

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

APRIL 8, 1996

### PRESENT

G. Daley, Chair  
J. Milardo  
S. Shapiro  
J. Vinci  
R. Santangelo

### ABSENT

None

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R. Sweet  
L. Nowlin  
A. Nowlin  
D. Thornton  
C. Matta-Saten  
H. Brings - Mach  
R. Bergan  
T. Miazga  
S. Mohr

### ALSO PRESENT

J. Bianco  
Carl Rodenhizer  
G. Wiernaz  
L. Aresco  
M. McCormack  
S. Wiernaz  
P. Karpel  
S. Libby  
P. Karpel  
C. Wilcox, Staff  
W. Kuehn, Staff

Chairman Daley convened the meeting at 7:05 in Room 208 in the Municipal Building and opened the Public Session for people not on the Agenda. Sue Mohr of Westlake Association spoke to the Committee regarding a forty four acre parcel of open space set aside in the Westlake area which they would like to turn back to the City as a park. The intention had been to have all of the different Condominium Associations contribute to the upkeep of this park. However, in reality only the Westlake Association which is fourteen individual residences and two Condo Associations contribute to the upkeep. Those two being Trolley Crossing and Beacon Hill. The new Associations do not contribute. G. Daley suggested that a number of agencies would be involved in this transaction and asked W. Kuehn to point them out. He noted that they should touch base with Park & Rec, Planning & Zoning, possibly with the Conservation Commission and that ultimately that the Common Council would be the body to accept this land. He also suggested contacting the Water & Sewer Department in case there were easements on that land. D. Thornton explained the history of this parcel noting that the Westlake Association was created under Mr. Okenbauch, the original developer out there. After the bankruptcy was resolved the other Associations were not included and they chose not to contribute to the upkeep. The Economic Development Committee advised Ms. Mohr and the other people interested in this topic to contact Bill Kuehn and Bill Warner on a staff level and they will move this process forward. S. Libby commented on the proposed loan to Touch of Class. He asked if it was a new loan for \$20,050.00, if that was the right amount and how long? He also objected to the possibility of an Executive Session. Mr. Daley replied with the usual explanation that an Executive Session would be possible only if requested by the applicant.

There being no further speakers the Public Session was closed.

Minutes - Upon a motion by J. Milardo, seconded by R. Santangelo the minutes of the previous meeting were accepted unanimously with the abstention of S. Shapiro.

Communications - A communication from Attorney Dowley had been received and will be discussed under Item F1, moving of the Convent Building.

Old Business - None.

New Business - J. Milardo excuses himself and leaves. S. Shapiro recuses but does not leave.

Parking Lot/Convent Building - Presentation by The Connection Fund, Inc. Carl Rodenhizer of The Connection Fund addresses the response to the RFP to move the Convent. He sees it as an opportunity to work cooperatively with the start up operation which is Kidcity, a project involving children and school groups. The area might become a child oriented part of downtown with Oddfellows across the street and Amato's around the corner. Secondly, The Connection Fund wants to create jobs for people who may be in their other facilities, i.e. the shelters or on welfare. He sees this as job training for unskilled workers in the building trade. Finally The Connection Fund would like to contribute to the preservation of an attractive historic building downtown. Jeff Bianco also spoke to The Connection Fund's response to the RFP and he was looking to enhance the gateway downtown and to give it the "West Hartford treatment by closing in the streetscape and parking behind the retail space. The letter from Mike Dowley represents an adjacent property owner who is concerned about the positioning of the building within the lot that it may be too close to his own building. J. Bianco commented that the idea of moving the Convent to the parking area came from the City Planner and he suggested using the west entrance, however, the building could go further east if the City says so. However, this is the suggestion of the Planner. He also noted that the City was looking for a pedestrian area and very few curb cuts. There is plenty of parking within the Municipal lot and landscaping the front would be optimum rather than allowing parking or curb cuts in the front. Discussion ensued about the curb cuts, the location, handicap parking, loss of spaces, and addressing concerns of the neighbor. Staff reaction was that if the Economic Development Committee is willing to pursue the response, staff can work with all interested parties to resolve location issues. A motion was made by J. Vinci, seconded by R. Santangelo to commend The Connection Fund on their proposal. To encourage them to proceed with their planning and to direct staff to work with The Connection Fund and the neighbors. The Committee also suggested involving Bill Warner and Public Works on redesigning the parking lot and the location of the building. The proponents were encouraged to come back to the next meeting with a more flushed out site plan and proposal. J. Milardo returns.

North End Industrial Area -

P. Karpel spoke for the owners of Red Wing Depot (formerly the Meech & Stoddard buildings) indicating that he had been advising them since just before they bought the property. They had met with P. Simons from DECD and Bill Kuehn from the city to ascertain what the NEIA plan wanted them to do. After another meeting in November the owners decided to evict the autobody tenant as a good faith effort to resolve some of the issues. These were a.) access to the rail yard which is still a major issue, b.) Availability of funds which might flow back to the project, c.) parking on land which is not owned by the State and d.) ascertaining the next step with the City and State. During the winter severe damage occurred to the north building. Mr. Karpel requested clarification and noted some differences of opinion about a couple of issues... i.e a.) what the site was going to look like and

what a “gateway” to the park should be and b.) what will happen to the remainder of the north building. The city thought it should be removed and the owners thought it was salvageable. He reported that the main building now had a new tenant (Ben’s Office Furniture) with 8-10 jobs and expanding. The owners indicated that they had done a lot of interior improvements, but were not very clear about what they would do on the outside. They spoke of “sprucing up” and repainting, but no substantive improvements. The chairman noted that at the January 29th meeting that the owners were to come back to the EDC with a specific proposal, with aesthetic improvements and plans for a significant investment into the project. Discussion ensued regarding the area as an eyesore, unkept, no site plans to review, etc. The owners replied that they had only been there for 8 months, that the property had been mishandled for years and that they had made some progress... mostly in the effort to evict the autobody tenant. G. Daley pointed out that a number of the neighboring businesses were represented at the meeting and they needed the assurance that the NEIA plan was going to be carried out. More discussion ensued regarding the needs of the building inspector, the City’s access to the rail yard and how it all should look. S. Shapiro asks Messrs. Sweet and Rocque about other industrial properties they owned and how they were maintained. The consensus of the committee was that this property was still an eyesore, inappropriate for a gateway to the park and that plans to fix a wall and paint were no good enough to meet the objectives of the plan and the wishes of the neighboring businesses, who were doing their part to improve the area. Attys Karpel and Milardo reminded the committee that this was private property and that the city, state, owners and neighbors should all work together. R. Bergen spoke for the group, North End Business Association. He commented that piles of palettes were still there, that there was no parking plan, that the second floor of the main building was vacant, and that everything that his group had worked for in the last 30 months according to the plan was going up in smoke. He noted he had not seen any landscape plan and they did not want to settle for an ugly gateway property which did not conform to the plan just because some buyers came in from out of town and bought the property before it was condemned. They urged the committee to have the city buy the property. G. Daley commented that he knew the business people and that they do not come to this level of frustration easily. He therefore insisted that by the next meeting the owners present a progress report on the clean-up, resolve exactly what was needed for the railroad access, and present written short and long term plans for the property. He emphasized that there was a lack of trust that this property would be revitalized properly, and did not rule out a complete taking in the future.

**REINVEST:**

Present were Lisa and Alease Nowlin of “A Touch of Class” and Debra Hopkins, who represented them and gave an overview of how they wished to combine their salon with their boutique. She acknowledged that this was a difficult loan but pointed out that her clients have run a successful business for over ten years. S. Shapiro asked about collateral and there seemed to be no adequate equity to pledge. The Nowlins reported on their plans to lease the Camp building with an option to buy and discussion ensued about the various rents now paid vs. future debt service etc. After considerable discussion the chair asked the applicants to rework the application after consultation with their financial advisor, to identify proper collateral, and to do a three-year financial strategy. Staff was asked to look into the possibility of using out-of-state real estate as collateral and upon a motion by s. Shapiro, seconded by R. Santangelo it was voted unanimously to table this item.

**CSO Invoice**

Upon a motion by S. Shapiro, seconded by R. Santangelo, it was voted unanimously to approve payment of the invoice for the CSO work done in the North end Industrial Area from the State grant.

**Remington Rand/ City Atty. Memo**

This was for the committee's information and explained a judge's decision which cleared the way for the City to proceed with foreclosure.

**NEIA (cont.)**

A motion was made by S. Shapiro, seconded by J. Milardo to put the acquisition of the Meech and Stoddard property (Redwing Depot) on the Council agenda declaring this to be for a public purpose. They noted, and confirmed by staff, that the appraisals were done and funds were in the project budget. J. Milardo moved to amend the motion to reflect that unless there was substantial movement to improve the property by the owners in 30 days, then to recommend acquisition; however after discussion he withdrew the amendment. The motion to recommend acquisition passed unanimously.

**Enterprise Zone brochure/maps**

Upon a motion by S. Shapiro, seconded by G. Daley the MDO was authorized unanimously to spend up to \$395.00 on the new brochure/maps published by the State.

**EDF Status report** - for the Committee's information

**Hartford Business Journal Insert:** after discussion, the Committee felt Middletown was not ready for this type of publicity and suggested contacting the Vinal Print Shop instead.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 10:12 p.m.

Cynthia G. Wilcox