



TOWN OF MIDDLEBURY

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

**Regular Meeting, Tuesday October 27, 2020, 6:30 p.m.
Shepardson Community Center**

Present: Chairman Terrence McAuliffe
Commissioner Anthony Minchella
Commissioner Frank Mirovsky
Commissioner Mark Petrucci

Also Present: Tom Hill
John Pollard
Linda Zukauskas (ZOOM)

Excused Commissioner Armando Paolino

Absent: Commissioner David Cappelletti
Commissioner Ted Mannello

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at about 6:30 pm.
Pledge of allegiance was said by all.

DISCUSSION

Chairman McAuliffe introduced guests Tom Hill and John Pollard by saying it was Middlebury EDC's challenge to bring businesses to Middlebury despite the fact that commercial property and leases can be more expensive than surrounding towns. The commission must develop a "value proposition" that Middlebury is worth it and is a better address. Businesses are well aware of Middlebury's amenities, which attract residents, but those businesses use a sharp pencil to calculate costs, and EDC must develop a marketing strategy that transcends choosing on costs.

John Pollard answered first. He said much of his career was selling towns on how to attract businesses. He said businesses didn't come to towns "looking at signs", the town needed to outreach to the businesses it wanted. Mr. Pollard brought marketing materials and noted four Main Street redevelopment projects in Connecticut, and also mentioned Middlebury developments in which he played a part. He noted that Middlebury does not have a "town center" that gives

residents a reason to shop local rather than neighboring towns which have such centers. Chairman McAuliffe said Middlebury's town green was the historical town center, but not commercially viable. He said the Four Corners area was the real town center, but entrenched property ownership issues hindered streetscape development, although such proposals were made to the Board of Finance in past years.

Tom Hill joked that his business used a lot of signs, and those signs were helpful in knowing who was looking. But he also said that businesses sidestepped him, if they could, and went to economic development directors in Town Halls, looking for bargains. He asked whether Middlebury has a person to take leads and react in half an hour, and whether the town maintained a list of properties. McAuliffe said there is no paid town employee with that responsibility, as Newtown, Southbury, and Oxford have, although the commission has advocated for it. Mr. Hill joked, "If you want to outsource that, we would handle it." McAuliffe said First Selectman Ed St. John generally took leads, and handled them himself or brought in himself or ZEO Curtis Bosco to follow up. We don't have a true database, but Ed St. John has a good feel for available properties and contacts. McAuliffe said he heard the outsource offer and felt it made more sense than trying to grow such capabilities from scratch.

Mr. Hill said properties such as Four Corners Grocery were too limited, and other spots, such as Middlebury Station needed tenants. He said a "town salesperson" would target businesses for those locations, and would advocate for changes in zoning to allow businesses to come in. He cited Southbury's zoning change to permit wineries and breweries, a change initiated by its EDC. Mr. Hill mentioned "charettes" to engage property owners, government officials, and residents in shaping a more attractive place for businesses. Mr. Pollard said this required a lot of buy-in from property owners. McAuliffe said town-owned land behind Four Corners could be made available to allow expansion, but required an EDC push. The land owners needed to be harnessed. Mark Petrucci said the town needed more medium-sized industrial possibilities, such as at Turnpike Drive off Straits Turnpike.

Mr. Pollard said industrial properties didn't necessarily need to be attractive, but commercial and retail properties did require it, a good first impression, to justify the prices.

Frank Mirovsky asked about business friendliness. Mr. Pollard said that over the years Middlebury was known to be difficult. Also, the density of residents to shop and utilize the businesses was low. Mr. Pollard said it was important for the boards and commissions consider Economic Development to streamline processes. He said the town has been resistant to have new businesses be part of the

community. He said there was too much detail in applications, requiring too many meetings and too much time and money expended. Mr. Pollard said ZEO Curt Bosco was very helpful in getting him through some applications.

McAuliffe said it was important for Middlebury to provide a good first impression on visitors, a topic mentioned by Dean Yimoyines at an earlier EDC meeting. Both Mr. Pollard and Mr. Hill said Mr. Yimoyines was a visionary and Middlebury needed to have a well thought out plan. McAuliffe said we heard the message, but it was more than beautification. Mr. Pollard said this was "place making", a sense of place.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting room needed to be passed over to the Conservation Commission, so other agenda items were deferred.

Frank Mirovsky MOTIONED to adjourn, SECOND by Mark Petrucci and unanimously voted at about 7:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Terrence McAuliffe

Chairman—Economic Development Commission

cc. Town Clerk, Barbara Whitaker, Commission Members