

## *Town of Fairfield*

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

November 5, 2020

The Economic Development Commission of the Town of Fairfield held a meeting via teleconference on Thursday, November 5, 2020 at 8:30 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kevin Lesko; Don Peterson; Steve Rosato; John Slavin; Alethe Fatherley; Rishi Narang

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Greg Minsky

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mark Barnhart, Director of Community and Economic Development

**CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m.

#### **Minutes of October 8, 2020 Meeting**

Mr. Peterson moved the approval of the October 8 2020 minutes. Ms. Fatherley seconded the motion. The minutes of October 8, 2020 were approved unanimously.

#### **Update on COVID-19: Response and Reopening Plan**

Mr. Barnhart said that due to a surge in Covid19 cases in the state, Governor Lamont instituted a roll back to phase 2.1 of the emergency plan. This primarily affects restaurants and entertainment venues and is of concern to these businesses. Town officials have expressed concern to the State about the impact of a 10PM curfew on restaurants.

Mr. Barnhart said the state has instituted a small business grant program with a maximum amount of \$5,000 per qualified business available. The Town has had a similar program, utilizing supplemental Community Development Block Grant funds. Mr. Barnhart reported that the Town has dispersed \$205,000 to date under its program and has roughly \$45,000 left in its fund.

#### **Stratfield Center & Southport Pedestrian Improvement Projects**

Public hearings have been held for both these projects. Participation was strong for the Stratfield Center meeting and feedback was generally positive. There were requests for more accommodations for bike users, which the design team will look into. The Stratfield

Village Association is partnering with the Town on this project, and is responsible for raising some of the funding. The Southport hearing did not draw as many attendees. Several participants expressed concern about the proposed plan's impact to parking and neighboring businesses. Mr. Barnhart reported that he and Mr. Hurley will be meeting with the owner of the Total Look Salon to discuss her concerns regarding parking. Construction on both projects is expected to begin by the middle of 2021.

### **Buy Local Community Gift Card Program**

Mr. Barnhart and Ms. Balaz reported on the Fairfield Buy Local Community Gift Card Program. So far, 60 businesses have enrolled in the program. Fairfield University will promote the sale of the e-gift cards through their newsletter. SHU has also indicated a willingness to participate. The program will benefit local businesses and provide the Chamber and the town with helpful statistics. All major businesses in town have been informed of the cards and Staples is providing promotional posters.

### **Update on Key Development Sites**

Mr. Barnhart said that commercial construction activity is down by 87% compared to 2019. The commercial vacancy rate is also increasing. In 2021, site work is expected to begin on 185 Thorpe Street and the Crossings at Fairfield (Metro Center). Most current activity is in the residential sector.

Mr. Lesko asked about progress on the Community Theater. Mr. Barnhart said the development continues to move ahead, and is scheduled to be completed early next year. Mr. Barnhart reported that in spite of the pandemic, several new businesses have recently opened.

### **Other Business**

Mr. Barnhart said his department is working with the Fairfield Chamber to promote Small Business Saturday and the Annual Holiday Stroll.

The Connecticut Economic Development Association will hold its Annual Meeting virtually on November 10<sup>th</sup>. Governor Lamont will be the featured speaker. Mr. Barnhart encouraged all to attend.

Mr. Barnhart said the town had received a grant from UI to be used toward encouraging business development.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 3, 2020 at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Goethner