

**TOWN OF HADDAM
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
COMMUNITY CENTER
7 CANDLEWOOD HILL ROAD, HIGGANUM, CT 06441
WEDNESDAY, 10 JANUARY 2024
UNAPPROVED MINUTES
*Subject to Approval by the Commission***

ATTENDANCE

X	Kate Anderson, Chairman
A	Kristy Benson Amarante
X	Curtis Browne
A	Cortney Emshwiller Swokla
X	Mike Farina
A	Mike Karam
X	Stacey Kinney
X	David Law
X	John Pember
X	Doreen Staskelunas, Secretary
X	Bob McGarry, First Selectman, <i>Ex Officio</i>
X	Bill Warner, AICP, Town Planner
X	Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

1. Call to Order

Ms. Anderson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge was recited.

3. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: Doreen Staskelunas motioned to approve the 10 January 2024 agenda as submitted. David Law second. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Higganum Center Projects Presentation – Bill Warner, Town Planner

Ms. Anderson thanked everyone for attending the meeting/presentation and noted that Mr. Warner had made this presentation to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) on Monday, 8 January 2024, and additional presentations are planned. Although an EDC meeting, the public was invited to participate.

Mr. Warner reported the presentation covers four (4) projects: Community Septic, Multi-Generational Playspace, Development of the Rossi Property, and Relocation of the Town Garage (Public Works).

Mr. Warner showed an aerial photo of HES, Rossi, and Public Works (all projects circled in red). Mr. Warner stated Bob McGarry, First Selectman, had decided to defer the HES property. Mr. McGarry reported this presentation would not be addressing any action with the building; only the grounds. Mr. McGarry stated an architectural firm had been hired and their report outlining what types of facilities would fit within the structure as well as pluses/minuses should be available in approximately a month. Mr. Warner stated the town did request RFPs for the building and received some very exciting proposals that pull it all together into one big project. Mr. Warner stated there is a plan coming within the next month outlining what is proposed to take place with the HES building.

Mr. Warner stated this is the beginning of a long project and a number of meetings will need to be conducted. Mr. Warner stated the town meeting will be the vote to move forward with the projects that will open the door to allow the developer, once a purchase and sales agreement has been signed, to begin the process of getting approvals. Those approvals include: CT DEEP for remediation, CT Dept. of Health (DPH) for well and septic, CTDOT encroachment permits, and locally the Architectural Review Committee (ARC), Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC), and Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z). These approvals are what the developer must obtain at his costs/risks. Mr. Warner stated once the purchase and sales agreement is signed it becomes a private development project for the Rossi property.

Community Septic - Mr. Warner spoke in regard to the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) being clear that Higganum Center needs some type of sewer system to foster more economic development; therefore, a community septic system would allow for new development and reuse of buildings that are underutilized. Mr. Warner stated all four projects are related to economic development.

Using an aerial of the HES property, Mr. Warner stated three areas have been tested and another area is good for a septic system that will probably contribute to the Rossi property rather than use the community septic system space. Mr. Warner also pointed out the 150 foot well radius as opposed to a 75 foot radius as it is a high capacity well for the existing school. The existing septic system was pointed out and noted that the town's engineer has pointed out that the galleys are very far apart and in very good soils so it could be expanded for future use at HES. The playground is also good soils for septic systems.

Mr. Warner provided an update on the community septic system: A-2 survey completed; general agreement with DEEP, DPH, and DOT (that alone took over six months as they had conflicting requirements – DOT wants the town to own the pipes under the road and DPH wants the pipes privately owned); deep hole and groundwater monitoring completed; and currently designing a conveyance system that reaches out into Higganum Center to collect the sewage and pump it up to the site. Mr. Warner stated a full design will be completed by 30 April 2024 – grant deadline.

Mr. Warner pointed out the 16,000 gallon a day system (more than enough needed for Higganum Center). Mr. Warner outlined East Haddam's flow rates and they have 13,000 gallons per day.

Playspace – Mr. Warner reported after the town purchased HES, Park and Rec sent out inspectors to inspect the playground. Once the inspection report was received, the town's insurance company condemned the playground equipment and it was removed. A number of people voiced concern over the loss of the playground and it was apparent that it had to be replaced. The town has received a grant from the State of Connecticut to do so. Mr. Warner reviewed wording with the POCD supporting the venture.

Mr. Warner stated the town hired Fitzgerald and Halliday Studios (FHI), a leading landscape architect firm in Connecticut, to design the playspace and are also working on comprehensive recreation improvements that could occur on the property such as a pump track (BMX bike course), playspace area, pickle ball courts, dog park, skate park, basketball courts, one-third of a mile walking trail around the perimeter, etc. Approaching this in a phased manner.

Updates – \$392,000 in State funding is in place; the survey is completed; public meeting with the FHI, who will present their plans, on Wednesday, 16 January 2024; town meeting, Thursday, 25 January 2024, will establish a line item in the Capital Plan; and if all meeting dates are met, may be able to go out for a formal bid in February and be under construction in April.

Mr. Warner stated the playspace is the easier project (a lot of bang for the buck). Noted there are a lot of parents with young kids who are very, very interested in this project.

Mrs. Staskelunas asked how long it would take for the playground to be usable if construction began in April. Mr. Warner stated the proposal calls for a soft surface, not wood chips, which could delay the project a bit, but believes it will be done by summer.

Rossi - Mr. Warner reported the buildings on the property are in a fairly dilapidated state and Public Works is using much of the property for material processing and equipment storage. Not a very attractive property to have in the town's center. Mr. Warner stated he had spoken to other developers; and even when the lumber yard was active, it was an eyesore and unknown what could happen on the site; therefore, developers were hesitate to go there. This is why Haddam took control of it and to clean it up.

Mr. Warner stated this will be a very complicated and difficult development project and this was made clear at the town meeting to acquire the property. Mr. Warner reviewed the following: 1) Traffic counts are low (6,300 cars per day on Saybrook Road). Will not attract a well-known or national retailer to the center. 2) Population density very low (three mile radius 5,183 people). Chester – 7,928, Deep River – 10,815, and Essex – 9,533 within a three mile radius. Mr. Warner acknowledged that a lot of the density issue has to do with the state forest and the river.

In terms of site issues: 1) \$1.5 million in environmental contamination on the property. 2) Contamination - 100 percent of industrial fill up to 12 feet (took place over 100 years ago). 3) Groundwater - six to eight feet. Mr. Warner stated the Rossies still own 305 Saybrook Road (former JC Products) due to the ground being contaminated with Trichloroethylene (TCE); however, the town entered into a long term lease which allows the town to use the property for whatever it pleases. Mr. Warner noted that the town did not want to enter into the Transfer Act which is a requirement of Environmental Protection. Because of this it complicates what the town would like to do while it waits for the Rossies to clean-up the site. 4) Town Garage operations. Mr. Warner pointed out the piles of materials and the storage area for Public Works noting that this makes it very difficult for a developer. 5) Four existing tenants. Mr. Warner noted that Richie Bather (RWB Equipment) is located in the middle of the site (will need to work with him). 6) Community water system needed. When a well serves more than 20 people it becomes a community system which is regulated by the DPH. 7) Soils are not suitable for a septic system, but there are suitable soils adjacent to the site. 8) Clean up to a residential standard. There is an area that can be used for residential, but it needs to be cleaned up. Mr. Warner stated the grant is only to clean to a commercial/industrial standard; therefore, the developer will have clean to a higher level for the residential area.

Jan Lemond asked if the EPA considers the site a superfund or Brownfields site and will come in and clean it. Mr. Warner stated it is a Brownfields site and EPA does not do clean ups any longer; they give grants to the municipalities to do the clean-up. Mrs. Lemond asked if there was any other type of contamination other than TCE. Mr. Warner stated there is a long list of chemicals.

Mr. Warner reported the town acquired the Rossi site for \$2.5 million understanding the situation and knowing that it would have to deal with the property if there was to be any future in the Center. The \$1.5 million grant for the remediation includes a condition that the town has to have a partnership with a private developer (one has been found). Mr. Warner stated the town advertised statewide on the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) website for developers and only one was interested (Higganum Village LLC – partnership between John Cellino and Wayne Rand). According to Mr. Warner, they are two very experienced developers, no lack of capital, and they like a challenge.

Lou Lemond asked if something went wrong or the developer could not perform for any reason, would the town have to absorb or return the \$1.5 million grant. Mr. Warner stated if the town did not have a developer, the grant would go back to the state.

Mr. Browne asked the time frame on the proposal. Mr. Warner explained the process the town had gone through, that it's only been about one year; however, the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) will have a new commissioner coming on board who would like to close on some of the grants. A letter has been received that the town must close (deadline 31 March 2024) with the state on the financing only. Mr. McGarry stated he received the letter last month (not a lot of lead time).

John Fernandez asked if there was a state requirement to have more than one bidder so the town does not end up like they did with Waterman's (Chatham Lake). Mr. Warner stated no, you only have to

advertise; and if you only get one, you only get one. Mr. Warner stated for a developer it is more a request for proposals rather than a request for qualifications or a construction bid.

Mr. Lemond asked if the sale were to be voted through, because of the deadline aspect, does the town have all its ducks in a row. Mr. Warner stated the town has an agreement with the developer; and if it is approved/passes at the town meeting on Thursday, 25 January 2024, a purchase and sales agreement is already drafted and it can be signed and sent to DECD right away.

Mrs. Lemond asked what the developer plans to put on the site. Mr. Warner stated that's coming up and that the proposal is consistent with the POCD noting the proposal has some housing.

Mr. Warner stated the property is within the Higganum Village District Zone and mixed use is allowed by special permit. Mr. Warner stated the proposal calls 43 - one bedroom residential units of which eight units have to be affordable (reviewed median income level – approximately \$1,800 a month rent). The town has to work with the existing tenants by getting them relocated. The brick office building will be converted into a restaurant with open space. All of this is subject to ARC and P&Z approval. If P&Z should deny the special permit, the applicant can rework their proposal and reapply; but ultimately, the developer can walk away.

Mr. Fernandez asked given the size of this project why would it go up for a vote/approval at a town meeting and not go to referendum. Mr. Warner stated the town's Charter dictates a town meeting. Mr. Fernandez asked if there was no overriding principle to that. Mr. McGarry stated there is a statute which will allow it with enough signatures on a petition to force it to a referendum.

Mr. McGarry stated there are 6,000 registered voters in the town and noted how many people have come out to hear about the project. Mr. McGarry stated there are a number of people who are listening to rumors or believing what they read on Facebook and suggested they come out and vote. Mr. McGarry stated he was hesitant in holding a referendum; but it would open it up for more people to participate.

Mr. Fernandez spoke in regard to what happen with the Scovil/former DOT garage property. Mr. Fernandez stated it is not what he signed on for and he doesn't want to see it happen with the Rossi parcel. Mr. Fernandez stated in his opinion, it did not represent the town well.

Mr. McGarry stated a referendum would cost the town approximately \$10,000, noting there are four elections this year between primaries and state primaries. Mr. McGarry also stated it is getting harder and harder to staff the elections and with a referendum all polling places would have to be open. Mr. Fernandez understood that, but noted that this proposal is millions of dollars. Mr. McGarry stated it is something to consider.

Mr. Warner stated when looking at redevelopment property you need to look at what was historically there – street flow, densely developed – and this has been provided to the developer.

Mr. Warner reviewed the developers' concept – two residential buildings facing HES, a residential building on Saybrook Road for a street wall and preserving the office building. Flex commercial buildings – which could be a yoga studio, electrician, etc., this has been done in East Hampton and they've had a lot of success with it. Toward the back a couple of the existing tenants and shielding the operations from the street and the residents. All designs are up to ARC. Mr. Warner talked about how this would be blended/integrated with HES with an opportunity to access up onto the HES property with all of the recreational improvements and the residential looking out on it.

Mr. Warner reviewed a preliminary architectural drawing. Along Saybrook Road a three story structure, maximum height of 35 feet, the single bedroom with loft looking out onto HES, residential and commercial spaces with individual doors/windows to the back of the parcel, and a restaurant in the office building. Preliminary architectural renderings reviewed looking from 81/154. Lots of landscaping on the plan.

Mrs. Staskelunas asked the location of the entrance to the property. Mr. Warner stated across from the town garage. Mr. Warner stated the entrance between the bridge and the office building would be closed (believes the state would require it).

Mr. Browne asked if the building along Saybrook Road would be multi-use. Mr. Warner stated no, it would be all residential town houses with garages underneath. Mr. Lemond stated the rendering also depicts an entrance onto Saybrook Road. Mr. Warner stated yes, between the office building (north of it) and the residential. Mrs. Lemond asked what the yellow depicted, sidewalks. Mr. Warner stated yes, sidewalks all the way from HES down to the Cove. Mr. Lemond stated he's assuming there must be some kind of shared revenue between the developer and the town. Mr. Lemond asked if the town retains ownership of the whole thing. Mr. Warner stated he will get there.

Jack Calhoun asked if the property line (facing Swan Hill) shown on the drawing was the normal property line or part of the school property. Mr. Warner stated no, the property line is a part of the Rossi parcel.

Mr. Warner reviewed financial considerations: grand list \$644,000 currently and the tax revenue \$21,000. It was not a high income property. In this development proposal, the developer doesn't put up a lot of money up front so the purchase price will be \$250,000. The condition is that the title will not transfer until the developer invests \$5 million into the property. So, effectively raising the grand list \$5 million. The developer estimates the apartments alone will be \$8 million. This will create new tax revenue with the residential units and flex commercial. Mr. Warner stated the new apartments in Tylerville came to \$162,000 per year plus \$54,000 so over \$200,000 per year in new tax revenue. Mr. Warner stated economic development is growing the grand list.

Mrs. Lemond asked if the additional tax revenue would assist in decreasing the taxes for regular residents or will the town keep making more and more money. Mr. Warner stated that would be up to the BOS and Board of Finance (BOF).

A woman, no name given, stated she had heard the developer is the developer of storage units and there are storage units shown in the plan. She asked if it was a false rumor. Mr. Warner stated in the back the proposal shows storage units, but from past experience when apartments are built the residents are looking for storage units. Mr. Warner also stated that storage units are currently not allowed in the Village District, but it all requires approval. The woman asked if there wouldn't be a basement. Mr. Warner stated no, garage. The woman stated there are storage units in Tylerville and up the road in Middletown; and asked if storage units are needed in Higganum Center, as it does not seem to be a good use of the property. Mr. Warner stated that would be up to P&Z.

Raul De Brigard asked what exactly the townspeople would be approving at the town meeting. Mr. Warner stated authorizing the first selectman to enter into a purchase and sale agreement. Mr. De Brigard asked if the uses would be specified in the purchase and sale agreement. Mr. Warner stated no. Mr. De Brigard stated there could be a conversation of what would be liked on the parcel, but would the developer be committed to that. Mr. De Brigard stated he likes what he's seeing tonight, but does not know if he can count on it happening. Mr. Warner stated the developer will be at the public hearing next week and can speak to that. Mr. Warner stated the only real market at this time is multi-family and the developer wants to do that; and it will all come down to how specific P&Z gets and how they approve it. Mr. De Brigard asked if the developer has a deadline for investing the \$5 million. Mr. Warner stated the DECD grant puts a five year limit on it.

Relocation of Town Garage – Mr. Warner stated the POCD is very clear about relocating the town garage outside of the village. The existing town garage sits on a 2.5 acre site, using a 1934 building, and the site is very crowded. Using an aerial photo, Mr. Warner pointed out the building the town used to rent from Rossies starting in 2014; and stated the town has filled it with equipment and over time it kept growing and growing. Mr. Warner stated when he came to work for the town (2018), Public Works was parking/storing equipment and materials; but once the road bond was approved, they started processing more

and more material – millings, concrete, etc., on the Rossi property. This is an indication that the 2.5 acre site is insufficient, the salt storage area is within a flood plain, and they wash the trucks onsite. One issue is that there is no lighting with the Rossi building, an OSHA violation. The town needs a new garage.

The relocation site: Lot 51-1, across from Great Hill sports fields. There is a 27 acre parcel that the town received when they received the Jail and land from the state. There is a deed restrict on the land for municipal purposes only, it cannot be sold or developed. It is zoned R2 residential. Municipal buildings and uses are allowed by special permit.

Mr. Warner used a map showing the transportation routes and stated he had spoken to Chris Corsa, Assistant Director of Public Works about this. It's important to be able to get the trucks around the town during weather and emergency events. Logistically it would work well.

The site appears as if it would work well. Of the 27 acres only seven acres are usable. Extremely steep sloping land. Quarry Hill and Jail Hill Roads, the sports fields, and the Jail were pointed out – from one point all the way down 900 to 1,000 feet down (extremely steep slopes), entirely wooded (not touching that), two pieces - 2.5 acres more favorable topography and the 4.5 acre piece with very favorable topography. In terms of adjacent homes, there are three homes – one home on Jail Hill Road over 300 feet away with a cliff in the back yard and wooded up to the site (46 feet below the proposed site), the second is 520 feet from the site completely wooded (43 feet above the site), and the third is 900 feet away with steep slopes and wetlands. The site is buffered by significant grade differentials, woodlands, and wetlands.

Mrs. Lemond asked the second residence's driveway. Mr. Warner stated Saybrook Road. Mr. Lemond asked where the access for the 7 acres to be developed is proposed. Mr. Warner stated he would show that next.

Mr. Warner stated there is the potential for blasting and drainage improvements and both can be expensive. Mrs. Lemond asked if the blasting would affect any of the travel on Jail Hill Road. Mr. Warner stated it shouldn't, except for possibly when they blast.

Mr. Warner reviewed a rendering of the site generated by NLJA. Mrs. Lemond asked if the trucks would exit across from the ballfields. Mr. Warner stated yes. Mrs. Lemond voiced concern over traffic flow, kids in the area, and the intersection of Jail Hill and Route 154 (site of several accidents; two fatalities). Mrs. Lemond asked if there would be anything done regarding the traffic flow. Mr. Warner stated there would need to be proper sightlines and brush would need to be cut back north of the Jail. Mrs. Lemond suggested a traffic light. Mr. Warner stated Public Works has no more than 12 employees whose hours are 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

For clarification purposes, Mr. McGarry asked the location of the property line with Whit Brookes' house. Mr. Warner pointed it out (purple line at bottom of slide). Mr. McGarry stated the entrance to the ball fields is directly across from Mr. Brookes' house.

A man, name not given, asked if the green line on the map was the driveway going up to the site. Mr. Warner pointed out Jail Hill and the proposed driveway.

Mr. Warner stated he used the Town of Hebron's facility assessment and worked with Public Works to see about current needs. Acquisition costs: none. Site work: \$2 million (blasting and drainage included). Garage, office support, storage building – would get you up to \$7.3 million. All would have to go out to bid. Mr. Warner stated the Capital Plan has \$9.5 million (funding not sitting in the Capital Budget).

Ms. Kinney asked if Public Works would need to be moved before work can be done on Rossi. Mr. Warner stated these projects will be difficult and complicated and it would need to be figured out. The developer also has another rendering with a 12,000 square foot building to accommodate Public Works

on the Rossi site. Mr. Browne asked if it would increase the cost for the developer. Mr. Warner stated the town would have to work with the developer. Mr. McGarry stated it will need to be well choreographed.

Mr. Fernandez asked if there was anything at the old state DOT property, Tylerville, that could be utilized as a layout yard while transferring Public Works out. Mr. McGarry stated the town has other property that could be used for that may work for temporary storage. Mr. Warner stated the developer and his financial people are aware of the situation.

Mr. Warner stated the existing garage would work well as a park noting that in 1874 the area was used as a park; and the 1934 building could be preserved. Mr. Warner talked about connecting to the water, celebrating the history of the town, and this is a place where it could happen. Mr. Warner pointed out how Candlewood Hill Brook and Ponset Brook merge with Bible Rock Brook creating a significant year round flow that goes down into the Cove. Mr. Warner stated Higganum Cove was the start of Higganum Center – in the 1600s the first grist mill was established because of the water flow. This parcel could also be used for parking for the Cove and parking can be controlled (residents only).

Mr. De Brigard stated for years the town has been talking about relocating the town garage and why it hasn't been done is because it is not easy to find a place to put it. Mr. De Brigard applauded Mr. Warner's ability to find a place. Mr. Warner stated there really isn't another good site.

Mrs. Lemond asked if the people bordering the property are aware of the situation. Mr. Warner stated did not know about the Quarry Hill Road families, but the two Brookes families are aware; and notices will be sent out for public hearings.

Mr. Lemond asked if Public Works plows in Haddam Neck. Mr. McGarry stated it is a private contractor; otherwise, the Public Works department does general maintenance in Haddam Neck.

Ms. Anderson asked Mr. Warner why the 2.5 acre parcel was carved out. Mr. Warner spoke about initially moving Public Works to the 2.5 acre site, but NLJA said it could all be done on the 4.5 acres. Ms. Anderson asked if the 2.5 acres would be available for future development (municipal only). Mr. Warner stated yes.

In conclusion, Mr. Warner reviewed why the Rossi proposal should be supported – consistent with the POCD, allowed by the zoning regulations, allowing the developer to take a risk and see if he can make it work, all work subject to ARC and P&Z approvals, almost no local funds needed, protects the four existing tenants who are all residents of Haddam, preserves the historic Cutaway Harrow office building along Saybrook Road, creates a new streetscape along Saybrook Road which calms traffic, sidewalks will be constructed, parking for the Cove, creates 43 new residential units with 20 percent being affordable, and creates up to 8 small commercial store fronts, assess value at \$645,000 to over \$5 million and addresses \$1.5 million liability the town owns. The residential use \$162,000 in taxes. Mr. Warner stated the developer has done a lot of this in East Hampton. Approval will secure the \$1.5 million

Mr. Lemond asked about protecting the existing tenants. Mr. Warner stated the tenants have 10 year leases so the developer would have to honor those leases. From the developer's point of view, as long as they're paying their rent, he'll want them there.

Mrs. Lemond asked if the \$1.5 million would be sufficient to clean the site up. Mr. Warner stated yes, Rossies consultant and the town's consultant came up with probable costs and the town's consultant came up with \$1.5 million (probably high). Mr. McGarry stated there could be an add up if needed.

Mr. Warner reviewed why the relocation of the Town Garage should be supported - long sought after goal, consistent with the POCD, allowed by the current zoning regulations, subject to P&Z review/approval, town owned parcel with municipal use restriction, isolated site, good distance to any residential,

well buffered by forest and topography, good access to major transportation routes, and opens up new opportunities to the site on Depot Road.

Mrs. Lemond asked Mr. Warner what his thoughts were on these proposals passing. Mr. Warner stated it will depend on how many residents show up at the town meeting on Thursday, 25 January 2024.

Mr. Fernandez asked how the agreement with the builder will work citing what transpired with Scovil Hoe. Mr. Warner stated if P&Z approves the plan, he doesn't believe a change could happen as P&Z would have a very specific motion for approval. Ms. Anderson stated this would happen under a Special Permit and a wedding venue is allowed by the Special Permit issued by P&Z. Mr. Warner stated P&Z approved an adaptive historic reuse of a building for Scovil; Rossi would be for apartments, etc.

Mr. De Brigard stated the developer is subject to getting the money from the bank and the town can't force the developer to commitments that depend on other people, there needs to be some flexibility. The developer will probably build in phases. Mr. De Brigard stated he didn't think it would be realistic to nail the developer to the point where he may back out.

Mr. Law asked about conditions - would it be less attractive if the town garage can't move. Mr. Warner stated the town cannot lose if the developer walks away after spending \$3 million rather than the \$5 million. Mr. McGarry stated if the developer backs out, DECD will allow the town to continue with the cleanup and seek another developer.

Mr. Fernandez stated if the town agrees to a transfer from one developer to another, the same thing could happen as it did on the south end of town. Mr. Warner stated only if the town agrees; and the developer cannot take ownership until the developer spends \$5 million. Mr. Fernandez stated \$5 million isn't a lot of money these days. Mr. McGarry stated no deal is without risk. Mr. McGarry also stated a wedding venue will draw people to Haddam as will apartments.

Mr. Law stated when you start to move chess pieces other moves become evident. Mr. Law stated if Public Works is moved to Jail Hill, the 2.5 acre parcel becomes a possibility for a Transfer Station and then the current Transfer Station becomes a possible river front recreation area. Mr. Warner briefly talked about revitalizing the Center with pedestrian activity between HES, Scovil, the Cove, and Rossi.

Discussion followed regarding Citizens Bank – just sold to an individual from Rocky Hill; will be listing the property; septic system is only 750 gallons limiting prospects.

Ms. Kinney asked about the Jail. Mr. Warner stated prior to COVID, he had someone genuinely interested in the Jail, but since COVID a totally different mindset. Mr. Warner stated there are \$1.5-\$2 million in interior renovations at the Jail.

Further discussion followed regarding rentals and communications (need for cell service). Mr. McGarry stated the cell tower service who rents from the town will be putting up a tower in Haddam Neck. Discussion followed.

Mr. Warner stated a public hearing is scheduled for 16 January 2024 and the town meeting for 25 January 2024. Ms. Anderson stated the landscape architect for HES and the developer for Rossi will be at the town meeting.

The Commission talked at length about the proposals; the need for communication to get the votes to get the \$1.5 million; not opposed to a referendum vote, but would it interfere with the time line for the grant; to have one vote (Rossi only) or include the town garage (approval of relocation to Jail Hill; not looking for approval of funding at this time); felt one vote for Rossi would be the best approach (not clouding the issue with other issues); emphasizing that the vote is for cleaning up the Rossi site and P&Z will be the one dealing with the developer; and push back related to the lack of an overall master plan and how all the pieces fit together (POCD is the master plan; things change).

Ms. Anderson asked if EDC, as a whole, would like to take a stance and make a public statement whether supporting or not supporting this project. Discussion followed.

Prior to the vote on the motion, Ms. Anderson stated she would like to get a letter to HK Now as soon as possible and proposed drafting a letter, submit to all Commissioners for their review (Commissioners to reply to Ms. Anderson, only, with edit suggestions), and then submit to HK Now.

MOTION: Kate Anderson motioned that EDC issue a public statement endorsing and showing support for the Higganum Center Revitalization Project. Mike Farina second. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment

Those members of the public that were present left immediately after Mr. Warner's presentation; therefore, there were no further public comments.

6. New Business

a. CT Main Street

Accelerator Program Application - Update

Ms. Anderson reported Haddam's application was accepted – one of six municipalities accepted. A kick off luncheon/meeting was conducted on Wednesday, 6 December 2023. It's a month to month curriculum. Haddam's project will be focusing on wayfinding/signage/branding/identity. Found Haddam's project overlaps with other projects proposed. Commission will be kept posted.

b. Holiday Decorations Takedown

The Commission agreed to meet on Saturday, 13 January 2024, 10:00 a.m. to remove the decorations from the gazebo.

A brief discussion followed regarding the bows not staying attached to the garlands. Mr. Browne stated from a consistency perspective the CT Main Street program will be helpful.

c. CT DEEP Rec Trails Grant

Ms. Anderson reported she was advised of a grant application for recreation trails. The application process is intensive and the payout appears to be small. Mr. Law stated Park and Rec has been discussing a trail around Great Hill Athletic Fields and need a landscape architect to assist in this matter. Ms. Anderson suggested NLJA.

d. General Questions

Citizens Bank – Mr. Warner stated the broker for the new owner has indicated there is only interest in marijuana stores at this time. Marijuana is a prohibited use in the town. A brief discussion followed in regard to the town receiving revenue from the sale of the product, but there are restrictions as to what the funding can be spent on. **Smoke Shop** – Mrs. Staskelunas asked about the shop being under new management. Mr. McGarry stated it is not a wholesale change out. Mr. Warner stated that is permitted and did not have to come to see them. **Brewery/Taino Smokehouse** – Mr. Warner stated progress is moving along. **Larry's Garage** – Mr. Warner stated Richie Bather has the right of first refusal and Attorney Bill Bowles is working on the matter. **Tylerville Business Interruption Loan/Grant Program** - Mr. Browne asked if a second round of funding could be made available for the businesses in the spring. Mr. Law spoke in regard to cracks being found on the swing bridge and additional work being required. Mr. Warner stated the only businesses pushing for funding are Subway, River's Edge, and Oh Fudge. River Valley has not yet responded with the additional documentation. **CT Main Street** – Mr. Browne stated this project will need a budget; and asked if funding could come from the American Rescue Plan Act. Briefly touched on building consistency in the town. Mr. McGarry suggested bringing a project pro-

posal forward for discussion. Mr. Browne stated he believes in doing things in steps and that's how he envisions approaching this project. **Bridge Road Apartments** – Mr. Warner stated there is a lot of interior work that needs to be done. **Merchant House** – No update.

7. Approval of Minutes – 8 November 2023

Tabled.

8. Review Next Meeting Date & Location – Wednesday, 14 February 2024, Community Center

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 14 February 2024, at the Community Center, 7 Candlewood Hill Road, Higganum, at 6:30 p.m.

9. Adjournment

MOTION: Doreen Staskelunas motioned to adjourn. Mike Farina second. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bunny Hall Batzner
Bunny Hall Batzner
Recording Clerk

**The next regular meeting is Wednesday, 14 February 2024,
at the Community Center, 7 Candlewood Hill Road, Higganum, CT.**