



TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

**Regular Meeting, Thursday July 28, 2020, 6:30 p.m.
Shepardson Community Center**

Present: Commissioner David Cappelletti
Chairman Terrence McAuliffe
Commissioner Anthony Minchella
Commissioner Frank Mirovsky
Commissioner Mark Petrucci
Commissioner Armando Paolino

Also Present: Matt Gilchrist
Curt Bosco

Absent: Commissioner Ted Mannello

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at about 6:30 pm. Curt Bosco used video cameras to record it on ZOOM.

Pledge of allegiance was said by all.

Discussion

Matt Gilchrist, President of EG Home in Beacon Falls, and a Middlebury resident, discussed his considerations, as a business owner, of relocating his business to Middlebury. His company has 17 employees and builds about 20 to 40 homes per year in three developments. He has outgrown the basement office space in a model home and is looking to build an office building and become a tenant in part of it. His employees live near Middlebury. He needs mobility – easy highway access, marketability of the proposed new office to other tenants, and reasonable taxes. He said Oxford had a mil rate of 23.84, Waterbury had 60.21, Southbury was 29.10 and Middlebury was 33.4. He said, of the four based on mil rate, he'd pick Oxford.

He cited Oxford's Quarry Rock as ideal due to its proximity to nearby restaurants and personal service businesses. He said Southbury had a lot of good things, including convenient shopping centers, but they don't have sewer and water. He

said Middlebury has Straits Turnpike, but that's about it. He said he'd love to be in the Benson Road / Chemtura area, but the dollars to acquire land was prohibitive. He said he didn't think Middlebury's taxes would be stable. Mr. Gilchrist told commissioners he wasn't in a hurry to make a decision, but factors might force him to move.

He told Frank Mirovsky that customers came to his design center to make decisions on new homes and he'd likely have one in the new office, but would likely keep design centers in remote developments, such as Mystic. He doesn't get retail customers.

He told McAuliffe he'd prefer to build in Benson Road if land was available. He complained of the lack of a central commercial zone with restaurants and services easily visited. McAuliffe said they were available, but all over the place.

McAuliffe said he had been told by others that the Benson Road property had not been subdivided into small enough parcels, with offsets, frontage, and initial infrastructure ready to build. Gilchrist agreed that the investment in taking the available big parcel was far too much, but a smaller parcel size would be more appealing. Yet still, he said, the hospitality requirements were lacking.

Gilchrist told McAuliffe to follow up with Jimmy Clark of Kitchen Cabinet Outlet, a Middlebury resident.

Gilchrist said the lack of a cohesive plan, and zoning issues, make it too easy to put in things like gas stations, making other desired business investment less inviting. Gilchrist pointed out Churchill Street in Newtown. He said that area had slowly changed from multiple gas stations into a more diversified business area.

Gilchrist said commercial realtors were important to promoting a business to see a property in a particular town.

Gilchrist also said Shelton and Oxford had more forethought to making desirable commercial property available, which subsequently made those properties more desirable and cheaper. Armando Paolino said that effort started about thirty years ago. McAuliffe said that effort produced smaller sized properties that could be utilized in six months rather than five years, requiring only plans and building permits to get started.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mark Petrucci MOTIONED to approve the June 25 minutes, SECOND by Frank Mirovsky and unanimously voted.

McAuliffe asked members who had not attended the June 25th meeting whether they had viewed the ZOOM recording. Anthony Minchella said he had viewed the meeting but David Cappelletti said it wouldn't work for him. McAuliffe said it needs to work and will follow-up.

OLD BUSINESS

Commercial Development Guide Update Status

McAuliffe said he had taken over the update effort originally assigned to absent member Ted Mannello and met with Land Use and other Middlebury officials several times, resulting in four or five draft revisions. He said Barbara Whitaker will print 50 color copies of the final version using the town's copier contract, with ten copies going to the Selectmens office and forty to the land use office. The guide is available online, on the EIDC web site, and a press release was issued to inform the public of its availability.

McAuliffe said the guide includes an introduction by First Selectman Ed St. John and an offer to discuss flexibility in our regulations.

Website issues – recent developments

McAuliffe recapped search engine performance and online visibility issues of the EIDC web site, a matter discussed at the June 25th and January 28th meetings. He said he was working with newly appointed CFO Robin Stanziale who was coordinating the outsourcing of the town web site to a commercial vendor. McAuliffe said the EIDC web site would either be incorporated within the new town web site, or made a direct link from the town menu, solving most of the issues cited in a June 10th consultant report included in the June 25th minutes.

Comparison of commercial property leases and rents

Mark Petrucci said he had added Cheshire and Southington to the towns surveyed by AdvanceCT in an initial spreadsheet comparison of rents, leases and purchase prices. Petrucci said there was a large variance in the numbers, depending on location, age, and desirability of location within a town. He said Middlebury didn't have a good inventory of right-sized properties with the right square-footage and location, saying Southington had far more, with tax incentives. If you wanted a 15,000-square-foot commercial building in Middlebury you wouldn't find one.

McAuliffe said Middlebury needed to market Middlebury as a desirable business location that justified a higher price, a value proposition.

Celebrate Middlebury

McAuliffe reminded commissioners that the Celebrate Middlebury committee needs help getting vendors and businesses to attend. Anthony Minchella, who did volunteer earlier, said he was not contacted. McAuliffe said he'd make sure he was given a list of businesses.

NEW BUSINESS

2017 Survey Action – Research Comparative study grease trap regulations

McAuliffe said high costs and difficult grease trap regulations made it difficult for restaurants to get started, according to feedback from the 2017 survey and guest speakers mentioning it. He said it would be good to know if Middlebury was similar to other towns, or “out of whack,”

David Cappelletti agreed to gather the information and report.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:25 pm Curt Bosco said the Conservation Commission needed to take over the auditorium, but commissioners were free to continue elsewhere. After a brief discussion there was no agreement to do so.

Anthony Minchella MOTIONED to adjourn, SECOND by Armando Paolino and unanimously voted at about 7:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Terrence McAuliffe

Chairman—Economic Development Commission

cc. Town Clerk, Barbara Whitaker, Commission Members