Room – 7:00 p.m.
Westbrook, CT 06498

PRESENT: TCRC: Marilyn Ozols, Chair; Darlene Briggs; James Crawford; Matt Diamond; Katie Holbrook
Richard; Deborah Rie, Libby Waldron
EDC: James Crawford, Chair; Darlene Briggs; Mark Lynskey; John Leake
Also Present: Meg Parulis, Town Planner; Erica Evans, Recording Secretary; Nancy Rudek,
Zoning Official

JOINT MEETING:

Call to Order

Ms. Ozols called the joint meeting of the Town Center Revitalization Committee and the Economic Development Commission to order at 7:05 PM.

Town Center Parking Project/STEAP – Project Update

Ms. Parulis stated the project is moving forward. Woodard & Curran is working on construction documents. Kathy Connelly has submitted a proposal for the landscape design. This work will not need to be sub-contracted through Woodard & Curran as originally believed, because the cost will be under \$5,000. The Committee discussed deadlines and the goal to submit the proposal to the Zoning Commission for public hearing in June. Once approved by Zoning, the project will go out to bid. The bid documents will need to be approved by the state. The engineers will be conducting soil testing in the area of the culvert to determine how much material will need to be replaced and verify that there is no need for additional structural support.

Town Center Wastewater Study – Project Update

Ms. Parulis stated that there was concern by members of the Westbrook Fire Department about how the potential community septic system would affect the carnival being held in the same area. Ms. Parulis discussed the issue with the Town Engineers and they suggested doing some borings around the perimeter of the field. Ms. Waldron inquired about Wren Park as an option. Ms. Parulis stated that the soils there are not optimal for the project but that she would discuss alternative locations with the engineers. Mr. Crawford asked about previous testing. Ms. Parulis stated that testing had been done in adjoining areas, but not specifically in the field. Ms. Rie asked how much money the fire department raises and about the cost benefit. No specific numbers were known. It is important to gather more information about cost before these decisions can be made. Ms. Parulis is looking for authorization to have Woodard & Curran do the borings with funds from TCRC. The joint committee of TCRC and EDC agreed it is an important step and it should move forward.

20 Westbrook Place Special Permit Application – Request for comment from Zoning Commission

Ms. Parulis stated that the Zoning Commission has requested an opinion from Town Center Revitalization Committee as to whether the use as requested on the application is consistent with the vision for Town Center. Gowrie Group is proposing to develop a corporate wellness/fitness center for their employees. This use would not require parking as the employees are parked at 36 Westbrook Place. Fitness centers are not listed as a permitted use in the Town Center. The space in question is currently listed as a retail use. The Gowrie Group is completing a façade improvement which would give a “facelift” to the building including replacing siding, changing the color of the siding, putting in new windows and a new awning. They will keep the existing flower boxes. Ms. Waldron asked if the fitness center would be open to public. Ms. Parulis stated that it would not and it would create a loss of retail space, but there would still be foot traffic. Ms. Rie inquired if Gowrie Group could put their employees in the building in question and then use some of their current space at 36 Westbrook Place for a fitness center. Ms. Parulis stated they could do that since offices are clearly allowed in the CTC District, but she doubted that the applicant would choose to. They could add a second story and then put the office upstairs and put a fitness center in the first floor as an accessory use, but there are currently no plans to add a second floor. Ms. Ozols stated that it was the committee’s job to decide if what Gowrie Group wants to do is consistent with what this Committee is trying to do. Mr. Diamond asked if Zoning proceeded with what Gowrie Group is trying to do whether TCRC has

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a say. Ms. Ozols explained that since there is some discretion, they would like to know whether the proposal is consistent with the plans being worked on by TCRC. Ms. Rie asked if they are trying to call it an accessory usage. Ms. Parulis explained that it can't be an accessory use because it is not on the same lot as the primary use (office). It can only be permitted as a personal service and there is no definition in the regulations. Therefore, it is subject to interpretation. Ms. Ozols stated that other towns are looking to move offices upstairs and get retail and restaurants on the first floor, which provides more foot traffic. She shared the description of uses envisioned in the Town Center in the UCONN Study. *"New buildings should reflect the historical character of the existing Town Center and provide mixed-uses like restaurants, shops, business services and apartments..."* Mr. Crawford stated that if the proposed use isn't approved, the building will remain empty and unsightly. In this case, by putting this business in place, it puts activity in the area and improves the look of the building. Ms. Parulis explained that previous tenants have left because of limited parking. Mr. Diamond asked if a permit could be given to use the area for a fitness center for a specified amount of time and then make them build a second story in the future for that use. Ms. Parulis explained that this type of condition would probably not be legal. Once the use is allowed, it can't be taken away. Mr. Diamond felt that the applicant should have confirmed that he would be allowed to use the building as a fitness center before they bought it. Ms. Parulis pointed out that there are other uses traditionally considered as personal uses that might not be desirable. She agreed that there are many pros and cons to this situation. The hope is that as infrastructure improvements are made, the gym would be replaced with a more profitable use that is more in line with Town Center goals. Ms. Ozols suggested that the Committee send a message that this may not be the most desirable use down the road and that there are other uses of the space that would be more in line with the vision. Ms. Rie felt that the use was in line with the recommendation for "mixed-uses". Ms. Parulis stated that the difficulty is in getting the right mix which can't always be controlled by Zoning. There was discussion about private vs. public use of the fitness center and the difficulty of providing parking. Ms. Rie asked about health code challenges with adding showers in the fitness center. Ms. Parulis stated that if they increase the flow by 50% they will need to upgrade the system.

Ms. Rie made a motion that although the proposed use is not necessarily consistent with the Town Center Vision Plan, and not to be encouraged going forward, the short-term gains of keeping the building occupied and making the façade improvements, combined with the expectation of a future expansion of the building to a second floor, warrant a FAVORABLE recommendation. If at all possible, the addition of some form of ancillary retail use that would attract additional visitors to the Town Center, would be desirable.

It is further recommended that the applicant provide the appropriate easements in furtherance of the Town Center concept plan for shared access and parking behind Westbrook Place to address parking needs.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Waldron and unanimously approved.

Minutes:

Regular Meeting, April 7, 2016

Mr. Crawford made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 7, 2016 regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Briggs and unanimously approved.

Adjournment

Ms. Briggs made a motion to adjourn the Joint TCRC/EDC meeting at 7:58 PM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lynskey and unanimously approved.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION:

Call to Order

Mr. Crawford called the meeting of the Economic Development Commission meeting to order at 7:59 PM

Update on New Development Applications – Town Planner

Ms. Parulis stated that the group had already been updated on 20 Westbrook Place.

Ms. Parulis discussed the antique barn next to Subway which is zoned residential not commercial. The owner is looking to have a music store with music lessons and keep a residential apartment in the building. The other building fronting on S. Main is being proposed as a dance studio and there was discussion of possibly tearing down the building and putting up a new one. The committee discussed what the property was used for in the past. Ms. Parulis stated that the only way the use could be allowed is as a ‘school’ use which requires a Special Permit. The hope is to adapt and reuse the building on S. Main if possible, but the condition of the building is unknown. There was discussion of available parking and it was noted that town parking behind the Riggio Bldg. is very close to that area.

It appears Archie Moore’s may no longer be interested in the old Westbrook Deli/Pizza without an answer on whether they could use the Town Green to expand the septic system. The existing system was only allowed to be placed on the Green because it was a repair. It has been a policy not to allow use of the Green for expansions. Ms. Ozols stated that as much as the Committee wants the properties to be developed, favor should not be shown to one developer or business over the others unless there is a specific phased plan put in place to ultimately include them in the overall bigger septic plan. Ms. Parulis stated that it is important to get more businesses in the downtown location to spread the cost of the system and make it more cost effective. Ms. Parulis was encouraged to reach out to Archie Moore’s to see if they might still be interested and work toward a solution.

Minutes:

Regular Meeting, January 7, 2016

Regular Meeting, February 4, 2016

Regular Meeting, April 7, 2016

Ms. Briggs made a motion to approve the minutes from the regular meetings in January, February, and April. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lynskey and unanimously approved.

Bills:

The bills had been previously approved by the TCRC due to EDC not having a quorum at previous meetings.

Historic Marker on Town Green

As previously mentioned, the historic markers from the bicentennial in 1976 that were given to each town by the State Historic Commission are currently deteriorating. Mr. Crawford contacted the Culture and Tourism Preservation and it was reported that restoration has never previously been an inquiry. He has received little response from his inquiries. One call was returned and they were going to research who built the markers. There was no useable information gained. Mr. Crawford hopes to find someone who can repair the markers. Ms. Ozols suggested finding out if other towns have needed repair.

Town Center Market Analysis – Project Update

Ms. Parulis stated that the analysis is underway, but an additional \$2,000 is needed to cover the cost. Initially \$10,000 was budgeted, but the scope has been increased raising the cost by \$2,000. There is enough money (approx. \$2,700) in the account to cover the cost.

Mr. Lynskey made a motion to approve the \$2,000 from the EDC budget to cover the additional costs to complete the analysis. Ms. Briggs seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

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Turnpike Autowreckers Brownfields Grant – RFQ

Ms. Parulis is working on the RFQ for an Environmental Engineering firm to conduct the grant project. Once a consultant is selected, they can be used for other projects down the line. The RFQ must be approved by the state. She hopes to have it out in the next couple of weeks. A little committee will be needed for interviews, but that can be decided at a later date.

Mr. Crawford stated that there is a vacancy for an alternate on the EDC. Mr. Diamond will seek a nomination for the position from the selectman.

Adjournment

Mr. Lynskey made a motion to adjourn the EDC meeting at 8:24 PM. The motion was seconded by Ms. Briggs and unanimously approved.

TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE:

Call to Order

Ms. Ozols called the meeting of the Town Center Revitalization Committee to order at 8:24 PM. **Ms. Rie made a motion to add completing the borings in the proposed septic system area to the agenda. Mr. Crawford seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.**

Minutes:

Regular Meeting, April 7, 2016

Mr. Crawford made a motion to approve the minutes of April 7, 2016 regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Briggs and unanimously approved.

Bills:

Recording Secretary.....\$ 105.40

Speaking of Landscapes, LLC.... Adopt-A-Spot.....\$675.00

Speaking of Landscapes, LLC....\$150.00

Mr. Diamond made a motion to approve the bills as presented. Mr. Crawford seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

Ms. Briggs made a motion to authorize the town engineer to conduct soil borings in the area proposed for a community septic system for an amount not to exceed \$1500. The motion was seconded by Mr. Crawford and unanimously approved.

“Quick Hits” Project

Ms. Rie shared a presentation on the website based on improvements to be made to the town green area. There were previously concerns about the portalet location and how it would affect events held on the green. The improvements will showcase the structure of the Historical Society building. Two different options were shown for screening the portalet and the mechanicals could be screened. There would be a fencing enclosure to limit visibility of the portalet. Ms. Rie met with John Riggio and he is ready to move ahead with landscaping. Some of the existing shrubs may be replanted in the berm across from Subway. It is currently too late in the season to transplant the already planted plants, but it will be left to John and his crew to determine what is viable and not to be transplanted at this time. A color-coded planting plan and list was reviewed. Some of the future projects include widening the sidewalk to match the width of the steps and re-locating the Murray bench. Ms. Ozols stated there is an outlet on the side of the building so it will be important to keep a path to that outlet that will not damage the plants. Ms. Rie discussed with John Riggio using metal edging around the plantings. Plants will be supplied through donations, wholesale purchases, and retail. John will take care of the labor aspect, but the timing

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of the work will be determined by the events that will take place on the green. Ms. Waldron is pleased with the plan and feels it will be a great improvement. The Committee supported utilizing a handicap portalet. Ms. Ozols again made an appeal to include a path to the outlet or to put an outlet on another area on the building.

Town Center Parking Project

Ms. Parulis reported that she had met on site with DOT regarding the removal of the bumpouts. They pointed out that a sycamore tree adjacent to the bumpout closest to Rte. 1 will need to be removed since it will likely die from root damage. The pavement in the entire parking area will be cut and re-milled rather than just patched where the bumpouts are removed. Ms. Ozols asked if some type of alternative pavements could be used to show it as a different use than a road. Ms. Ozols felt the biggest concern was that, when no cars are parked there, all that space will encourage cars to go faster than they already do. Narrowing the space visually will slow people down. Ms. Parulis responded that she would look into options. Ms. Parulis stated that the preliminary plan will be available for the Committee to review at the next meeting. There was a question of whether removal of the bumpouts will affect any events or activities that take place on the Green.

Town Center National Historic District Nomination – Public Info Mtg. 5/12/16

Ms. Parulis presented a large-scale map of the proposed boundary. There were some areas around Seaside and Kingfisher that had been questioned. After reviewing with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), these areas have been removed. The area is larger than initially planned and includes Westbrook Inn and Oxford Academy. A letter is being sent out to all property owners in the proposed district. There will be a public information session on Thursday, May 12th. The same information will be given as was shared at the meeting at the end of last summer/early fall. Ms. Parulis is working with SHPO to get the nomination on the June agenda of the Historic Preservation Board, but if there is an issue, it can be postponed until the fall. Presence from the committee at the information session is encouraged to show support, but not required. Ms. Waldron explained that Cathie Doane wanted to know why she was not contacted at the historical society for information to support the nomination. She has found numerous wrong dates associated with buildings. Ms. Parulis agreed that Ms. Doane should have been consulted earlier on. There will be opportunity for these types of corrections after the State Historic Preservation Board meeting but before the nomination is forwarded to the National Park Service.

Adjournment

Ms. Briggs made a motion to adjourn the TCRC meeting at 9:12 PM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Crawford and unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Erica Evans, Recording Secretary