

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Minutes of the Meeting of
May 23, 2007

PRESENT

Members: Chairman Robert Kapusta, Kathy Alagno, John DePalma,
Robert Gregory, Bob Stanton

Guest: Toni Dolan, Executive Director, Beth El Shelter

Press: Frank Juliano, CT Post

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 April 25, 2007 as distributed.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

III. Standing Reports

- A. Milford Chamber of Commerce – Ms. Alagno stated that the Chamber is in the process of wrapping up the work done on the Chamber Directory and it will be going to press next week. Ms. Alagno stated that for the first time after six months they are still holding at 800 members. The Chamber has almost doubled the number of Business After Hours having two a month. The Chamber is having a dance on June 15 and the proceeds will be going to the maintenance fund to make improvements on the Chamber's building.

Ms. Alagno continued by saying that the Chamber has started a Health and Wellness Committee this year. They will be doing a tabletop at a Business After Hours at the end of May at Milford Hospital. This will hopefully help enhance their networking capabilities and to keep their businesses going and to create new jobs.

Ms. Alagno stated that she met with Michelle Mesek who is the new Executive Director of the Sales and Service Learning Center at Westfield Connecticut Post Mall. The facility hopes to be open in the mall in three months. The learning center recruits, trains, and places individuals in long-term retail and customer service careers. They are going to train more than just retail people. They will be training people who are in customer service in any industry and training will be multi-level.

Ms. Mesek works directly with Workforce Development Center in New Haven and she is going to try to do some work in the Bridgeport area. She hopes to be able to develop companies who will become her clients. The people who go through this training will actually receive accreditation when they have completed the training. After receiving their accreditation there will be ongoing skills that they can learn.

Ms. Alagno spoke with Ms. Mesek on possibly trying to work through the Junior Achievement Program. The program would like to increase their presence. They worked with over 3,000 students last year and they are looking to increase that number and to work with high school students. They are going to be looking toward Corporations for donations to help support the programs. In many cases, the classes will be free. After you complete the classes you go for a certification testing and there will be charges for the testing process (possibly under \$100).

- B. Milford Progress, Inc. – Mr. DePalma stated that there was no meeting. Ms. Alagno added that there is one more focus group that is set up for Thursday night (May 24) on the signage study. Businesses and residents are all invited to attend the meeting. Milford Progress is looking for the people to give input on what they think the signs should look like, how big the signs should be, and what materials it should be made of. The input so far is that people are leaning toward the eclectic look, which means that all the signs should look different not the same.
- C. Downtown Milford Business Association – Ms. Alagno stated that “The Doors of Milford” had their auction and they did very well. They are now gearing up for the Captain Kid Treasure Hunt, which will be taking place June 9 with a rubber duck race. DMBA is trying to get something together for the Friday night before the Oyster Festival.
- D. Real Estate Trends & Developments – No Report
- E. Building Permit Task Force – No Report

IV. Devon, Downtown & General Economic Activity

Mr. Gregory reported the activity in the month of May as follows. Villa Gourmet will open at 9 River Street (formerly Milford Camera Shop). Bistro Basque Restaurant has opened on River Street. Mountain View Development has leased 50,000 square feet to Outland Engineering at the former Bic property. Bastarache Properties has purchased 6,860 square feet for a medical office building at 2080 Bridgeport Avenue. AMSplus has leased 2,500 square feet at 121 West Main Street. Mr. Gregory continued by saying that there is a lot of activity and there have been many emails and correspondence regarding people looking for space. There is continued activity on both commercial and residential sides. Hyatt Place is open. Lowe’s and Hilton Garden are scheduled to open in 2008.

V. Items & Matters of Continuing Interest

- A. Devon Revitalization Program – Mr. Gregory stated that contracts have been signed for design of Phase III, which will consist of streetscape from the bridge as far as it will go with the current grant. The design company believes that they will be able to go to Naugatuck Avenue. The contract for the drainage study has also been signed. The Mayor has put aside funds for the construction once the study has been completed.
- B. Walnut Beach Redevelopment – Mr. Gregory reported that the Beach Shore Village is moving along. They did have some issues with Planning & Zoning but the issues were resolved. A final plan should be unveiled next month for Stowe Farm. The next step would be going out to acquire funding to build the facility. Lazy Lobster has opened after issues that have been settled. Walnut Beach Creamery's grand opening is Thursday.
- C. Correspondence – None
- D. Proposed Courthouse Expansion/Milford Post Office/Downtown Parking Structure – Mr. Kapusta stated that the report finally came in from SLAM. They have filed the report but it has not been made public as of this point. The situation is very complicated. This process involves four different entities and jurisdictions.
- E. Eisenhower Park – Mr. Stanton stated that everything is still status quo. They have broken development into three stages. They are waiting for the commencement of Phase I. The report has been given to the Mayor. There is work being done on the new power lines by U.I.
- F. Reinstatement of Tolls – Mr. DePalma stated that he has spoken with a legislator that has been in office for 18 years and who is quite a force in the legislature. The tolls have not been discussed in quite a while. If they put the tolls in they would lose federal funding. They are concerned with the pollution in the Stratford area. There is a dilemma on what to do. The general consensus, at this point, is that the voting public is against the reinstatement of tolls.

VI. Old Business - None

VII. New Business

- A. Mr. Gregory stated that a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) has been developed by the Regional Growth Partnership and every five years they need to update the process. The importance of this is that there is the potential for funding for various public works projects if you have a CEDS. If you do not have a CEDS, you are not even in the ball game. This is for the fifteen-town region around New Haven that comprises the Regional Growth Partnership and Milford is one of those towns. They

have a traveling road show. They want to explain CEDS in more detail and they would also like additional input. The Mayor suggested that EDC would be a good vehicle to conduct this public hearing in June. Mr. Gregory suggested that they set up a special meeting later on in the day and not at lunchtime. It was decided to set this meeting up for Monday, June 18 at 4 p.m. Mr. Gregory and Ms. Alagno will work on this together. Ms. Alagno recommended that they send out general notices and also it was suggested that they make individual phone calls to people telling them how important this meeting is. They will do about a ten-minute presentation on what CEDS is all about and then seek comments.

B. Guest Speaker – Toni Dolan, Executive Director, Beth El Shelter

Ms. Dolan stated that she is a graduate of Trinity College in Hartford. She has a degree in psychology. In the past, Ms. Dolan was involved in affordable housing through Hartford Planning & Zoning. Then she was tapped for the board of a non-profit organization that was involved in housing for people with disabilities. Ms. Dolan from there was recruited from the board into becoming a staff member. She worked her way up through the ranks to become executive director of that organization. After that she began to do consulting work and she got involved with a transition consultant. She became the interim director at non-profit organizations that were going through the transition process. The organization Ms. Dolan was with before coming to Beth El Shelter was Interfaith Refugee Ministries, which was in New Haven and she was there for about 5-6 months.

Ms. Dolan was approached by CPAC to do the same type of thing in Milford with the expectation that she would be here for another 5-6 months. It was well over a year that Ms. Dolan and the transition consultant worked together as a team and the transition consultant is still working with the board on the government's issues. Last November the board approached Ms. Dolan about the possibility of staying as permanent executive director and she made the decision to stay.

The Beth El Shelter was founded by 16 churches (Combined Parish Action Committee) and because of that there were many representatives of the different churches on the board of directors. Their bi-laws stated that a certain amount of people would come from the churches. Unfortunately, that allowed for a very large board. There were 40 people on the board and as a result they could not most times get a quorum to conduct a meeting.

Ms. Dolan continued by stating that in the beginning Beth El was intended to be a faith-based organization. One of the major things that happened this year was that, although they are recognized as faith-based and a group of Christian churches founded the organization; they are not a religious organization. There are now 21 members on the board. To make the board more defined, the transition consultant met with many of the clergy of the churches that founded Beth El and the general consensus was that they did not need to be on the board.

The majority of Beth El Shelter's budget is from the Department of Social Services. Beth El has a contract with the Department and they pay Beth El on a quarterly basis on a contract for a year. Beth El receives \$171,000 a year broken up into quarterly payments. Other support comes from individuals. The churches are still a real source of support. The City of Milford and the United Way are also contributors. Beth El Shelter provides shelter, food and case management services to the residents. Beth El is in a good location. Beth El is very accessible to the buses, train station and the residents are able to walk to a job from the shelter.

Ms. Dolan stated that Beth El is not an emergency center. They are up to a 90-day program. They receive referrals from different areas. The case managers do an intake (bottom-line basic information). There are two categories: homeless or at the risk of homelessness. Beth El Shelter has a women's dorm, men's dorm and a family dorm.

Ms. Dolan said they look at two things; can they help this person and how. They may send people to an evaluated service at Bridges. The shelter helps these people acquire a job. They make sure these people receive support services because many of them have mental health issues and substance abuse issues. The expectation is that by the time they leave these services they have a job and/or some kind of income. The shelter provides food for residents and the community. Ms. Dolan said that they receive donations and they have a grant food bank through Shop Rite. They can go there and get as much food as they need.

The soup kitchen is next door to Beth El separated by doors because they do not want soup kitchen clients wandering through the shelter. The soup kitchen is open to the public and it serves lunch five days a week. All of the residents out there can have at least one hot and nutritious meal a day. Many of the churches will come in during the evenings and provide dinner.

The biggest issue is affordable housing for their clients. The little housing that exists is occupied because people cannot afford to live in this state. This was one of the driving forces in Beth El to collaborate with Mutual Housing Association of South Central Connecticut, Inc. to develop the original site of the shelter across the street. The site will have one building with five units in it. It will have two one-bedroom units, two two-bedroom units and one three-bedroom unit. It will be a combination of singles and families. The expectation is that the residents at the shelter will be on a point system and they will have to meet certain base-line criteria. They will receive extra points for being residents of the shelter and also if you live and/or work in Milford you receive extra points.

Ms. Dolan believes they will break ground the 2nd week in July because of the holiday and the way things are going. Beth El Shelter owns the property as of this point, but they will be selling the property to Mutual Housing and they will own and manage it. The shelter will be providing case

management services to the residents. Mutual Housing is a non-profit developer. The residents who move into the shelter cannot be above a certain income. CFHA insures for the length of that mortgage it will remain an affordable housing unit and a supporting housing unit. The shelter will have case management services on site.

The shelter's hope is that when these people are brought back into the community they will not have to return because of the support service piece of the project. The shelter does have nine minor children within the program. They make sure the children are put back into the schools. There is funding for this school program. Ms. Dolan continued by saying that their expectation of these individuals while they are in the shelter is to follow the rules and there is no tolerance for drug or alcohol abuse. These residents are out of the shelter between nine and two every day. They are out looking for jobs. If they come back in any unacceptable condition they are asked to get their things and leave immediately. Good Shepard has also been extremely helpful in putting young children into daycare and the mother or father are then able to get out there and look for a job.

Ms. Dolan stated they are celebrating 25 years this year. There was testimony by a young single woman who was at the shelter. She had a baby at the shelter. She went out and got a job, raised her child and not only has she become a member of the Board of CPAC but she has graduated from college and got married this year. There are success stories. She praised the volunteers who run the soup kitchen. Ms. Dolan extended an invitation to the Commission to come visit or call if they ever had any questions that they needed answered.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.