

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Minutes of the Meeting of
February 27, 2008

PRESENT

Members: Chairman Robert Kapusta, Vice-Chairman John DePalma,
Tessa Marquis, Peter Spalthoff, Bob Stanton, David Sulkis

Guest: Bruce Alessie – Special Projects Coordinator EDC – Town of Stratford
Danielle Hawthorne – Chairwoman of EDC – Town of Stratford

Press: Frank Juliano – CT Post, Brian McCready – New Haven Register

I. Call to Order

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

II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes of January 30, 2008 as distributed.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

III. Standing Reports

A. Milford Chamber of Commerce – No Report

B. Milford Progress, Inc. – Mr. DePalma stated that MPI met on February 19, 2008 at noon. The first item on the agenda has been and continues to be the signage. MPI reviewed the report with Karl Smith. They continued by discussing an issue of non-compliance and MPI is waiting for the results. There seems to be an issue with the City Attorney that they cannot find someone to do non-compliance work. Lynda Smith is the Chairwoman of the Committee and her report is that they are trying to receive some monies from the State to fund some of the costs of improving downtown as to new benches, garbage cans and putting flowers around.

Milford Pride has Adopt-A-Spots that are planted and maintained by businesses, individuals or service organizations. They have twelve locations and some of them are working out very well and some are not consistent and they look shabby. MPI is considering hiring a professional landscaper.

As far as the business report, John Bergen, from GJ Smith Realtors, said that Rich Conine is trying to sell Daniel Street building for \$1.3M and with the nightclub it would sell for \$1.7M.

The plan of developing and beautifying downtown they are going in with the next phase of the extensive report by Dean Alan Platus of Yale School of Design.

A discussion continued regarding MPI responsibilities. Mr. Spalthoff discussed the increase in parking fines for downtown Milford.

- C. Downtown Milford Business Association – Tessa Marquis reported that DMBA has completed their entire calendar for next year. There will be 5 or 6 movies on the green. There will be a farmer's market on a number of Saturday's through the fall. There was a discussion of a downtown business and retailer's map, which DMBA would do in concert with the Greater New Haven Convention and Visitor's Bureau. They have a beautiful one for downtown New Haven and they want to do one for Milford at a reasonable cost and that was approved. DMBA also had a report from Lynda Smith Tellier about the signage study but still no report that anyone could look at so that was tabled. They are preparing also for the Pirate Festival and they will have a Pirate Dress Ball to have funding for a charity. In addition, they are going to be looking at local charities for the Open Doors of Milford art program in the summer.
- D. Real Estate Trends & Developments – Mr. Spalthoff commented that there was an article in the CT Post regarding the housing crisis and he does admit that there is a problem with housing. An awful lot of people from the State and Federal levels are doing many things about the housing crisis. There will be a study and a myriad of programs to come out to help the people that are really hurting. Mr. Spalthoff continued by commenting that Milford is number 4 out of 20 towns locally. Milford year-to-date has 166 pre-foreclosures that is an inordinate amount considering Milford only had 50 a year ago. But yet if you follow that through and look at the Commercial Record Milford is still selling homes. The average sales price on the homes has dropped from \$335,000 to \$330,000, which is so minimal and we are still selling waterfront property. There is one under contract for \$1.2M on the water. Mr. Spalthoff said he is a person who has the glass half full. He believes this issue is turning around. He continued by saying that Milford is still holding its own as far as sales.
- E. Building Permit Task Force – No Report

IV. Devon, Downtown & General Economic Activity – No Report but the Economic Development Activity for February 2008 was included in the package per Bob Gregory.

V. Items & Matters of Continuing Interest

- A. Devon Revitalization Program – No Report
- B. Walnut Beach Redevelopment – No Report
- C. Correspondence – None
- D. Proposed Courthouse Expansion/Milford Post Office/Downtown Parking Structure – No Report
- E. Eisenhower Park – Mr. Stanton apologized because he has been out of town for extensive periods of time for personal business for the last couple of months and he has no report.
- F. Welcome Letter to New Businesses – Mr. Spalthoff pointed out that he did not have it with him but he will submit a proposed thank you and welcome letter to go out to the new business people that are moving into the City that he will send to Chairman Kapusta and will bring it to the next meeting. Mr. Spalthoff said he hopes to sit down with Mr. Gregory before the next meeting to see what kind of package to put together.
- G. Status of Signage Regulations – Wayfinding Signs – Mr. DePalma discussed earlier in this report.
- H. Available Business Sites – No Report but the CERC SiteFinder listing was included in the package.

VI. Old Business – Tessa Marquis asked about representation on the Sikorsky airport development committee. Chairman Kapusta stated that two representatives of Stratford were here and will comment on this situation when they give their presentation.

VII. New Business – Chairman Kapusta introduced Mr. Bruce Alessie, Special Projects Coordinator for the Economic Department in Stratford and Ms. Danielle Hawthorne, Chairwoman of the Economic Department in Stratford.

Mr. Alessie stated that it seems for years that the Housatonic River has been a river of divide where the two communities have not had dialogue. He hopes that this meeting is a beginning of a continuing dialogue between Stratford and Milford. It was not too many years ago that Diane Toolin, the former Director of Economic Development, and Mr. Alessie met with Mr. Gregory soliciting Milford to join Stratford with the City of West Haven as part of an Economic Development corridor and at that point in time that would derive benefits under the creation of the corridor similar to that of an enterprise zone. At that time, Mayor Lisman was adamant that he was not about to give tax breaks to businesses to locate in Stratford. The criteria

was not met and they needed three demographic similar towns along I-95 to be eligible for that program and that did not happen.

Mr. Alessie continued by saying that he hoped that today was a beginning of a new positive dialogue between the two communities and the thrust in economic development today is regionalization and promoting our key industries and our competitive advantages. Mr. Alessie quoted an article that was in the New England Business Journal. The article said that we need to include regional efforts aimed at technology transfer. The interaction of experienced entrepreneurs, intraregional and interregional commuter transportation links, retention of our young talent, graduate students, educated immigrants as well as simply increasing the flow of Federal grants and research investments and that should be the charge of the committees.

Mr. Alessie stated, to coin a phrase from Penn State, "We Are Stratford, offering more from forest to shore". Through the years Stratford was a defense-oriented community and depended solely upon Avco Lycoming, Textron Lycoming, Allied Signal and Sikorsky Aircraft. In 1984 with the closings, Stratford was at the crossroads of its economic life. They sustained by changing into a more diversified business community with small manufacturing, warehousing and the retail marketplace.

Some 10 years ago Mr. Alessie was the Chairman of the Economic Development Commission and at that time Stratford was perceived as being a non-business friendly community such as difficulty to get permits and the process development in the Town. They were always under the political banners that Stratford utilized economic development as the key to reducing taxes. In Stratford \$4M of cash through the tax office, deposited, cleared is \$1M and this is the representative tax value of Sikorsky Aircraft. Stratford is part of the same problems that Milford and other towns have dealing with the programs that are not funded or mandated programs that come from Federal government and the State government. Unless the State deals with the regressive tax system that we have in the State of Connecticut we will continue to suffer.

Mr. Alessie said that they created a round table discussion group, which included P & Z, Health Department, Fire Marshall and all the boards and commissions that were going to deal with business development. They sat all these departments around the table and discussed the problems that they were hearing from the business community on the process of moving forward in development. They came as a positive team and developed the fast track which meant Zoning took on free zoning hearings and met with potential developers to listen to what their development plans were and what their problems were and try to iron them out prior to the application going forward. In 2004 they reached another crossroad. They changed the form of government from a Town Manager to a Mayor. All of the department heads had problems adjusting to this because they were no longer

independent agencies operating they were in a political arena to an agenda of a Mayor.

The position of Director was eliminated by the budget. The department is divided in half. The community side has a grants administrator that administers the community block grant from approximately \$672,000, which accomplished the community projects and also the housing rehabilitation program. On the other side Mr. Alessie has multi-functional tasks related to economic development. All commissions are appointed by the Mayor and all committees are appointed by the council by charter. The commission has 21 members and has a budget of \$10,000 under the last budget and their staff is three. Their core budget is \$134,000 to accomplish the savior of society.

Mr. Alessie has a network of commercial brokers in Fairfield County and they partner with them. They are the extension in the field as how they market their community. During the course of the year they reward them with a commercial realtors breakfast at the end of April. Stratford currently, the last community in Fairfield County, is the recipient of the business shuffle. This means that the businesses in the lower Fairfield County are moving Stratford's way because they are a more affordable community. They have benefited quite nicely from this fact.

The Chair has created under the Commission because of the size of the Commission sub-committees to deal with specific charges such as development of a new Town brochure. The funding from that comes from the Mayor's office. Another charge is the addressing and analyzation of their website.

The major project that they have ongoing is the Army plant. The notoriety is that the film industry is seriously interested. There are several other industries that are interested in that site. The Shakespeare Theatre Council will be given nine presentations on March 11 for the development of that site.

There is a common issue between the two communities and that is the construction of the Moses Wheeler Bridge. A side issue and maybe a controversial issue that could create more dialogue is the full interchange at Exit 33. The Airport issue has been described in the paper that the Mayor of Stratford and the Mayor of Bridgeport have been in negotiations for the purchase of the airport. Mr. Alessie said as a personal point of view, the Town of Bridgeport will never sell the airport to the Town of Stratford. The technology that they have on sound on engines and speed and the development of the army plant Stratford will see an increase of activity at the airport. He believes the expansion of the runways will not happen. Stratford will hold it up in court. Bridgeport owns the airport and the City of Bridgeport appoints who sits on the airport commission.

Mr. Alessie continued by saying that listening to the Milford reports there are many things that Milford and Stratford have in common. These things in common are the beautification, signage and problems with parking. They invited the Commission to Stratford. A discussion continued regarding common goals and the Sikorsky Airport and its expansion. Mr. Alessie and Ms. Hawthorne are excited to work with the City of Milford in an ongoing bond.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Holden