

City of Middletown, CT

Economic Development Committee

Minutes from the Economic Development Committee Meeting of September 14, 2009

<u>Present</u>		<u>Also Present</u>
G. Daley		W. Warner
R. Santangelo		R. Kearney
J. Bibisi		E. Roberts
H. Kasper		
D. Bauer		
Public: J. Pugliese, T. Davis, E. McKeon, D. Wheeler, M. Trowbridge, M. Millane, E. Hammerling and J. Leshane, A. Rich, K. Coley, R. Wilson, J. Gecewicz, A. Pioppi, M. Ennis and members of the public		

Minutes

- A Call to Order:** Kasper called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.
  
- B Public Session:** Roberts stated the city needs to enforce the maintenance obligations of the lease with Harbor Park restaurant. Roberts stated the former CVH lands were used for agricultural purposes to feed the patients at state hospitals and discussed the city's interest in maintaining open space i.e. Brocks and questioned the future needs of agricultural land in the city versus developing this land for a golf course. Roberts noted Warner provided a copy of the agreement with Mark Quattro and Bob Fusari for a golf course on Newfield Street.

Daley noted the 3 presentations to follow and requested the public comments be kept concise.

Wilson stated the CT Forest & Parks Association proposal is a great idea and questioned the golf proposal. Wilson noted the state had engaged and proposed many projects in the area including a 700 person prison, alternate incarceration and trash to energy power plant. In 2000, the state approached Wilson to acquire 100 acres of land at 7 times the value to create a 130 acre parcel for a school. Wilson stated he liked the idea of a golf course since it would put the land to use with improvements and make it more difficult for the state to try to acquire the lands. Susan Bysiewicz proposed the transfer of the lands to the city in 1991 but the process was held up. The state had considered a massive girls prison for the site. Wilson noted the compatibility of the hiking proposal with the other proposals and asked the committee to carefully consider the proposals.

Ennis read the 8/17/09 letter (Attached) to the committee from the Conservation Commission which was sent to EDC members. Ennis stated the golf course would not be in keeping with the desire for public access although the green plans for the course are laudable. Taxpayers and citizens support the Artfarm proposal.

Rich, Westfield Residents for Rational Development, stated the executive committee was not able to meet and craft an opinion. Rich questioned the golf course dual layout and noted the scale is not readable. Rich questioned the logistics and need for the shuttle service, size of the cart paths. Rich stated her credentials as a former past president of the Southern New England Women's Golf Assoc.

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Daley stated the course is 9 holes for play in both directions.

**C Minutes**

- 1) **August 10, 2009 meeting minutes:** Bibisi made a motion seconded by Bauer to approve the minutes. The committee voted to approve the minutes. Kasper abstained, Santangelo was not present.

**D Communications**

**E Old Business**

- 1) **Harbor Park Restaurant lease:** no discussion
- 2) **Midfield Corp: Property at the corner of College and Broad Streets: EXECUTIVE SESSION** CGS Chapter 14, Sec. 1-200, 6(B) strategy and negotiations with respect to pending claims or pending litigation to which the public agency or a member thereof, because of the member's conduct as a member of such agency, is a party until such litigation or claim has been finally adjudicated or otherwise settled. No discussion
- 3) **Lady Katharine Cruises lease:** no discussion
- 4) **Extension of Federal Transportation Funds**
  - a) **RFP for Riverview Arcade Garage;** no discussion
- 5) **RFP for former CVH lands**
  - a) **Connecticut Forest & Park Association:** Presentation of proposal with interest to feature the historic, agricultural and scenic and the desire to work in conjunction with other proposers. Leshane stated the Mattabeset was designated in March 2009 as a New England Scenic Trail. Noted the trail would be near downtown, open to the public, free and in a beautiful place. The trail would feature the historic Silvermine, golf, agriculture. Discussion of 30 year old pine trees planted by CVH patients which would be removed by golf course. The trail would provide views from Duck Hill since the golf course would remove trees to allow for a view. Additional features would include a red cedar forest and at parcel #5 a granite ledge, pond and gorge. A brook cascades over steps build by CVH patients along with the mix of forest and fields. Unused city land could provide a connection to the trails from downtown.  
  
Bauer noted the Pedal Power business and asked if the hiking trails and bikers could coexist. Lachane stated this would depend on the owners and the topography. Volunteers would maintain the trail.  
  
McKeon asked Daley if he could ask questions and Daley stated the questions could only come from the committee and if there was time at the end of the presentations then the public could ask questions.
  - b) **Artfarm:** Wheeler stated planning for the organization stated 10 years ago as a concept for theater and simple living combined with education and organic agriculture. In 2005 he and

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Trowbridge left Oddfellows Playhouse and began looking at farmland. Artfarm decided the need to create a brand and created Shakespeare in the Grove and Circus for a Fragile Planet. Artfarm has partnered with many arts organizations. Artfarm needs its own facility. Trowbridge stated parcel #5 looks like Vermont with 2 meadows, mostly woodland and a stream. Artfarm would build 2 barns: one for art education and 1 for agriculture education. Artfarm would like to connect to the trail system and would build a Braille trail and a child eco art trail for children to interact with the natural environment. It would take 3-5 years to develop the sustainable buildings with solar power and timber framed with hay bales for walls. They would dig a well and have composting toilets. There would be fundraisers for the organization. Artfarm would cleanup of the site, introduce livestock and plant crops. In 2012, the second barn would be built. Artfarm would engage inner city children and teach them where food comes from. Parking would accommodate 30 cars and there would be parking at Middlesex Community College where the Shakespeare program would continue. There would be workshops on green building, sustainability and Artfarm would be a community resource. Artfarm is developing a business plan with assistance from Paul Hughes. There would be weekend and weeklong retreats of 3-5 days with dormitory style housing. People would come from New York, Boston & Philadelphia. There would be ongoing workshops. The theater would seat 80 people. Artfarm would continue to send out touring shows and have a fall harvest festival. The farm would offer shares of CSA, sell organic produce to restaurants and offer pick your own produce.

Bibisi stated adjacent lands were private and allowed hunting. Discussion of hunting regulations. Wheeler thought the adjacent lands were public and stated the need to research the hunting issue. Bauer asked what term of lease Artfarm was requesting. Wheeler stated 99 years to offset the investment there is a need for a long term. Daley asked where Artfarm would find funding. Wheeler stated funds would be sought from private individuals, foundations, corporations and the government including CDBG to assist inner city youth with \$500,000 over several years. Kearney asked who would reside on the site. Wheeler stated a year round caretaker for the livestock and interns for 6 weeks in the summer. Wheeler is looking for a residence in a nearby house.

- c. **Arawana Golf Course:** Pioppi presented a PowerPoint presentation of the proposed Arawana Golf Course which would be a 9 hole course designed to be played twice. The land would not support an 18 hole golf course. The course would draw an estimate 25,000 rounds per year. Pioppi described as a freelance writer and author. Majority of articles written cover the golf course maintenance, design and construction industries, including a number for national and international publications that focus on environmentally-friendly golf course maintenance practices. Pioppi is a golf course architecture consultant and lecturer to regional golf course superintendent organizations focusing how to get the message to the public that superintendents are stewards of the environment. The idea began with 18 months of formulating a plan once Pioppi discovered the land in Maromas was available for active recreation. Architect Brian Silva walked the site to determine if was suitable for golf. Then toured the area with Mark Eitelman, owner of Agri-Scape Golf Course Construction to get an estimated cost. Consulted with David Southworth of Southworth Development and Southworth Golf about the viability of the project. Southworth Development continues in a consulting role. Pioppi described the history of golf in Middletown including Arawana Golf Club' Highland Golf Club, Minor Hills Golf Course.

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Benefits to the Community would include land that is used by a small minority of residents will become available to a wide variety, including the off-season. Affordable recreation -- \$20 for 9, \$38 for 18 holes of golf. Opportunity for youth to learn about, and to play. Hunter Golf Course in Meriden has a youth camp which draws about 100 children a year. A number of participants went onto careers in golf. This will be a home course at which Middletown High can practice and play. Arawana will work closely with Vinal, Xavier and Mercy as a practice course. Mentioned the PGA First Tee program and enhancing the city's quality of life.

Benefit to Businesses include adding to Middletown's draw as a "destination," the total experience of the city from restaurants to lodging to the arts. Golfers will patronize gas stations, convenience stores, etc.

Arawana and the Environment: the course will eliminate washouts and noxious weeds including: purple loosestrife, bittersweet, Japanese knotweed. The course will practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM) along with a grassing plan of using low water and pesticide use along with the protection of native grasslands and removal of few trees and energy-efficient buildings

The design harkens back to the Golden Era of golf architecture. The course will be fun and challenging with yardage between 5,000 and 6,950. The course plays differently the second time around -- four holes change par, four other play from a different angle.

The course will be visually appealing and unique to the region. There will be a practice and learning Area. The course will be open to the general public. There will be a 290-yard long driving range with a 50,000-square-foot practice tee and lesson tee. The area will allow for a short-game area and a large practice putting green. The clubhouse will be small with no locker room, a small restaurant, bar that will only be open when golf course is open and an adjoining tent for outings. There will be an open room that can be utilized by organizations looking to access the area.

Timeframe for the course is: Securing investors: 8 months; Permitting: 10 months;

Construction and grow-in: 18 months; First golf ball struck: fall of 2012

Conclusion: the course will provide: affordable recreation; increased business traffic for downtown; quality of life and a destination for travelers

Pioppi presented a Google Earth flyover of the proposed course.

Bauer asked what term of lease is requested. Pioppi stated 99 years because banks need a 65 year minimum for lending purposes.

Daley opened the discussion to the public.

Millane stated the soils can be wet and a golf course would remove thousands of trees. 38 acres of land are farmed and stated grades were not shown in the presentation. Millane state IPM uses more pesticides than farming.

Coley, member of the Conservation Commission, stated the need for ecologically sound projects with public access and maintained trails. Coley questioned the ability of a composting toilet system at Artfarm to handle the waste of 80 people. Trowbridge stated

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other organizations have experience with occasional large numbers of people and Artfarm needs to find out more about how this would work.

Coley asked how many cars would be at the sites. Artfarm stated 30 cars and using the Middlesex Community College parking lot. Arawana Golf Course stated 100 cars on an unpaved lot.

Rich questioned how many people would ride the golf shuttle v/s ride. Pioppi stated 70% would ride.

A member of the public questioned how many and how long the bridges would be at the golf course. Pioppi stated the two bridges would span streams and be approximately 50 feet long. Questions concerns wetlands: the projects would need wetlands agency approval. Statements were made that development would discourage certain species of wildlife and encourage other species. Questions about how golf carts would climb Duck Hill. Pioppi stated the cart path would wind around the hill. Question about where the golf course would get water. Pioppi stated the course might get water from the Kleen Energy project or a well. Question about how many people would use the driving range. Pioppi estimated 100 people per day.

Millane lease terms are 5-7 years versus a 99 year golf course lease.

A member of the public (Kerry) asked what criteria the EDC would use to evaluate the proposals.

Daley stated the new proposals have been heard and there are existing users of the lands. Daley recommended having PCD staff have further discussions with the new proposers to get additional detail and get answers to questions, analyze viability and compatibility and potential. EDC would discuss findings in one or two months.

Ennis suggested sending the public comments of the Maromas Study to EDC.

Daley asked the proposers what their timeframe on an answer from the city: Artfarm-2010; Golf Course-in limbo until the city decides; CT Park-when the city is ready.

Coley asked how the city will evaluate the proposals relative to compatibility with the land.

Daley stated the proposals would be reviewed by the Common Council. Warner stated EDC is charged with the lease or sale of city lands and the proposals would be reviewed by Planning & Zoning and Inland Wetlands Agency. Bauer questioned on how to proceed and how to consider the value of open space and farmland for the future of the city, and community gardens, open space and a lot of community sentiment about the lands.

Daley stated the committee needs to consider the current uses and the tremendous assets of the lands and allow more people to enjoy this beautiful area.

Kasper made a motion seconded by Bibisi to authorize staff to research the details of the new proposals along with the existing users and to report the research to the November EDC meeting.

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Daley requested staff submit the summary of comments of the Maromas Open Space Land Use Study to the committee.

- 6) **\*Amended\* REINVEST Loan Application: Cardinal's Nest, 129 Church Street \* \***  
**EXECUTIVE SESSION** CGS Chapter 14, Sec. 1-210, (8) Statements of personal worth or personal financial data required by a licensing agency and filed by and applicant with such licensing agency to establish the applicant's personal qualifications for the license, certificate or permit applied for. Bibisi made a motion seconded by Kasper to enter executive session. The committee voted to approve the motion and entered executive session at 8:10 PM. Bauer made a motion seconded by Kasper to exit executive session. The committee voted to approve the motion and exited executive session at 8:30 PM.

Bauer made a motion seconded by Santangelo to recommend to the Common Council for a \$25,000 loan to Cardinal's Nest Restaurant and to fund the loan with a transfer funds from the Economic Development Fund (EDF) Restaurant line item balance to the EDF Reinvest Loan line item and create a new line item for the Reinvest Loan subject to the following conditions: 1) the applicants and owner of 15 Goodyear Ave agree to pledge 15 Goodyear Ave. as collateral; 2) the applicants agree to pledge a lien on all fixtures and equipment of the restaurant; 3) the applicants agree to repay the city REINVST Loan funds prior to investors; 4) the city recommends that the applicants meet on a quarterly basis at the Middletown Small Business Development Center to review the quarterly financial statements; 5) the applicants agree to establish a direct payment account with the city's servicing bank. The committee voted unanimously to approve the motion.

**F New Business**

**G Status Reports**

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

**H Other:** The committee agreed to move the October 2009 meeting to October 13, 2009 due to the Columbus Day holiday.

**I Adjournment:** The committee adjourned at 8:35 PM.