

TOWN OF SALEM
Economic Development Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 15, 2022, 7:00 p.m.
Salem Town Hall, Conference Room 1

PRESENT

Steven Shelley, Chairman
Melissa Beers
Carl Fontneau
John Houchin
John Gilbert, Alternate
Alexandra Marsh, Alternate (7:05 p.m., seated)

ABSENT

Victoria Knopf

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Shelley called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

M/S/C: Fontneau/Houchin, to approve the January 4, 2022 Economic Development Commission Special Meeting Minutes, with the following amendments:

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Shelley called the meeting to order at ~~8:25~~ 7:25 p.m.

10(b) Welcome Packet

Commissioner Fontneau provided a brief background of his proposal to create a Welcome Packet for new ~~residents and~~ businesses,....

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 4-0, all in favor.

3. CORRESPONDENCE – none

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Steve & Zahi Merz, 6 Forsyth Road, of *Hola Beaches Travel, LLC*, a home-occupation business, stated that they moved to Salem from Niantic last year and expressed their interest in being a part of a local networking organization.

Chairman Shelley thanked them for attending the meeting, stated the challenges they have encountered in amassing the smaller and home-occupation businesses, and offered their assistance.

**M/S/C: Houchin/Beers, to seat Alternate Member Marsh for Full Member Knopf.
Discussion: None. Voice vote, 4-0, all in favor.**

5. SALEM BUSINESS AND COVID 19 IMPACT

- a. Update from Senator Paul Formica**
- b. Update from State Representative Holly Cheeseman**
- c. Update from Salem First Selectman Ed Chmielewski**

Chairman Shelley stated that he has spoken with Senator Formica, Representative Cheeseman, and First Selectman Chmielewski – all of whom discussed the importance of utilizing the Town’s ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Funds to encourage new businesses, support existing businesses, and encourage people to patronize local businesses. First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Salem Plaza, located at 1 New London Road, was temporarily closed during the weekend due to a water issue. The Town is working with the Uncas Health District and property owners to resolve the issue(s). Any suggestions the Commissioners might have to assist the tenants would be appreciated.

6. CT OFFICE OF TOURISM

a. EASTERN REGION TOURISM DISTRICT UPDATE

The Eastern Region Tourism District meetings are held quarterly. Their last meeting involved discussions regarding renaming the area so as not to favor any one town.

Commissioner Fontneau recommended the Commission draft a generic grant proposal preparing them for any grants that become available. Chairman Shelley will request a listing of the available grant opportunities from the District.

7. PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT (POCD)

Chairman Shelley provided a brief background of the POCD, an all-encompassing document explaining the Town’s land use-related goals and objectives for the next ten years. The document is drafted and approved by the Planning & Zoning Commission, with the input of the Town’s related entities and community. Commissioner Fontneau, who also serves on the Planning & Zoning Commission, requested the input of the Commissioners for the chapter related to economic development. He explained that the chapter, which was completely rewritten, includes the possibility of amending the regulations and rezoning and expanding the Town’s highway commercial zones. Commissioner Houchin added that part of the difficulty in inviting large businesses is due to the Town’s lack of public water and sewer.

8. SALEM BUSINESS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

a. In-Person Outreach

Commissioner Beers reported that she received numerous responses to a Facebook post she recently posted to try and help promote local businesses. She created and distributed the list of the businesses that were gathered from the response. The list will need to be verified as Salem businesses, though, she felt, it might behoove them to include the non-Salem businesses. She discovered that there is a large interest in developing a support system and proposed the possibility of utilizing the Town's Economic Development page as a resource. Ms. Merz proposed the possibility of organizing a networking group of the Town's businesses, stating that such a group would be very helpful. Commissioner Beers concurred. Commissioners Beers and Marsh will work together to gauge the public's interest in forming a business networking group through social media.

b. Welcome Packet

Commissioner Fontneau envisions the Welcome Packet for new and/or existing businesses to be comprised of a Welcome Letter, contact information to the relevant departments, a listing of the required permits, and helpful suggestions and information.

9. NEW BUSINESS

a. Salem Business Survey

The Commissioners reviewed the Survey drafted by Commissioners Houchin and Marsh. Commissioner Houchin stated that the goal of the survey was to obtain information through open-ended questions rather than simply checking off their responses. The Survey, which is comprised of six questions, will be created in Google Forms and promoted through social media. Commissioner Beers proposed the possibility of creating another survey that is directed to the residents to gauge how they could be encouraged to support their local businesses. Chairman Shelley agreed, stating that the goal of the *Salem Business & Services Directory* is to encourage the townspeople to shop locally. Commissioner Fontneau stated that the goal of the cluster business analysis is also to create that same synergy that could, possibly, expand outside of the local area. Commissioner Shelley proposed the possibility of trimming the Survey to five questions. He also stated his goal to utilize the EDC web and Facebook pages as an advertising forum for their local businesses by providing weekly updates and/or a weekly spotlight of a particular business.

b. ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Funding / Salem Small Business Assistance

Chairman Shelley reported that the ARPA Committee approved a proposed list of items for ARPA Funding. \$15,000.00 was allocated to Salem Business Development. The funds must be utilized by December 31, 2024. He requested the Commissioners

propose any ideas they might have that would help the town's businesses and drive additional business into town. The possibilities of hosting a Job Fair-type event or organizing a BNI (Business Network International)-type organization were raised. Commissioner Fontneau proposed the following ideas:

Salem Coupon Book – Creating and distributing a Coupon Book to be inserted as part of the Town's quarterly, *Our Town Salem*.

Buying Down Advertising Costs – Offering free business card size ads to home occupation businesses in the *Salem Business and Services Directory*.

Cluster Identification – Purchase a collective ad for cluster- or like-businesses.

Commissioner Marsh proposed the possibility of creating an emergency or rainy-day fund for businesses in need.

Commissioner Houchin proposed expanding upon and funding the *Salem Business and Service Directory*.

The item will be added to their next agenda for additional input.

Chairman Shelley reported that he is in the process of obtaining Economic Development Commission business cards for the Commissioners to distribute as they reach out to the town's businesses.

10. OLD BUSINESS – none

11. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Houchin/Beers, to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Salem