

**TOWN OF SALEM
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2020 – 8:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN HALL – CONFERENCE ROOM 1**

PRESENT

Edward Chmielewski, Jr., Chairman
Paul Robillard
Terri Salas (*via telephone*)

ABSENT

none

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Chmielewski called the meeting to order at 8:06 p.m.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – *led by State Representative Holly Cheeseman*

2. ADDITIONS/MODIFICATIONS TO THE AGENDA

The following items were moved up on the agenda and the succeeding items were renumbered accordingly:

- 6(b) Update from State Representative Holly Cheeseman
- 6(a) Update from Senator Paul Formica

3. SALEM BUSINESS AND COVID-19 IMPACT

a. Update from State Representative Holly Cheeseman

State Representative Cheeseman reported that she has had numerous conversations with the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Angela Adams who is very interested in bringing some of Chamber's expertise to Salem businesses. This week, she will be meeting with seCTer (Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region) Executive Director Nancy Cowser to discuss, in part, the organization's receipt of \$1.5 million in grant funds, \$400,000.00 of which is specifically earmarked for municipalities and economic development. She hopes to have more information regarding how municipalities and, possibly, individual businesses will be able to access the funds to help recover from the pandemic and build their resiliency to survive through various crises. She also met with Congressman Joe Courtney and the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition regarding the possibility of additional funding, including the issuance of another round of the PPP (Payroll Protection Program). She is hopeful that additional funds will be provided by the Federal Government to aid in the recovery process for both the State and its local businesses. The DECD (Department of Economic Community Development) is also discussing the possibility of offering additional funding to aid business recovery. With respect to the recent Eversource rate increase, the Energy and Technology Committee

presented a draft of a bill that would increase the accountability of such companies and require that their rate increases be based upon their performance.

In response to Commissioner Salas regarding any changes to the estimated number of businesses that would be closing due to the pandemic, Representative Cheeseman stated that the prolonged effect of the pandemic is increasing the chances of the negative impact on local businesses. The hospitality and entertainment industry will especially suffer as an estimated one-third of museums nationwide and up to 90% of Connecticut restaurants are expected to close. Hotels are also experiencing a record low number of occupancies. Due to a growing number of people who have become accustomed to the lifestyle changes, compiled by the public's fear and, in some cases, terror of the virus has not only had negative effects on the local businesses, the economy, and people's livelihoods, but is also resulting in an increase in suicidal ideations, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. She hopes that, with time, more knowledge is gained regarding the virus and the country will be able to move forward in a positive manner.

Chairman Chmielewski expressed his appreciation to Representative Cheeseman for all of her hard work and efforts for the Towns of Salem and East Lyme and the State of Connecticut, as a whole. Likewise, Representative Cheeseman thanked the Commission.

b. Update from Senator Paul Formica

Senator Formica thanked the Commission for the opportunity to provide a brief update. The primary conversations with the legislators at this time has revolved around the Eversource rate hike and their response to the outages during the recent storm. A request was made to PURA (Public Utilities Regulatory Authority) for a suspension to the recent Eversource rate hike and a Docket has been opened. Following the storm, another Docket was opened regarding their restoration failures. In addition, bipartisan legislation is expected to be drafted regarding Eversource's business model, the steps to be taken to protect the consumers against paying exorbitant rates and designating reimbursement rates.

Deregulation, battery storage, and the ISO Power market will be investigated as other possible options. The Appropriations Committee continues to hold hearings on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all of its agencies. As a result of the creation of the spending, borrowing, and volatility caps, the State has been able to increase its Rainy Day Fund. While things are moving forward in a positive manner, there continue to be major challenges as the pandemic continues. The underlying economy, he believes, is stronger than that of the recession and, as such, is hopeful that once the pandemic has passed and people are able to begin working once again, the economy will bounce back.

In response to Commissioner Robillard who questioned the funding the State will be providing to the towns and whether the State is expecting to cut expenses due to the decrease in tax income, Senator Formica stated that COVID-19 relief funds have been set aside to provide some economic relief, including for education and nursing homes. He will investigate whether any of those funds will be distributed directly to municipalities. With

respect to any expected cuts, he reported that the Governor is expected to request that all agencies cut their budget by 5% to 10%.

The Commissioners thanked the Senator for joining their meeting, providing an update, and for all of his hard work and efforts. Likewise, Senator Formica thanked them for the same.

c. Update from Salem First Selectman Kevin Lyden

In lieu of the First Selectman, who was unable to attend the meeting, Chairman Chmielewski reported that the First Selectman has been working tirelessly advocating for the town and its residents to receive any available assistance from the State Capitol. The town has been proactive and is equipped with the necessary COVID-19-related safety items for its staff. The Town Hall has continued to be open and serve its residents throughout the pandemic. He has also supported the small businesses in town, providing masks and other assistance. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Formica, Representative Cheeseman, and First Selectman Lyden, the town is in good shape at this time.

Commissioners Robillard and Salas concurred and extended their appreciation to the staff.

M/S/C: Robillard/Salas, to express their support and gratitude to Senator Paul Formica, Representative Holly Cheeseman, and First Selectman Kevin Lyden for their aid and assistance to the Town of Salem, including its small businesses, during the COVID-19 crisis. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor.

4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: JULY 20, 2020 REGULAR MEETING

M/S/C: Robillard/Salas, to table the approval of the Regular Meeting Minutes of July 20, 2020, with the following amendment:

10. SENIOR FRIENDLY / AGE RESTRICTED HOUSING DISCUSSION

~~Chairman Chmielewski continues to be discussed and of interest to the town and its residents.~~ *Chairman Chmielewski stated that the Commission continues to work behind the scenes as Senior Friendly/Age-Restricted Housing continues to be of interest to the residents of the town.*

Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor.

5. CORRESPONDENCE – none

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS – none

7. PUBLIC BLIGHT COMPLAINTS UPDATE

a. 1 NEW LONDON ROAD, SALEM PLAZA

Chairman Chmielewski provided a brief recap of the issues related to the Plaza and reported that the owner has contacted the First Selectman to discuss the items they are planning to

begin working on to address the violations against the Plaza. The Commissioners were pleased with the Plaza's visible improvements and look forward to its future.

8. CT OFFICE OF TOURISM

a. EASTERN REGIONAL TOURISM DISTRICT UPDATE

Chairman Chmielewski reported that the Board of Directors continue to hold virtual meetings and initiatives are expected to be introduced in the near future.

9. EDC BUSINESS & SERVICE DIRECTORY 2021

Commissioner Robillard reported that he would be contacting the printer to discuss the production of the 2021 Directory.

10. SENIOR FRIENDLY / AGE RESTRICTED HOUSING DISCUSSION – *no update*

11. SALEM BUSINESS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

The Commissioners continue to reach out and support the local businesses. Commissioner Salas expressed the continuing creativity of the town's businesses to survive during this difficult time. Chairman Chmielewski commended the efforts of the town's businesses to maintain a clean, healthy, and safe environment for the public and their staff as they adjust and work through the restrictions of the pandemic. He encouraged everyone to support the town's local businesses and eateries.

12. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Salas proposed the possibility of discussing the recruitment of additional members to serve on the Commission.

While the status of the town's annual Applefest event is unknown at this time, Commissioner Salas agreed to organize the presentation of the previous year's display. She requested that a table and/or stand to be acquired to better support the display. The item will be added to their next agenda.

13. OLD BUSINESS – *none*

14. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Robillard/Salas, to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 3-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

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