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East Hartford Silver Lane Advisory Committee

Kick-Off Meeting Summary

Thursday, December 15, 2016

2:00 pm

Welling Conference Room – 2nd floor Town Hall

PRESENT - Frank Collins, Economic Development Commission; Tom York, Goman & York; Robin Pearson, Redevelopment Agency; Todd Andrews, Goodwin College; Marcia Leclerc, Mayor; Dan Matos, The Matos Group; James Matos, The Matos Group; Craig Stevenson, CTC; MaryEllen Dumbrowski, CT River Valley Chamber; Rebecca Augur, Milone & MacBroom, Inc. (MMI); Mike Zuba, MMI; Tim Bockus, DPW Director; Mary Ellen Kowalewski, CRCOG; Eileen Buckheit, Development Director; Jeff Cormier, Town Planner; Casey Hardin, TranSystems

ABSENT – Chad Freitas, Peter Bonzani

CALL TO ORDER

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.

The Mayor first gave an overview of the Silver Lane BAR grant, history behind it, and the numerous other recent and ongoing efforts in the corridor. These efforts include the Horizon outlet project and second phase development at Rentschler Field, the successful receipt of \$12 million in State Urban Act funding, the completion of the Willowbrook Study, the successful receipt of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant of \$200,000, the BAR grant, the CRCOG Transportation Study, the submission of the Casino RFP package, and the passage of the town referendum items which include \$3 million for development activities on Silver Lane and the City and Town Development Act. The launch of the committee had been delayed in order to realize the synergy provided with the transportation grant from CROG which will study the same area of the corridor. The Mayor explained that one of the goals may be to create a new

redevelopment zone and to this end, she has asked Robin Pearson as the chair of the Redevelopment Agency to chair this committee, and Robin has agreed.

The group made introductions.

Eileen Buckheit and Milone and MacBroom, Inc. (MMI) reviewed the 16-month planning process, milestones and committee's role. The BAR planning process will rely on market, environmental and engineering analyses to identify opportunities and constraints to redevelopment and form the basis for alternative planning concepts. The expected outcome of the plan is a preferred development program with recommendations and strategies that could be adopted and administered by the East Hartford Redevelopment Agency. The BAR plan will dovetail with the ongoing CRCOG Silver Lane transportation corridor study.

The Committee engaged in a SWOT Analysis about the corridor and its potential for redevelopment, which all the committee members contributed comments to and is summarized as follows:

Strengths

- Connectivity - major east-west connector; connect to Hartford, Manchester, connect residential to riverfront
- Greenway/ trail and pedestrian connections.
- Accessibility and visibility – highways, transit, interstate frontage for redevelopment candidates
- Significant employment growth within the corridor – Pratt campus expansion, outlets development
- Diversity of housing along corridor - rental and ownership opportunities
- Existing infrastructure - water, sewer, gas and highway ramp system
- Stable political environment with excellent town staff with long term vision
- Demographic trends to help form identity along cultural aspects
- Undeveloped land
- State Roadway – potential funding for improvements
- Opportunity to acquire and/or presence of properties ripe for redevelopment
- Strength and stability of residential neighborhood east of Forbes to support local businesses
- Phillips Farm as example of quality development
- Portion currently in Enterprise Zone
- CTfastrak expansion
- Town has great ethnic restaurants, cultural diversity to build upon and market

Weaknesses

- Visual/ aesthetics - conditions of properties, visually displeasing
- Demographically challenged
- Current roadway in bad shape – lacks pedestrian infrastructure and connections to trail
- Lack of traffic - Forbes ramp closure and I-384; lack of professional offices; limited traffic counts deter retailers
- Regional competition – Buckland Hills, West Farms – Silver Lane changed into neighborhood based commercial, how can it become regional again?
- Aged infrastructure – may scare off development community
- Drainage issues - development areas below drainage systems; high water table limits infiltration on site
- Individual goals of land owners
- Current businesses - Image and perceptions/low rent; lack of professional office
- Disconnect from CT River
- Disconnect from employment centers
- Tax base – mill rate challenged
- Current zoning – most tightly constrained dimensional requirements in Town
- Limited control of ROW – need for an understanding with the State to support infrastructure

Opportunities

- Rentschler Field – could be better used through better partnerships, but currently draws 20K to the corridor – opportunity to create positive impressions
- Derelict properties - opportunities to acquire and follow through on vision
- Cyclist gateway to Hartford Downtown – build upon
- Public transit linkage and enhancement
- Greater Hartford lacks millennial-friendly assets - opportunity to capture and capitalize on millennials
- CT Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT)
- To increase access and connectivity within corridor – north south feeders, midpoint access - better connect to community
- Recent voter approval of CT City and Town Development Act and funding to implement
- State of CT maintenance garage located – Clement Rd./ interstate frontage

Threats

- Economic climate – regional market share, current underlying commercial demand, state and town fiscal realities – scarce resources
- Number of rental properties
- Lack of site control in corridor
- Zoning limitations
- Watershed, flooding and drainage issues
- Inland wetland regulations a hindrance to development
- Legislative challenges to innovative approaches such as land banking development rights on properties challenged by wetlands/ drainage, etc.
- Uncertainty over potential catalyst projects
- Lack of implementation – don't want this plan to sit on a shelf, need to get decision makers involved now, and focus on feasible, actionable and implementable projects
- Ensure vision is malleable and realistic for the private sector and market – not overly limiting on opportunities or financially infeasible in design guidelines
- Address private sector hurdles
- East Hartford's image statewide
- Lack of overall marketing campaign and strategy

Next steps in the process:

- Data collection and analysis, including field surveys
- Meet in Feb. to review Comprehensive Existing Conditions Analysis, date not determined
- Market Analysis to follow

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting concluded 3:20pm.