

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

June 8, 1998

Present

G. Daley, chair
J. Vinci
R. Santangelo
S. Shapiro

Absent

S. Gionfriddo

Also Present

G. Weitzmann
C. Wilcox, Staff

G. Daley called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. in room 208 of the Municipal Building and opened the Public Session.

Gerry Weitzmann gave the committee a brief status update on the Armory project. He reported that Dan Friedman had been discharged and that the CDBG grant was under local control by working with the Municipal Development Office and the contractor himself. Tom Ford of Midfield Corp is now doing the marketing and he has a meeting Thursday with Tom and Mark Masselli regarding a potential tenant. Tom is making up a brochure and has an Internet site for marketing. Thomas J. Kronenberger & Sons is doing the exterior restoration work which is coming along very well. Mr. Weitzmann reported he had taken S. Gionfriddo through the building; and that the concept for its use has not changed. He is still giving consideration for the veterans including display space for memorabilia and probably a place to meet as well. He is also still talking about the community cultural center idea; but what he needs to get the project moving ahead is tenants for the historic buildings who can pay for the fit-out and operation of the building(s). He reported he was recently buoyed up by the movie theater proposal for Metro Square; and understands he needs permission of the Common Council to make any changes that address market conditions which are different from those proposed in the sales contract. Discussion ensued regarding parking and the combined parking at River's Edge which did not get built. The Middletown Press parking lot, however offers an opportunity for perhaps 70 spaces, and he is developing a strategy to acquire it. G. Daley pointed out that if it were for a private venture, the City could not acquire it but perhaps it could help facilitate an agreement. The parking needs will depend on the user ... the most recent interest was discouraged by the interior rehab costs. Discussion ensued on the need for a package of funding involving Wesleyan, the City and private investment of around \$2,000,000.00. Mr. Weitzmann reported that the non-profit Board, Armory, Inc., wants to reactivate and needs a goal of what they are expected to do. S. Shapiro asked about private foundations; G. Weitzmann responded he was renewing discussions with Wesleyan, and was considering a grants writer. G. Daley remarked that if the City has the opportunity to preserve a great building, it should; but the worst case would be to have the exterior done with no use inside. Soon it will be back in good shape, and the Economic Development Committee would be supportive of an active reuse. J. Vinci asked what the investment was so far which is in the area of \$240,000 from the owner and \$340,000 from CDBG (when the exterior is finished). It was noted that the sales agreement may need to be modified by the

Council if the venture becomes completely private; but the concept has always been to have commercial uses on Main Street with cultural, public interests in the drill shed. The Armory was considered a white elephant like the old Court House, but is now well on its way to regaining its position as an asset to the Downtown. There was more discussion about getting the building functioning in an economically viable way; and both G. Weitzmann and Tom Ford were invited back for the August 10th meeting of the Economic Development Committee. Public session closed at 7:50 p.m.

Golf Course:

R. Santangelo reported that at the recent Public Hearing of the Inland Wetland and Watercourses Agency, the wetlands people still have some reservations and there are those who would like Middletown to have more open space. However, the new plan seemed to be much more acceptable to the public than the previous one. The Committee had sent a letter of support and there was a resolution on the Common Council agenda emphasizing support. He felt more support from the environmental community would be helpful. J. Vinci noted the connection with the Newfield Street Plan of Development and new regs which was in the same area. The moratorium was now over, and Planning & Zoning was now working out the recommendations. He and a group of Newfield street owners were recommending that the first 33 pages of the plan be approved but the rest be refined based on testimony of users. The NPZ actually adds new uses to the former zoning as well as reduces curb cuts to lessen accidents. After discussion of the traffic problems the committee noted that Newfield St. is being used to bypass Rt. 9. The State will put in new bridges and left turn lanes. A point of contention is that the current MX zone allows no retail. The committee requested copies of the Newfield Street Plan as developed by Planning.

Old Business:

Items on the agenda memo from staff were acknowledged; no action was needed.

New Business:

Regarding the request of Paul Fazzino that the Economic Development Committee consider acquisition of his property, The committee requested a letter from him before entering into any meaningful discussion. They also felt there should be an appraisal and asking price. He wants to get rid of the building which is on the blighted structures list. Staff pointed out that his other option is to fix it up; but that would preclude access to interior parking from Rapallo Ave.

Minutes: A motion was made by S. Shapiro, seconded by R. Santangelo and voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the May 11, 1998 .

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:45.

Cynthia G. Wilcox, Project Development Manager

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