

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Minutes of the Meeting of
January 30, 2008

PRESENT

Members: Chairman Robert Kapusta, Kathy Alagno, John DePalma,
Robert Gregory, Tessa Marquis, Cyrus Settineri, Peter Spalthoff,
David Sulkis

Guest: Mayor James Richetelli, Jr.

Press: Jim Tinley - NH Register, Frank Juliano – CT Post

I. Call to Order

Chairman Kapusta called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

III. Election of Chairman

Election of Officers – Robert Kapusta was nominated to serve as Chairman for 2008. Since there were no other nominations, a motion was made and seconded to have the secretary cast one ballot for Mr. Kapusta. Passed Unanimously. John DePalma was nominated as Vice Chairman. Since there were no other nominations, a motion was made and seconded to have the secretary cast one ballot for Mr. DePalma. Passed Unanimously.

Chairman Kapusta continued by welcoming the newest member to the Economic Development Commission, Tessa Marquis.

II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes of November 28, 2007 as distributed.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

IV. Standing Reports

A. Milford Chamber of Commerce – No Report.

B. Milford Progress, Inc. – Mr. DePalma stated that MPI met on January 29, 2008 at noon. The first report was by Mr. Gregory who had a few announcements about the proposal of a new power plant by the transfer station. Schick received an approval to expand their facility and they are coming out with a new product and when that is approved they will be expanding the facility. Lowe's is opening soon. The largest segment of

the meeting consisted of the signage studies. Karl Smith, Jr. proceeded to go over all of the material. The study was delivered to Mr. Sulkis in December and also a copy was sent to Marilyn Lipton the City Attorney. Ms. Lipton made her comments to the legality of the report submitted and Mr. Smith is going over all suggestions to resubmit the report to conform with the legal issues. A committee from MPI may be meeting with Jim Amann to mirror the efforts by the Devon Revitalization Program for MPI's signage study. A discussion continued on the signage efforts.

C. Downtown Milford Business Association – No Report.

D. Real Estate Trends & Developments – Mr. Spalthoff commented that Milford continues to be ahead of the game and ahead of 2007 results. The market is steady, the community is still thriving and selling, and people still want to reside in Milford.

E. Building Permit Task Force – Mr. Settineri stated that a year ago he was a new member of the Committee and he took it upon himself to investigate the Building Department because they were the target of numerous complaints. The investigation would determine whether there was indeed a problem or if in fact the department was an unfortunate target of negative rumors of unfounded and incorrect remarks. After an initial meeting with Tom Raucci, during which Mr. Settineri was encouraged, a newspaper article reported his findings as skeptical rather than positive. Mr. Settineri said that from that day forward Mr. Raucci never responded to Mr. Settineri's efforts to communicate even when John O'Connell and the Mayor intervened. Mr. O'Connell went so far as to secure a tape of the EDC meeting and to deliver it to Tom Raucci in an effort to verify that Mr. Settineri's comments were positive. Mr. Raucci never responded to three additional phone requests to meet.

Mr. Settineri continued by saying that Chris Lau from the State of CT admitted that Milford receives an inordinate amount of complaints regarding the Building Department. The overwhelming consensus is that the department is dysfunctional. Various attempts by Mayor Richetelli to improve the department have had marginal success. Every positive story about new policies and practices there are three or four tales of woe.

Mr. Settineri turned the meeting over to Mayor Richetelli. The Mayor thanked all of the members of the EDC for their interest in this matter and making the City the best that it can be. In particular the Mayor thanked Cyrus for all of his work and efforts in this situation. The Mayor continued by saying that there is no question that the Building Department is one of the busiest departments of the City, if not the busiest. Chris Lau spent the day with Tom Raucci in December and the day evaluating the department as a whole and then spoke with the Mayor and John O'Connell. From the beginning Mr. Raucci has brought to the Mayor's attention that they need to increase the number of employees.

The Mayor has added employees in the department more so than in any other department and stated that it was needed. To that end, the Mayor added an additional building official and they upgraded a part-time clerk to a full-time clerk. The Board of Aldermen and the Board of Finance agreed to add another position to the department. Over the course of the past three years, they have made every attempt to fill those positions as quickly as possible.

The Mayor continued by saying filling these positions is not the easiest task in the world. One of the reasons why is that there is a Statewide systemic shortage of qualified building officials. There is a course that the State runs each year and about 30 individuals graduate from that course. They get eaten up very quickly because there are many more retirements than there are new people coming into the department. Due to personal reasons the two people that they did find for the first position did not work out but they did finally fill that position. So currently there is one Chief Building Official and four Building Officials in the department. They have funded one more person for the department. They have not found a qualified person going into a third round of interviews.

The Mayor continued by saying that they are looking at innovative ways to attract a person to come to Milford. They are looking at the possibility of going to the people that are currently in that course and asking them to commit to coming to Milford and working in Milford prior to them graduating. The Mayor needs to see if this is legal and then they would have to set up ground rules and guidelines that the candidate would have to agree to and would have to give the City a minimum amount of years that they agree to stay on in Milford. This way insuring that when the class is over the City has locked up one of those people.

The Mayor stated that he continues to meet on a weekly basis with Tom Raucci and they talk about the possibilities of greater efficiencies, greater customer service and getting better at what the department does. Whenever asked, he meets with people that have concerns with the timeliness, etc. They put some measures into place last summer and those have greatly helped particularly the lines. There is a dedicated line for mechanical people and they have also increased the hours that these people can come in. In addition, Tom agreed for plan review that people could drop off their plans and it wouldn't be done at the counter and then the permits can be mailed to them at a later date.

Mayor Richetelli informed the Committee that Chris Lau had come up with some observations of the Building Department. Mr. Lau has been asked to evaluate departments all over the State for many years. He did report to the Mayor that from the State reports that are required, Milford is a high volume, one of the highest in the State, for permit requests and permits that are given out. He did state that he has heard complaints from people in Milford and most of the complaints were timeliness. He

did not feel that there were any questions of integrity or any kinds of corruption in the department. The Mayor also stated that everyone he has talked to agrees that under Tom Raucci's leadership the department is honest as can be and follows the rules by the book. There is room for greater efficiencies and better customer service and that is the bottom line. The department is also striving for more technology so that people can do more on line. The department would be able to interconnect with other land use departments in the City to improve efficiency. The Mayor stated that he has asked CCM (Connecticut Conference of Municipalities) to hold one of their near future training sessions in Milford City Hall and all of the departments that provide service to the public will be asked to attend.

The Mayor continued by saying that he would be naming a commission. He will be discussing it with the leaders of the Board of Aldermen and the City Attorney to see what the parameters of the commission will be. Their goal, in the broadest sense, will be to improve the efficiency, customer service and continued improvement within the department. Chris Lau also stated that Milford's permit fees are about average. The Mayor stated that right now Milford is enjoying an edge in economic development throughout the State. We are one of the most desirable communities in the State for people to come to and bring their businesses to and to live here.

Mayor Richetelli met with the upper management staff at Schick about four months ago and they told him that there was a possibility that they could be bringing a new product line to Milford. At Schick they are not only competing against the global marketplace they are also competing against their own plants within the department. They are competing against South America, Asia and Europe. In order to be competitive amongst their own company, they needed to remove any impediments that they would have here in Milford. The Mayor thanked all of the City departments for expediting the process. This was so important to do this as quickly as possible to give Schick every advantage. This will bring 100 new jobs and probably solidifying Schick's existence here in Milford for at least another decade. Manufacturing is like Mom and Apple Pie – Americana. Mr. Gregory is working on seeing what kind of Economic Development dollars we can get from the State for this project. The Mayor thanked the EDC for its efforts in promoting Milford. The Mayor believes everyone will be pleasantly surprised at the increase in the Grand List. This will go far in offsetting taxes.

The Mayor stated that there are four projects that are going to add to the Grand List in the future. One project is the 345 KV lines, fuel cell technology that is being proposed by the transfer station will add in the 10's of millions of dollars to the Grand List. The Iroquois gas pipeline compressor station which is proposed which will have no impact on environment and noise and NRG, owns the Devon power station, has teamed up with U.I. and they will actually be proposing for new

state-of-the-art newest technology electric generators which will be very good for our economy and will actually improve the emissions and the environmental impact because they will be taking off line two of the oldest generators which were fuel burning. These will be natural gas burning and have the latest technology as far as air pollution standards.

The Mayor stated that Lowe's will be opening next week with a hotel that is going to be there. There are two new hotels that are planned on Plains Road with a conference center and Pilgrim furniture, which is in the old Kurt Volk building, and many others that are on the drawing board. The Mayor stated that they are working on growing the grand list so that he can offset taxes and that is what economic development is all about. Mr. Settineri thanked the Mayor for coming to the meeting.

Chairman Kapusta asked the Mayor to expedite the meeting and asked him simply to go over the items that were left and discuss those items that he thought were relevant. The Mayor agreed and asked Mr. Gregory to help him out with certain other details.

- V. Devon, Downtown & General Economic Activity** – The Mayor stated that Devon continues to meet each month. Two significant things to report are the money from the State is in place and they will begin construction in the spring on the Bridgeport Avenue portion of Phase III, which are the streetscape improvements. Bid specifications are being drawn up and then they will be going out to bid.

The Devon drainage study that they commissioned last year reported that there is a considerable flooding issue in the center of Devon on Naugatuck Avenue extending to St. Ann's Church. The main problem is a capacity issue. The size of the pipes that were put in 40 and 50 years ago don't have the capacity to carry the amount of water that they are being required to carry. Especially when you have high tides and full moons when the water actually backs up into the pipes at times it can create a flooding issue. The general idea is to make the capacity of the pipes bigger and this will require digging up the old pipes and putting in bigger pipes.

There were two scenarios and both of them put the State's responsibility and the City's responsibility separately because Bridgeport Avenue is a State road. The pipes that are under Bridgeport Avenue are the State's problem and the pipes that are under Naugatuck Avenue are the City's problem. This is approximately a \$3 million project. As far as funding goes the City's portion is about \$2 million and the State's portion is \$1 million. The Board of Aldermen has already authorized \$800,000. In addition, the Mayor has been investigating with the council of governments for the Federal and State highway dollars. The Mayor stated that they have on account two years worth of funding which amounts to \$1.2 million dollars. So between the COG's \$1.2 million and the \$800,000, which they have already appropriated, the City has it's \$2 million in place. They are

currently waiting to hear from the State as to how or if they will fund their portion of the project.

VI. Items & Matters of Continuing Interest

- A. Devon Revitalization Program – The Mayor stated that planning for Phase III for the streetscape along Bridgeport Avenue is ongoing and that it will go out to bid some time this winter with construction to start in the spring.
- B. Walnut Beach Redevelopment – The Mayor stated that they have the paperwork started for the \$1 million grant, which Speaker Amann secured. They have been waiting a number of years for these dollars to come in. The purpose is to enhance the art's community concept of Walnut Beach. They will also use a portion of the money for streetscape, sidewalk and roadway improvements. The vast portion of this money will be used for the Stowe Farm. They have been working with Stowe Farm Task Force as well as the Milford Fine Art's Council.
- C. Correspondence – As noted.
- D. Proposed Courthouse Expansion/Milford Post Office/Downtown Parking Structure – Mayor Richetelli continued saying that they met with the new administrative judge, Judge Quinn.
- E. Eisenhower Park – No Report.
- F. Welcome Letter to New Businesses – Mr. Spalthoff pointed out that Mr. Gregory was going to put something together and get it sent out and then report to the Commission on a monthly basis of whom he had sent the package out to. Mr. Gregory stated that he has not gotten to this project quite yet.
- G. Status of Signage Regulations – Wayfinding Signs – The Mayor stated that this item was already discussed.
- H. Available Business Sites – Mr. Gregory stated that the CERC listing is in the package. The listing contains all of the commercial sites that are available that are listed on CERC. Sometimes you will find private property owners that have a site for sale that they don't go through a commercial broker. The site is accessible by going directly to CERC or if you go to the Milford site click on Community Development then you can find access to just the Milford properties.

- VII. Old Business** – Mr. Spalthoff was looking for feedback on what is happening with the OTB. The mayor reported that OTB has found a place. It is up to the Aldermen if it is going to be accepted. They worked very closely with them and put them in touch with a number of people where they thought this could be acceptable and they worked with the landowner. The location

was fine but the building is too small so it is going to require an addition and will also require additional parking spaces. It is the old Saber Electric property on Roses Mill Road, close to the Post Road and accessible to I-95. The Mayor is hopeful that the Board approves it because it means \$65,000 or more to the City. It is 1.6% of their bets. The last full year of operation in Milford was \$65,000.

VIII. New Business – Tessa Marquis noted quoting Mr. Gregory about a panel that is held every five years having to do with the Sikorsky Airport in Stratford. They asked why no one from Milford was represented and Mr. Gregory quite simply stated that he hadn't been asked. Ms. Marquis wondered if the commission should be attempting to put some representation on to that Committee. The Mayor stated that it certainly would not hurt for Milford to have representation on the Committee. The FAA requires this kind of study before they do anything. Ms. Alagno stated that they are trying to expand the safety zone and that means they want to expand the airport.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Holden