

WILTON EDC MEETING MINUTES

February 10, 2016

In attendance: Peter Gaboriault (Chair), Peter Hubbard, Vivian Lee-Shiue (Vice Chair), Keith Rodgerson, Robert Sabo, Lee Wilson, Jennie Wong (Secretary/Treasurer)

Absent with notice: John Wilson

Absent without notice: Chris Fuentes

- 1) Mr. Gaboriault called the meeting to order at 7:19 pm
- 2) Upon motion made by Mr. Gaboriault, seconded by Ms. Lee-Shiue, the January meeting minutes were unanimously approved.
- 3) Old Business
 - a) Reviewed Proposed 2016-2017 Budget. Ms. Lee-Shiue gave some background information for changes to the EDC's proposed spending budget for the remainder of current year. Previously the plan was to allocate the remaining \$30,000 equally between the Branding Consultant and college level interns. Ms. Lee-Shiue estimated it would cost an average of \$4,000-\$5,000 per college intern for the entire summer and the initial plan was to engage three interns for a total of \$15,000. However, Ms. Lee-Shiue pointed out difficulties to engage interns part-time. Also since the EDC is not full time Board, the Commission would not be able to provide full time supervision. As such, Ms. Lee-Shiue proposed delaying the engagement of college level Interns to the following fiscal year. Based on preliminary conversation with three other Branding and Planning Consultants, Ms. Wong discovered a range of estimates. Ms. Lee-Shiue and Ms. Wong jointly proposed to allocate a greater amount of the remaining budget to the Consultants as follows: \$25,000 to Phase 1: Branding Consultants and \$35,000 to Phase 2: Planning and Execution Consultants. Of the \$35,000 allocated to Planning Consultants, \$3,000 would occur in the current fiscal year, while the majority \$32,000, is expected to occur in the following fiscal year. For the following year budget Ms. Lee-Shiue proposed allocating \$10,000 for Grant Writing and Administrative Services and \$8,000 for college level interns. Mr. L. Wilson emphasized the need to align proposed spending to EDC's strategic planning as well as provide supervision over the internship programs. Mr. Gaboriault made a motion to approve the proposed 2016-2017 budget, Ms. Lee-Shiue seconded, and the proposed budget was unanimously approved.

- b) Analytics Survey – Ms. Lee-Shiue discussed having John Kelly of Berkeley Research Group to assist with conducting analytics surveys on business and residents, coming in and out of town. To conduct the analytics, Mr. Kelly would rely on realtors to reach incoming residents. His one request was for assistance to obtain a list of companies and their COOs who would be the respondents of this analytics survey. Ms. Lee-Shiue discussed leveraging Wilton High School internship program, in particular the seniors in their last semester *volunteering* as interns, earning work credit, to help with conducting the surveys. The program requires that the student be engaged for 25 hours per week. Most of the works would involve internet research, searching for key decision makers in various companies, and to some degree the interns would formulate surveys based on inputs from Mr. Kelly and Ms. Lee-Shiue. The results of the survey would be used to understand key drivers for the flow of businesses and residents in and out of Wilton. Mr. Kaelin suggested these surveys as EDC’s outreach effort to help local businesses.
- c) Community Branding Consultants - Ms. Wong recapped the need for Community Branding as a strategy for the Town to form a differentiated identity and direct us in attracting the right type of businesses in town. She brought up the proposal from Roger Brooks International and discussed the different level of services and pricing. Mr. Wilson inquired the deliverables of the project that would add value. Ms. Wong and Ms. Lee-Shiue jointly explained one the branding deliverables would be development strategies and blueprint that can be integrated into the upcoming Town Master Plan. Ms. Wong mentioned that she has contacted three other potential consultants with the intent of getting competitive bids. Ms. Wong suggested forming a sub-committee consisting of at least two to three members to vet potential consultants, review the consultants’ approaches, and define the project scope, timetable, and budget. She mentioned that members of the task force would speak with the potential consultants, bounce ideas, and ultimately make a recommendation as opposed to a single Commissioner vetting process. Ms. Lee-Shiue and Mr. Hubbard volunteered to be in the task force.
- d) TOD Grant: Mr. Rodgerson discussed the due process to submit a grant application. He estimated the process to be 50-hour job and with only a week and half to submit for the TOD grant application to the Board of Selectmen, and two and half week before the Grant deadline; there was not adequate time to bring in a proper grant application consultant in time. Mr Rodgerson mentioned meeting with Mr. Bob Nerney, Director of Planning and Land Use Management, to discuss smaller and large scale projects that are ideal for Grant application submission. Given the limited capacity from both Mr.

Rodgerson and Mr. Nerney, he concluded the February TOD Grant deadline as unrealistic.

- e) CERC Training – Mr. Rodgerson mentioned that as a member of Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC), the Commission is entitled for a one-time training. CERC collects state wide economic data and provides economic development services to its members. The three hour training requires at least twenty people and would keep the Commission abreast of economic developments that are occurring around the State. Mr. Rodgerson recommended that in addition to EDC members, the Board of Selectmen, and members of the Planning and Zoning Commission to participate in the training. Mr. Rodgerson stated that he would bring it up to the Planning and Zoning Commission at their next meeting, to get a date that would work best for all the groups to attend a joint training. Mr. L. Wilson concurred and urged for the training to happen as soon as possible. Mr. Kaelin reminded that the Board of Selectmen is not available until the Annual Budget process ends on March 4th. Mr. Rodgerson would find a date subsequent to budget process with a possible option to hold the training during one of our regular scheduled meetings.
- f) Spring forum – Ms. Lee-Shiue reminded that the EDC will hold bi-annual public forums and asked for everyone’s input in terms of timing of the spring forum. Mr. L. Wilson inquired if we have any topics in the pipeline that is different from the previous forum. Ms. Lee-Shiue recommended that the topic could be presenting the results of the analytics survey. Another idea could be sharing the report from Community Branding project. In both cases, it would mean holding the Spring Forum closer to June but before the school is out. Ms. Lee-Shiue suggested holding the Forum a few weeks before the school is out and in the meantime hold off on deciding on topic and coordinator until after the budget has been finalized.
- g) Follow-up from October Forum – Ms. Lee-Shiue stated that Mr. Clune sent an email to provide an update from Ms. Heather Herve of GMW. Ms. Herve would be willing to do a story in a few weeks, with a focus on what Ms. Wong presented at the October Forum. Mr. Gaboriault suggested including other local papers, such as Wilton Bulletin, in profiling the story about the forum.
- h) Wilton EDC Facebook Page – Ms. Lee-Shiue mentioned that Wilton EDC Facebook has been created with the names of commissioners. While there are not many activities initially, Ms. Lee-Shiue believed it is important to update the page to keep the public

aware of EDC's undertaking. Ms. Lee-Shiue mentioned the page is ready to be announced on Wilton 411 and Wilton 412.

- i) Website update including "About Wilton" – Ms. Lee-Shiue discussed her observations of EDC's website. She brought up that the website's domain is under the name of a former commissioner, Ms. Tricia Hartner. The website domain will be transferred to John Savarese who is the head of IT Department for the Town of Wilton. Secondly, during the process of updating "About Wilton" section, Ms. Lee-Shiue observed that the Website is cluttered and contains redundant or contradictory information. Ms. Lee-Shiue recommended the website to be redesigned to a more streamline look. She has spoken with the website designer, McNeil Johnston, who is open to the idea. The website redesign fee is covered under the budget. Mr. Sabo inquired as to the number of "hits" on the site. Ms. Lee-Shiue explained the number of hits is very high however the bounce rate (the rate the visitor leaves the page within 2 minutes) is also very high, at 80%. This may indicate that the website does not have information that most visitors look for. Ms. Lee-Shiue believed that the new "About Wilton" section and other substantive information would improve the bounce rate. Ms. Lee-Shiue showed a demo of the redesigned site. She showed the different categories listed under "About Wilton" section; one of the categories for example is schools and under this category there are links to all the schools in Town. She mentioned other Town's EDC websites posted testimonial of residents and businesses that showed as pop-ups. Mr. L. Wilson and Mr. Gaboriault stated that the original focus of the EDC's website is Corporate. Mr. L. Wilson requested a chance for everyone on the Commission to view the redesign site on the screen. Ms. Lee-Shiue mentioned she would send the demo site link. Mr. Hubbard made a recommendation to prominently display "Contact the EDC" button on the front page of the website. Ms. Lee-Shiue brought up that the process to update the website is cumbersome hence she has obtained the editor's right to the website. The Commission discussed Ms. Lisa Bogan and Mr. McNeil Johnston's roles with EDC's website and their billing rates.

4) New Business

- a) Workout session to revisit strategic plan – Ms. Lee-Shiue brought up two options to address the recommendations made by EDC in 2014: 1) During regular meetings or 2) In workout session in between regular meetings. Mr. Rodgerson suggested that we should also revisit the recommendations contained in the Plan of Conservation & Development, specifically the recommendations that pertain to the EDC. The Commission discussed the viability of a task force to address the strategic plan and

recommendation; however the option does not get adequate support due to limited capacity. The Commission decides to tackle the plan during regular meetings.

- b) Grant decision process - Mr. Rodgerson discussed the importance of establishing a relationship with professional Grant writers who can help scout for the right Grants opportunities. These grant writers are already engaged by other municipalities, thus we have to be ready to hire them when the right grant comes along. He estimated that it would be \$3-4k just to get one grant written by professionals with rates range between \$75-\$150/hour. Another alternative for pursuing grants is through Council of Governments (CoGs), the way Ridgefield did. Mr. Rodgerson stated that CoGs has the capability to administer, add value, and do projects in exchange the Town would give up controls over the projects. In order to utilize CoGs, we would need representation on the Council. Mr. Rodgerson recommended that we set aside adequate budget for grant writing and Mr. Kaelin discussed authorizing the grant writer to collect grant opportunities.

5) Other:

- a) Yale School of Architecture Report – Mr. Hubbard mentioned his intent in distributing the Yale School of Architecture Report as a way to illustrate a sample report from a typical Planning Consultant, should we decide to engage a Planning Consultant.
- b) Discussion of GIS Surveys – Ms. Lee-Shiue shared the GIS Surveys of key development areas from her meeting with Bob Nerney, Director of Planning and Land Use Management. Cannondale, while there are some opportunities, has plenty of historic and wetland restrictions. Further the lack of infrastructure, such as sewer line, has to be addressed. The second area under discussion was a 2-acre land owned by the Town, located across from Caraluzzi. The third area is Gilbert and Bennett School and two adjacent plots of residential land owned by the Town. The fourth area discussed is 10-20 Westport Road. Currently there are two office complexes owned by TIAA-CREF, there is an opportunity for a third office complex next to it. The next area discussed is a strip of land owned by the Town, adjacent to Wilton Commons and the Commonfund Building. Mr. Nerney feels this land has a lot of potential due to its proximity to the Train Station and Wilton Town Center. Further, as part of the new multi-family housing development right next to it, the developer has been asked to fund the extension of the sewer line. Discussion about the Commonfund Building ensued. Ms. Lee-Shiue pointed out that the Building is zoned for three-story high, but due to the slope of the land towards the back, the building appeared as two-story high from the front, as such the opportunity may exist to propose re-zoning that space for an additional story. Mr.

Rodgerson concurred that adding an additional level would not be as noticeable and at the same time would bring in sizeable tax revenue to Town.

- 6) Open Discussion – Mr. L. Wilson shared the latest CBRE’s report (4th Quarter 2015) on Fairfield County’s Commercial/Office Market, broken down into segments namely Class A and B office buildings with 20,000 sq. ft. or larger. He pointed out that overall vacancy rate in the Fairfield County is around 20%, Stamford’s vacancy rate between 22.5%-23.5%, while Wilton’s vacancy rate at around 18%. Fairfield has the lowest vacancy rate at around 6%. He concluded that Stamford’s office market is at a disadvantage due to heavy traffic on I-95 and Merritt Parkway. For example, one of his new tenants moved his office from Stamford to Wilton because he and his employees were all very frustrated with the traffic situation around Stamford. Mr. L. Wilson believes that Wilton is located in the geographic center of Fairfield County and has access to labor market in the northern and eastern parts of the County, enabling employees to commute without having to go through the highways or freeways. Thus, this makes Wilton an attractive office market. Mr. L. Wilson also shared the latest survey that his office did on Office and Space in Wilton Center. The findings of the survey indicate a 43% decrease in available office space in the past 12-month ended February 1 2016, while on the retail side, there has been a 42% increase in retail space in the same period. The survey also revealed the rental prices as well as operating expense of the retail and office space in Wilton Town Center.

Mr. Hubbard brought up that Tusk and Cup is coming to Wilton Center. Even though the EDC has not formed the Rapid Response Team, he believes that the Commission should be proactive in making an initial contact.

- 7) Adjourn - With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm.