

Town of Harwinton
Economic Development Commission
Minutes: March 30, 2011

Attendance: Christina Emery, Kevin Nelson, Kerri Oulette, Steve Criss, Franci Tartaglino, Tom Schoenemann

Also in Attendance: Richard Miller, Marty Peabody, Fred Pesce, Carola Pesce

1. Call to Order

Tom Schoenemann called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM in the Selectmen's Conference Room. Introductions were made.

2. Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

3. Minutes

Kerri Oulette noted that the minutes from 2/23/11 incorrectly stated that she was present. Upon motion by Kerri Oulette, seconded by Franci Tartaglino, the minutes were approved as amended.

4. Comments from the Chair

Tom Schoenemann informed the Commission that the NW CT EDC will meet tomorrow morning at 9 AM at Winchester Town Hall. Tom will ask Doug Parker - Executive Director to attend one of our meetings. He also noted that Rose Ponte is a board member of the NW CT EDC.

5. Discussion with Representatives from the Town of Burlington regarding Johnnycake Airport area

In attendance was Fred Pesce, owner of the Harwinton property, Richard Miller, owner of the Burlington piece, and Marty Peabody, nearby business owner. The representative from the Burlington EDC was unable to attend. Tom Shoenemann asked the guests how the Harwinton EDC can help foster economic development at that site.

Mr. Pesce presented his idea to realign runway diagonally across the town line in order to have an airport to accommodate business aircraft. This would involve a partial land swap with Mr. Miller. He believes it will result in a longer, safer runway without disturbing many homes. It would also provide Mr. Miller with more frontages along Route 4. He sees the economic potential of having such an airport as there is demand for facilities for private planes.

Steve Criss asked about the reason that Johnnycake Airport closed. Mr. Miller explained that liability was one of the most significant reasons.

Franci Targalino asked Mr. Pesce if he was proposing a privately-owned or municipal airport. Mr. Pesce explained it would be like the Oxford Airport, which is municipal. He stated that the State and Federal government would fund 80%.

Franci Targalino asked about the previous referendum question and outcome a few years ago. Mr. Miller stated that the vote was to create a municipal airport by eminent domain and that it failed overwhelmingly.

Kerri Oulette asked Mr. Pesce what his alternative plans were if there was no public funding available for the airport. Mr. Pesce explained he would have to sell the land. His property consists of 60 acres of commercial and 20 acres of residential property.

Steve Criss asked if there was a feasibility study done on the airport. Mr. Pesce said work had been done in the past.

Mr. Miller explained that his property currently consists of a farm and forest. 20 acres were sold for active adult housing. Houses in this new development have started; they provide tax revenue to the town with no additional stress on the school system. Mr. Miller believes that an airport is not the best use of his property. He stated that it would cost \$500,000 per year to run it as a municipal airport. It would also contribute to a drop in property values in areas surrounding the airport.

Steve Criss asked Mr. Pesce what the current use of his property is. The hangers were originally there for storing aircraft, they are not conducive for business use.

Kevin Nelson stated that this property is the largest piece of commercial property in Harwinton. If there was an airport how much adjacent land need to be clear of buildings? Mr. Pesce stated there would be acreage left for commercial development.

Mr. Miller owns the yellow house across the street; it is zoned light industrial on 4.75 acres and is used as a warehouse for his own business.

Marty Peabody stated that he has respect for Mr. Pesce's vision; however without city sewer he does not believe it is realistic for industrial use. There is also the issue of the Bristol Water Company land. While an airport would promote economic development, it may not be feasible without the necessary infrastructure.

Tom Shoenemann would like to get representatives from the Burlington EDC rescheduled for next month. Doug Parker from the NW CT EDC will be invited to a separate meeting.

6. Committee Progress Reports

- a) Harwinton Business Database – Franci distributed a list of personal property owners from the Assessor. Christina Emery will send the EDC this data in an Excel spreadsheet, so everyone can help organize the data.
- b) Business Survey Questionnaire – Kevin Nelson distributed a draft list of questions. The Commission feels this is a good way to introduce the EDC, gather information, and have information available for town websites. Christina will email the questionnaire to all members, they should comment and send their suggestions back to Christina. Marty Peabody explained the past survey that the Planning Commission did as part of their Plan of Conservation and Development. Christina shared some of the responses as they relate to commercial and industrial development.
- c) EDC Website - Steve Criss explained that the EDC can add a page to the existing Town website. It could include links for regional resources, and information on how to start a business in Harwinton. Christina Emery also noted that it could include a business directory and a list of available commercial or industrial sites and buildings. Steve and Christina will continue to draft the information for the next meeting.

7. Public Participation

There was no further public participation.

8. New Business

Christina Emery noted that the budget that was passed by the Board of Selectman included a \$500 line item for the EDC. This line item was also approved by the Board of Finance. Mr. Miller stated that the Burlington ECD sent out a small “We’re Open for Business” flyer in the tax bill as a low cost way of getting the word out to the community.

9. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christina Emery,
Recording Secretary