

City of Middletown, CT

Economic Development Committee

Minutes from the meeting of May 14, 2007

<u>Present</u>	<u>Also Present</u>
G. Daley, Chair	W. Warner
J. Bibisi	M. Wackers
R. Santangelo	R. Kearney
D. Bauer	
P. Szewczyk	
Public: G. Sherman, J. Pugliese, K. Johnson, J. Kovner, P. Patton, D. Sataline, A. Sataline, P. Redford, G. Dayharsh, D. Raydel and members of the public	

- A **Call to Order:** Santangelo called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM.
- B **Public Session:** Johnson asked to speak on the Liberty Square project. The committee agreed to the request to differ comment on the project until after the proponents of the project make their presentation.
 - 1) The committee agreed to Patton’s request to speak prior to the presentation due to time restraints on his schedule. Patton stated Wesleyan is a stakeholder in the area with the Green Street Arts Center (GSAC). Over the past 10 years, Wesleyan was involved with the planning for the area. The planning study highlighted the fact that too many social service agencies were in the North End and the need to get more higher class retail to revitalize the area. Clients of GSAC noted walking more than the 100-200 feet to GSAC is a problem. The new Wharfside Commons Apartments will help to change the area. Wesleyan is working with the O’Rourke’s Diner group to rebuild the diner. Nearby parking is a problem. Wesleyan supports the Liberty Square proposal as new investment in the area.
- C **Minutes:** Szewczyk made a motion seconded by Bauer to approve the minutes of the April 9, 2007 and May 8, 2007 meetings of the Economic Development Committee. The committee approved the motion. Bibisi abstained from voting on the May 8, 2007 minutes and Daley was not present during the vote.
- D **Communications**
- E **Old Business**
 - 1) **CBB Parking**
 - a) **Main & Liberty Streets:** Harding stated he has worked in the North End for 11 years and presented plans to construct a retail/office building called Liberty Square at the corner of

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Main & Liberty Streets. He stated that It's Only Natural Market and another retailer will occupy the first floor. He has a tenant for the third floor and is negotiating with several companies for the second floor. Dayharsh described the project, which will have 64 parking space lot and 7 street spaces. Santangelo noted the leased spaces with signs for specific persons in the existing lot and if the city would control the new lot. Daley noted the stalls are paid for. Santangelo questioned whether this is a problem for the proposed new lot. Daley stated this would be an issue for the Parking Authority. Santangelo discussed the loss of parking when Wharfside Commons was built. Harding stated the proposed lot would increase parking from 30 to 64 spaces and would accommodate different needs for day and evening uses. Santangelo questioned the demand for parking for the retail and office tenants. Daley asked Warner if the parking is adequate under zoning rules. Warner stated the downtown parking rules are flexible relative to uses and adequate parking in the area. The proposal would go before P&Z. Santangelo asked if the lot would be metered. Warner stated the tenant would pay for parking and be monitored from a list of license plates or a sticker on the car. Bauer stated this lot is a Parking Authority issue and noted drivers enter the lot at the exit. Santangelo noted the assigned parking is signed. Harding stated retail customers are in and out and the solution is adding the 34 spaces. Question regarding 25 cars parked all the time. Daley question the P&Z conditions on approval and how many spaces would be rented. How many office employees would there be. Harding stated the third floor would have 22 employees and he would offer them 12-15 spaces and the second floor employee count is not known. Dayharsh asked how many spaces would be left for employees. The building employees would use 30 spaces leaving 34 open and 7 on the street. Santangelo noted people living in the area need overnight parking and repeated the loss of parking on Ferry Street. Daley noted the potential for the lot as a gathering spot or for car repairs. Harding stated this will not be allowed. Santangelo stated the idea is great and he wants it to work.

Johnson stated there should be no parking lots on Main Street it is not good for retail. There is over a 30 foot break between the proposed building and the Professional Buildings. There is little support to take buildings out on Liberty Street. The building on 9 Liberty Street acts as a buffer between people and parking. People are saying the former Methodist Church (9 Liberty ST) has no value, which is not true it shields parking from the street. The proposal should go before other committees before reaching the Economic Development Committee for a decision too soon. Szewczyk stated the committee would not make a decision before the June 11 meeting. Warner discussed the permit process before approval. Harding stated the closing on the property did not occur. A member of the public stated how great it is to have a grocery store downtown and questioned the plan with gaps in the streetscape. Request to redesign the proposal and there is no shortage of parking downtown. People need to learn how to get around and parking should be underground with a deck for all day parking and the need to rethink the whole picture. Redford stated it is great to work with Harding. Redford bought the Professional Building in the 60's when 16-18 spaces were reserved as a percentage of the lot for the Middletown Press, which subsequently moved to their new building. Problems arise when visitors need parking space. If the spaces are turned loose they will be filled up with visitors. After hours parking is very haphazard and the police were tagging reserved spots when attorneys who believe the spaces were reserved on Saturdays are part of the workweek. Skaters use the lot on weekends. Redford requested the lights in the lot be fixed. Warner discussed the idea of parking passes for dashboards. Daley asked who prepared the contract. Warner stated the contract language was from the Blue Back Square Project and the Richman Project. Szewczyk questioned if the city attorney had reviewed the contract. Warner affirmed. Daley stated no decision on the project would be made tonight.

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Sataline stated his lease expires April 1, 2008 and he wants to stay in Middletown this is the perfect location and nothing else is suitable. Szcwzyk questioned foot traffic. Sataline stated it is but convenient parking is important. Sataline stated average sales in the store are much lower since customers have to carry heavy and bulky purchases to distant parking spaces. General discussion ensued about Liberty Street, which is too narrow for diagonal parking. Warner stated eliminating curb cuts on Main Street would make traffic circulation difficult sending traffic one way on Liberty. Sataline indicated convenient parking is important and not to force traffic onto one-way Liberty Street. Redford stated the drive to the cemetery is a 16-foot right of way that the city made into a parking lot entrance. Santangelo stated the loss of the 55 space Ferry Street lot has affected the people who live in the area. Radel stated downtown is impossible to navigate with no signs directing people to parking and spaces that don't accommodate SUVs. Daley observed that people like to park in sight of their destination. Redford stated a permit on the dashboard and that attorneys like to park close to the courthouse since they charge \$200/hour. Radel stated he lived in Westport where a ramp created parking above a lot. Dayharsh stated the building was designed based on economics of supporting the cost based on 3 stories and that 4 stories is economical but would impact parking even more. Daley stated the committee is not required to make a decision since other committees would review the plans and the proposal would return to the committee.

Daley questioned the 9 Liberty Street building issues. Warner stated Kronenberger would charge \$190,000 to move the building to Rapallo Ave and the building is advertised. Harding stated he spoke with 3 non-profits. Warner stated the renovation costs would be at least \$500,000. Daley asked about the Rapallo Ave location. Warner stated there are funds available for affordable housing projects and the Nehemiah would need help to move the building. If 9 Liberty was not moved, it would butt up against the new building. Warner stated 11 Liberty is a Connection project in a group of other properties in CHFA. It would take CHFA 2-3 years to switch the building with another building. Daley noted moving the building or storing it would add 10 parking spaces. Dayharsh noted the access issues and the dumpster. Daley noted the issue of moving v/s storage. Warner stated moving to Rapallo is better than never having the building come out of storage. Bauer questioned the status of the purchase transaction. Warner stated there is a glitch in the title regarding sweat equity. Harding stated he was not able to close on the gas station since a Phase I was not completed and the determination as to whether the property was an establishment. Szcwzyk questioned whether eminent domain was still possible. Warner stated the current owner ignored the DEP laws when he purchased the property and there are issues of how much he paid for the property. The city could proceed with eminent domain and receive the property for \$261,000. Daley noted the environmental problems. Bauer stated the prior minutes were kind to his issues regarding the process on the use of public resources. Daley stated the process is competitive. Bauer questioned if the city has a Plan of Development. Warner stated the city has a 1994 POD and there was a major draft in 2001-2 but P&Z decided they did not want a major rewrite of the POD but a concise revision of the 1994 document. Bauer requested the chair have a discussion of the process of using public resources. Daley state the process is by RFP but this case is unusual starting as a city project and then Harding got involved and it evolved. Daley stated learned a lesson maybe to have a competitive process. Daley asked Warner to supply information on other town's process of disposition of town property and place a future agenda.

F New Business

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- 1) **Main Street Façade Program: Main Street Market:** withdrawn

- 2) **Becky Thatcher Riverboat:** Sherman presented the interest in mooring the Becky Thatcher (BT) in Middletown on the CT River. The ship is 220 feet long 38 feet wide and 53 feet tall with 3 decks and is on the National Historic Registry of Places to Visit. The ship has 2 restaurants and is restored. Sherman stated a Middletown Museum would be on the ship and would attract children visitors. The ship has 15 cabins, which would be available as lodging. Szewczyk asked where the ship would dock. Sherman stated the ship would be permanently moored and the steam engines have been removed. The ship would be towed from West Virginia. Bibisi questioned if the ship would be stationary. Sherman affirmed stating the ship would compliment the Lady Katharine, which offers cruises on the river. Szewczyk asked who would build the docks and moorings. Sherman stated the BT would look to the city to build the moorings. Szewczyk questioned if there is room for the ship to moor. Sherman stated the Harbor Improvement Commission recommended mooring from the gazebo north towards the bridge. Szewczyk questioned if the Army Corps would be involved. Sherman stated that the Coast Guard would be involved and would require periodic inspection. Warner stated the Army Corp would not be involved. Sherman stated the Homeland Security would be involved. Szewczyk questioned the cost of the moorings. Bauer questioned whether the restaurants would raise a conflict with the Harbor Park Restaurant. Daley stated the time frame for resolving the Harbor Park lawsuit would be this year. Sherman stated the ship would be brought this year and operate next year. Bibisi stated Lady Katharine is working on mooring plans and this would be a similar mooring to the north. Daley questioned whether the BT would create competition under the agreement with Lady Katharine and what effect the BT would have on a Harbor Park Restaurant request for proposals. Bauer noted the BT would create an additional strain on parking. Daley questioned how many patrons the BT might have. Sherman stated the ship could accommodate 200 people. Warner stated patrons could use the tunnel. Daley stated this would force better maintenance of the tunnel. Bauer stated the tunnel has a lot of broken glass and the smell of urine. Szewczyk asked what the cost of the moorings would be. Warner stated he would get the costs of the Lady Katharine moorings. Szewczyk questioned how deep the moorings would be. Warner stated they are like telephone poles that are driven into the river. Sherman stated the ship has bubblers, which prevent ice from forming. The ship can accommodate 50 tie-ups for boats. Szewczyk asked what the next step would be. Warner stated the need to get a price on the moorings. Bibisi questioned the need to settle the Harbor Park Restaurant issue first? Warner stated having two ships is better than one. Bauer questioned whether this would ammunition to the opposition, the effect on the lease and any non compete issues. The committee asked Warner to explore these issues with the City Attorney and to determine the cost of the moorings. Daley encouraged Sherman to return in June. Daley asked why the ship was moving. Sherman stated she has considered other offers but wants the ship with her in Middletown where she resides. Sherman stated the BT would be an instant attraction and is on the National Historic Registry since 1993. The ship was two boats: the Mississippi II. Szewczyk remarked that Portland, ME has a dining ship in the harbor. Sherman stated the ship was in West Virginia for four years.

- 3) **Letter of support:** Warner discussed the draft letter to Congressional delegates from the Mayor and EDC for the support of Middletown projects. Szewczyk made a motion seconded by Bibisi to recommend the drafting of letters of support to Congressional representatives for City of Middletown projects. Warner stated that the two projects to seek federal funds are: 1) the completion of the bike path which fell short of funding and 2) the Capital Theater project for an Arts/Education bill. These projects were selected from a list submitted by the Mayor and

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determined to have the best chance of receiving federal funding. The committee voted to approve the motion.

- 4) **Acquisition of Washington Street property located between Old Mill Road and Bernie O'Rourke Drive by the State of Connecticut DOT:** Warner presented the offer from the State of Connecticut to acquire property along RT 66 and Bernie O'Rourke Drive for state highway improvements. Szewczyk made a motion seconded by Bibisi to recommend sale of the property to the State of Connecticut with the proceeds of the sale of \$2,900 to be deposited in the Economic Development Fund. The committee voted to approve the motion.

G Status Reports

- 1) **Economic Development Fund, monthly report**
- 2) **Economic Development Specialist Report**
- 3) **REINVEST Loan Program, monthly summary report**
- 4) **JOBS Loan Program, monthly summary report**

H Other: Szewczyk questioned whether the Economic Development Committee needed to act on the term of the Landmark Development status as Preferred Developer. Daley stated the MOU 2.2 required Economic Development Committee to approve or not the conceptual plan. Once this was done, MOU 2.3 sends the conceptual plan and the Economic Development Committee decision to the Common Council June 4, 2007 meeting for action.

I Adjournment: Bauer made a motion seconded by Szewczyk to adjourn. The committee approved the motion and adjourned at 7:11 PM.