

Town of East Hartford

Development Department
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9-20-23

Redevelopment Agency

A Special Meeting of the **EAST HARTFORD REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY** was held in Room 105 of the East Hartford Community Cultural Center and on Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, September 20, 2023.

1. Call to Order

Chair McCreery called the meeting to order at 12:35 PM.

2. Roll Call

Present:

Ellen McCreery, Chair
Gerry Maine, Vice Chair
Tony Matta
John Ryan

Absent:

Others in Attendance:

Eileen Buckheit, Development Director
Steve Hnatuk, Deputy Development Director
Carlene Shaw, Town Planner
Michael Daniels, Economic Development Coordinator

BFJ Planning Staff (joined virtually):

Christine Jiminez
Thomas Madden

3. Approval of Minutes

Approval of minutes of special meeting, 6-21-23.
Motion by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Maine, approved.

4. Discussion of Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) with Town's planning consultant, BFJ Planning

Mr. Hnatuk introduced the staff and gave an overview of the POCD process and timeline. The consultants are currently meeting with boards and commissions to listen to their perspectives. A public engagement workshop is scheduled for November. It will be promoted through channels including the Town website, social media, and the public schools. There will be an interactive online survey where participants can make comments directly on a map of the town and can participate in discussions.

Mr. Hnatuk asked the commissioners to discuss major accomplishments since the POCD was last updated ten years ago. Mr. Ryan began with the ongoing progress to redevelop Silver Lane Plaza as a result of the Redevelopment Agency's Silver Lane Redevelopment Plan. He also mentioned the Logistics Center at Rentschler Field and new buildings at Goodwin University. Mr. Matta added the Habitat for Humanity homes being constructed on Burnside Avenue on a former Redevelopment Agency property, as well as the ongoing development of the Concourse Park Apartments at the former Showcase Cinemas site.

Mr. Matta and Chair McCreery discussed the need to think proactively about the future of the neighborhood including Charter Oak Mall, the Concourse Park Apartments, Silver Lane Plaza, and the former Greensprings nursing care facility on Applegate Lane. Mr. Matta said he would like to see a mix of uses including retail in this area so that new residential tenants and businesses can help to sustain each other. Mr. Ryan said that the quality of housing stock is key for the town's reputation.

Mr. Matta mentioned that he had recently attended a Connecticut Department of Transportation seminar that discussed possibilities for rerouting parts of the I-91, I-84, and Route 2 interchanges, with the possibility of a new bridge over the Connecticut River. He said the POCD should coordinate with DOT to make sure these possibilities are taken into account.

Mr. Madden asked about issues the Agency believes need to be addressed and priorities for the next ten years. Mr. Matta said he would like to strengthen commercial corridors and make Main Street more of a destination. The Agency members said they typically drive to each destination on Main Street as opposed to parking once and walking to each. They did note that residents of the immediate neighborhood walk on Main Street frequently.

Ms. Buckheit noted that there have been five ribbon cuttings for businesses on Main Street within the past year: Bailey's Medical Supply, Chase Bank, M&T Bank, Dottie's Sea Moss Wellness Bar, and The Russell Caribbean Restaurant. Additionally, the Town purchased Church Corners Inn and is reviewing RFP responses for its redevelopment.

Mr. Ryan expressed that eminent domain should be used infrequently and carefully, but he indicated he believes it was used appropriately for Silver Lane Plaza. He would like to see more mixed-use development with two or three stories of housing above commercial space, appropriately scaled for surrounding environments. He added the importance of amenities and open space to go along with residential development. He referred to past Goodwin University master plans for mixed-use development along Ensign Street as a good example of the type of development he favors.

Mr. Matta said he is in favor of traffic calming and believes the reconfiguration of lanes and addition of bike lanes has been successful so far. Ms. Buckheit mentioned that a study is ongoing to determine the route to complete the East Coast Greenway in town. Mr. Matta highlighted the town's robust network of bike trails, including at Goodwin University, which support both recreation and transportation.

Mr. Madden asked what factors encourage young people to stay in East Hartford beyond graduating from high school or college. Mr. Matta said Goodwin University's programs offer opportunities for local young people, many of whom are already in the workforce but want to gain further skills. Mr. Ryan said East Hartford's proximity to many colleges creates an opportunity for students to commute to campuses and to save on housing costs. Ms. Buckheit said if proposed apartment developments come to fruition, such as Port Eastside at Founders Plaza, there will be more attractive housing options for young people.

Chair McCreery mentioned the School Street Square plaza on Ellington Road and noted that while the plaza's appearance has greatly improved, an anchor grocery tenant still has not opened. Mr. Ryan discussed the emergence of the cannabis industry and said that while the Planning & Zoning Commission created comprehensive regulations for both retail and production facilities, they may need to be adjusted as the industry continues to grow.

5. Project Updates

Ms. Buckheit stated that about seven out of the ten foundations for the Habitat for Humanity homes have been poured, and construction is proceeding faster than expected. The Downey Building at 1252 Main Street is nearing the completion of its renovation. The Logistics Center at Rentschler Field construction is ahead of schedule, with the first warehouse, for Wayfair, expected to open next spring. Bare Bones Boxing and Splinting Solutions have already relocated from Silver Lane Plaza, with Je Mart to follow. Legal proceedings regarding the final payment amount to the former owner of Silver Lane Plaza are still pending.

6. Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Maine, approved 2:07 PM (Mr. Matta was no longer present)

Respectfully Submitted,

Eileen Buckheit
Development Director

cc: Town Clerk
Development Department