

MINUTES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION VIRTUAL ON-LINE MEETING SOUTH WINDSOR TOWN HALL

REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, April 28, 2021
TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Chairperson Paul Burnham, Linda Jeski, Louise Neary, Scott Kelley, Sue Burnham, Alternate Victor Dorbantu (sat for David Marsh), Bill Jodice, James Murray, Alternate Robert Burns (sat for Edwina Futtner), Alternate Mindy Lewis (sat for Joseph Kennedy)

ABSENT: Edwina Futtner, Joseph Kennedy, Alternate Wayne Kilburn, Vice Chairperson David Marsh

ALSO PRESENT: Asst Town Manager Scott Roberts, Mayor Andrew Paterna

1. **Call Meeting to Order:** Chairperson Paul Burnham called the meeting to order at 7:04p.m.
2. **Roll Call:** The above-mentioned members were introduced.
3. **Special Presentation – Karen Wagner.** Chair, Mass Transit & Highway Advisory Commission-Economic Development and Business Community's Need for Reliable Local Bus Transportation: Karen Wagner introduced herself and talked about a project that they've been working on to provide a trolley that goes around town which would fill in the gaps of the CT Transit schedule and to locations that aren't accessible by CT Transit buses. The group has been trying to gauge the interest of the businesses and community. A survey has gone out in town mailings, via the senior center and Chamber of Commerce, and at town events. Through the survey they discovered that 50% of the people expressed interest in using the trolley and employers stated it would help them to employ people from South Windsor instead of surrounding towns. Employers stated that if employees had access to additional transportation options, it might increase employment longevity and decrease turnover. The group is applying for grants and one question they've encountered is what the EDC thinks of the project. Ms. Wagner asked if there have been any conversations around this topic. Chairperson P. Burnham asked if the trolley would be different from the CT Transit buses and Ms. Wagner indicated the service would be provided by a separate bus company. Ms. Wagner explained that Matt Galligan had been instrumental in developing a plan for supplemental bus service. The service would be available mostly along Sullivan Ave. with some crossover into the CT Transit area. Evergreen Walk is open to considering allowing trolleys to run through their location. Ms. Wagner stated that Senior Center bus drivers could drive the trolleys or that a service could be hired. The trolleys would have a reliable schedule with predictable stops and could be financed in part by traffic to fairs, sponsorships, and advertising by attractions and businesses along the route. Commissioner Neary asked what hours the service would be available and Ms. Wagner replied that it would not run 7 days a week. Commissioner Dorobantu asked if the group is seeking town funding and Ms. Wagner replied that they are looking into grants and that if there would be any expense to the town it would be if there was anything extra that would have to be done or if the Senior Center drivers drove the route. Commissioner Kelley envisions the trolley going through larger roads in neighborhoods and asked what the distance would be to those bus stops and Ms. Wagner stated that it would be a 1/2 mile max. Commissioner Kelley asked about the return ride and Ms. Wagner responded that routes would be circuits and completed within an hour round trip. Commissioner S. Burnham asked about the cost for the service and Ms. Wagner stated that it is estimated at \$343,000 per year and that fares would be determined by the amount of grant funds received. She shared that the town of Enfield has a successful grant funded trolley service. Commissioner Jodice asked if the group is considering a study to see if it can be self-funded so the town doesn't have to contribute and Ms. Wagner replied that they are looking at options for grants and are planning to do a town wide survey for more feedback. Commissioner Dorobantu stated that most senior living centers have scheduled bus trips to shopping areas already and asked who else the group thinks would use the service and Ms. Wagner replied that the senior living center employees themselves would use the service, not residents. Commissioner Jeski

believes that the route going by SWHS could be utilized by students with after school jobs and Ms. Wagner agrees. She shared that students coming from Hartford, who were surveyed, expressed interest in utilizing the service so that they could participate in afterschool activities instead of taking the school bus back home, Chairperson P. Burnham suggested seeing if CT Transit would consider changing some of their routes to accommodate the needs of workers/residents and Ms. Wagner stated that the group has had discussions with CT Transit and learned that they are leaning towards eliminating some of the streets on their current routes due to low ridership and have only made a slight change in the area of Buckland Hills and Evergreen to make it easier for people coming from Hartford to access shopping areas. Chairperson P. Burnham asked Ms. Wagner what, if anything, she needed from the commission and Ms. Wagner replied that she was interested in discovering if this has been a topic of conversation with businesses. Commissioner Burns asked if there would be one trolley or multiple and Ms. Wagner stated that there would be 2 trolleys. Commissioner Burns responded that with a 1 hour loop, he's not sure there's a market here, since 1 hour is a long time to wait. He also asked what the feedback has been for Enfield. Ms. Wagner replied that Enfield is a different town, but it has been successful for them, and that 1 hour is not that different from CT Transit times. She indicated that the group is still working on the routes, but that it would be unrealistic to offer service every 10 minutes. Commissioner Kelley calculated that the stops would be every ½ hour if there were 2 buses and Ms. Wagner agreed that it's possible. He shared that he has employees that take the bus and that he picks them up at the bus stop so that they don't have to walk the rest of the way to work. Ms. Wagner shared that when meeting with groups to gauge their interest, they take a ride on the trolley to get the full experience. Chairperson P. Burnham suggests creating a map of the routes so that they could be more easily explored with potential riders. Ms. Wagner stated that the group has maps of trial runs, and that she can send them with an explanation of their plans. Commissioner Dorobantu suggests interviewing businesses that have employees that come from out of town.

4. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from Regular Meeting on 3/24/21: A **motion** to approve the minutes with the following corrections was made by Commissioner Burnham and **seconded** by Commissioner Jeski and was **unanimously approved. Motion passed.**

4.(b) should read "Chairman P. Burnham..."

5. Old Business

(a) Mayor TV: Scott Roberts-Absent Commissioner P. Burnham shared that it should launch in May 2021 and that the crew will be finishing up with a few more shots before launch.

(b) Follow-up Discussion on Tax Abatements: Chairperson P. Burnham spoke with Commissioner Murray who believes that commissioners want more information on how abatements work before moving forward with suggesting changes. Chairperson P. Burnham will ask the Assessor's office for a breakdown of each abatement. Commissioner Jeski thought information was going to be put on the town website so that it can be easily found, that it would provide transparency, and help to create a more uniform distribution of abatements. Commissioner Jeski stated that with Carla's Pasta going through bankruptcy now, she is concerned that companies are not complying with OSHA and it doesn't sit well with her. Chairperson P. Burnham can talk with Mr. Maniscalco next month about this. He shared that Tribe 19 bought Carla's Pasta, after they went through Chapter 11, and wonders how this affects a tax abatement. Commissioner Jeski asked if a company owes back taxes, if the abatement is no longer valid, and Mayor Paterna responded that a lien would be put on a property when back taxes are owed. Commissioner S. Burnham asked if a company still owes what has been given in an abatement if there is a breach of contract and Mayor Paterna replied that once they breach the agreement, they owe all the taxes back to day one. Mayor Paterna suggested that information on

tax abatements can be included on the EDC section of the website and reminded commissioners that the town must follow state guidelines when issuing abatements. Chairperson P. Burnham shared that the town is working with a new vendor for the EDC website and that Mr. Roberts will have a sample for them at the next meeting.

6. Committee Report(s): None

7. New Business: Commissioner Jeski asked if there has been any discussion about holding meetings in person again and Chairperson P. Burnham shared that on May 19, town hall will be open and that the commission could have in-person meetings held in council chambers. Mayor Paterna stated that guests would enter via the main lobby and be asked questions, have their temp taken, and then admitted to the meeting. Everyone would be required to wear a mask, be screened, and have their temp taken. Chairperson P. Burnham asked for consensus of members in attendance to gauge their interest to hold in-person meetings and all in attendance expressed interest. Chairperson P. Burnham stated that in-person meetings will require more staffing to screen guest attendees.

8. Economic Development Opportunities/Updates

- (a) Matthew Galligan, Economic Development Consultant: Absent
- (b) Scott Roberts, Assistant Town Manager: Absent
- (c) Michael Maniscalco, Town Manager: Absent
- (d) Paul Burnham, Chairperson: Chairperson P. Burnham took some time to watch trains going into Home Depot and saw how they blocked the intersection 5 or 6 times within a 45 minute period. Mayor Paterna stated that there are plans to redo many of the railroad crossings and that the group gathered also observing this could have been inspecting the crossing but that he has not heard of any complaints about the intersection. Chairperson P. Burnham stated it occurs mostly between 11am-1pm along Chapel Road and suggests posting a sign. Commissioner Lewis stated that lots of trucks travel along Chapel Road but that the delays from trains hasn't deterred them. Commissioner Dorobantu has gotten stuck at noon. Chairperson P. Burnham suggests implementing manual track switching and Commissioner Dorobantu suggests that a switch can be moved so that it is done before the train crosses over Chapel Road.
Chairperson P. Burnham had a meeting with a businessperson last month looking at the All-Phase building who wants to have a retail showroom for books. They are opening one in Somers and he is working with the building owner now.
The furniture store is closing so there will be 25,000 sq ft of space available with warehouse space in the rear.

9. General Discussion: Mayor Paterna stated that vacant buildings are an issue that the town has been struggling with and suggested that EDC could look at offering tax abatements to repurpose these buildings.

Chairperson P. Burnham shared the following updates:

- Costco has broken ground
- Harbor Chase received certificate of occupancy
- Aldi's and Chase Bank are open
- Windsor Federal has foundation
- Valvoline has begun site work
- REESG New Co. zone change-continued to May meeting
- Daycare approved for old Bank of America building

Mayor Paterna thanked the commission for its letter of support regarding the Geissler's redevelopment project.

10. Executive Session: None

11. Adjournment: A **motion** to adjourn at 8:27pm was made by Commissioner Jeski and **seconded** by Commissioner Neary and was ***unanimously approved. Motion passed.***

Next meeting is to be determined.

**Respectfully submitted,
Catherine Potter
Clerk**