

Town of Fairfield

Office of Community & Economic Development Minutes of Economic Development Commission Meeting

March 4, 2021

The Economic Development Commission of the Town of Fairfield held a meeting via teleconference on Thursday, March 4, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kevin Lesko; Don Peterson; Steve Rosato; Alethe Fatherley; John Slavin; David Fogel

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Mark Barnhart, Director of Community and Economic Development; Jim Wendt, Planning Director; Emmeline Harrigan, Assistant Planning Director; Beverly Balaz, Fairfield Chamber of Commerce

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 8:34 a.m.

Minutes

Mr. Risoto moved the approval of the February 4, 2021 minutes. Ms. Fatherly seconded the motion. The minutes of February 4, 2021 were approved unanimously.

Update on the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) for Fairfield

Mr. Wendt commented upon the adoption of the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study conducted in 2019 that examined market potential and development opportunities around the two primary transit stations. Mr. Wendt noted that the study determined that multifamily projects and office uses yielded roughly the same net tax benefit. The study concluded that demand for new office space was limited, and projected that the downtown area would add 10,000 to 20,000 square feet over a 10-year period, but that Fairfield Metro Center could accommodate more. Mr. Wendt noted that the study concluded that demand for dining and retail uses in the downtown area would remain strong.

Mr. Wendt reviewed the purpose of the Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD), which sets goals and priorities for the town, as well as identifies land use policies: needs and priorities. The TPZ Commission then uses the POCD as a guide to direct future development. Through a series of workshops open to the public, three 'needs' were

identified that require further study: 1) conservation (open space and recreational uses); 2) economic development and housing needs; 3) infrastructure improvement. Mr. Wendt said residents wanted to develop new sources of income for the town BUT wanted to stop 'overdevelopment.'

The challenge for the town is to find a balance between these conflicting goals. Feedback from the Economic Development showed these were interests of the public: streetscape improvement (particularly in the downtown to Southport Post Road area); upgrades in the appearance of commercial area; acquiring a hotel; rooftop bar/dining location. More development in the train station areas was acceptable. A public-private partnership might be the answer to further development of the main station's parking lot. Other possibilities involve providing access to Black Rock Turnpike stores from the rear and developing new, smaller commercial areas, i.e. near SHU and in Greenfield Hill center.

In the area of housing, Mr. Wendt cited the adoption of new regulations for Accessory Dwelling Units by the TPZ Commission. The regulatory change was facilitated by the work of the Affordable Housing Committee and Fairfield Senior Advocates, among others.

Future areas of consideration by the TPZ Commission include examination of parking requirements in commercial areas and reducing development in flood areas. Ms. Harrigan spoke of the need to educate the public on the question of available land for commercial development, as less than 5% of Fairfield is zoned for commercial use.

MetroCog Survey

Mr. Barnhart referenced efforts to prepare a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. Mr. Barnhart noted that as part of this effort, MetroCOG was conducting a survey. He asked commissioners to participate in the survey and to share and ask others to do so as well. This will help participating towns establish priorities and apply for grants to improve infrastructure. The survey may be found on the EDC web site.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Goethner

