

**TOWN OF SALEM
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2020 – 8:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN HALL – CONFERENCE ROOM 1**

PRESENT

Edward Chmielewski, Jr., Chairman
Carl Fontneau
Paul Robillard
Steven Shelley

ABSENT

Terri Salas

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Chmielewski called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – *led by Commissioner Fontneau*

Chairman Chmielewski welcomed the Commission's newest members, Carl Fontneau, who previously served on the Commission, and Steven Shelley.

2. ADDITIONS/MODIFICATIONS TO THE AGENDA

The following item was added under item 12, New Business:

12(a) Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)

3. APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

M/S/C: Robillard/Fontneau, to approve the August 17, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes.

Discussion: None. Voice vote 3-0-1. Voting in Favor: Commissioners Robillard, Shelley, and Chmielewski. Voting in Opposition: None. Voting in Abstention: Commissioner Fontneau.

4. CORRESPONDENCE

a. Commissioner Salas sent her regrets for her absence due to a family obligation and welcomed their newest members. Chairman Chmielewski expressed his appreciation to her for work and efforts.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The possibility of instituting an EDC-specific town e-mail address for the receipt of public comments will be investigated. Public comments may also be received via the white dropbox located in front of Town Hall.

6. SALEM BUSINESS AND COVID-19 IMPACT

Chairman Chmielewski welcomed Senator Formica and Representative Cheeseman.

a. Update from State Representative Holly Cheeseman (*via speakerphone*)

State Representative Cheeseman reported that several bills were discussed and approved during the Connecticut General Assembly's September Special Session, including those related to the School Construction Grant, Absentee Ballots, eligibility of condominiums for the Crumbling Foundation Fund, Transfer Act updates, and the Take Back the Grid Bill. Nominations for both the Supreme and Appellate Courts were also approved.

b. Update from Senator Paul Formica

Senator Formica thanked the Commission for the opportunity to provide a brief update and for everything the Commission does for the town. He provided a brief history of the most recent rate increase by Eversource, which was approved by PURA (Public Utilities Regulatory Authority). The increase was due to increased usage related to the pandemic and the cost of transmitting the energy. As a result of the public outcry, the legislators submitted a written request to PURA to suspend the rate increase. The request was approved and a docket, enabling them to investigate the issue, was opened. Tropical Storm Isaias then hit the state, highlighting several deficiencies in the business workings of the energy companies, including poor communication and cooperation between the companies and the municipalities they service. As a result, an additional docket was opened to further investigate their response. The public is invited to join their Zoom discussions this week. Those wishing to present a comment must pre-register for the event(s).

The Energy Committee also drafted a bi-partisan Take Back the Grid Bill (H.B. 7006), reforming the manner in which rate increases are determined to a performance-based system. The Bill, which was drafted in conjunction with the Governor's office and CT DEEP (Connecticut Energy and Environmental Protection), will also begin the conversation regarding the future of utility companies. Similarly, the saving of Millstone, which provides up to half of the state's power and 1,500 jobs, also provides a bridge to the future as they move towards renewable energy sources.

Representative Cheeseman added that the state is seeking ways to link all of the energy markets in a positive, productive, and affordable manner. As part of their agreement with Millstone, the rate is guaranteed for a period of ten years, saving the rate payers approximately \$2 billion.

Chairman Chmielewski expressed his appreciation for their hard work during these challenging times and their efforts to work in a bi-partisan manner to support economic development-related issues that meet the needs of the state and the town's business and residents. The Commissioners thanked them for joining their meeting and providing an update. Senator Formica and Representative Cheeseman thanked them for the same.

c. Update from Salem First Selectman Kevin Lyden

A brief update was received from First Selectman Lyden and recited by the Chairman.

The First Selectman reported that the Salem Plaza, located at 1 New London Road, has reached zoning compliance; building code compliance issues remain. Several businesses have expressed their appreciation to the town for their diligence. He expressed his appreciation to the Commission for supporting their efforts. A much-needed proposed 48-unit age-restricted development has been submitted to the town. Included in the town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and Vision Report, the development will offer older residents with the option of downsizing and continuing to reside in Salem, resulting in a positive economic impact. Though not required to do so, *Two Brothers Restaurant* is temporarily closed as three employees tested positive for the coronavirus. Many positive comments have been received regarding the *Salem Herb Farm*, which recently opened for properly-sized events. Nancy Cowser, Executive Director for the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer), has offered to support the town by offering their services. He thanked the members of the EDC for their perseverance during these challenging times.

Chairman Chmielewski expressed his appreciation to the First Selectman for his persistence in working with the owner of the Salem Plaza. He also commended *Two Brothers Restaurant*, who are excellent business partners with the town, for their ongoing support and efforts to ensure the safety of their customers.

7. PUBLIC BLIGHT COMPLAINTS UPDATE

a. 1 NEW LONDON ROAD, SALEM PLAZA

Chairman Chmielewski added to the First Selectman's update, stating that the Plaza received a makeover as the result of the numerous complaints received by the residents, business owners, and employees and positive feedback has been received by the public regarding the improvements. Commissioner Fontneau added that the installation of the fence has made a big difference in the number and placement of signage on the property. Chairman Chmielewski added that the fence also improved the safety of the pedestrians by redirecting them to the crosswalks.

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 have been conducting the foundational work as they reorganize and reconstitute the group and share their ideas on how to boost tourism in the region.

9. EDC BUSINESS & SERVICE DIRECTORY 2021

Commissioner Robillard reported that an estimate of \$8,200.00 was received for the production of the directory, based on the current directory. Quotes with various options were also provided. Commissioner Robillard proposed the possibility of meeting with a small pool of businesses to discuss the cost of the ads. Chairman Chmielewski suggested forming a Business Advisory Committee comprised of member(s) of the EDC and four to five business owners. To obtain an

adequate representative of the town's businesses, Commissioners Robillard and Shelley will work together to formulate questions for a short online survey. Some businesses might also be visited in-person.

A list of the town's businesses was received by the Assessor's Office, which must be compared to their master list; additional information will also need to be sought. Commissioner Shelley volunteered to provide assistance, adding that he also received a list of approximately 660 existing and 16 new (established since January 1, 2020) Salem businesses from the state.

Also discussed was the possibility of publishing the directory at a later date and the possibility of obtaining a COVID-19-related grant to help subsidize the cost of the directory.

10. SENIOR FRIENDLY / AGE RESTRICTED HOUSING DISCUSSION

Commissioner Fontneau, who also serves on the town's Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Commission, reported that an application was received and a Public Hearing will be held in November for the construction of a proposed 48-unit one-bedroom age-restricted housing development on Route 82 on privately-owned property.

11. SALEM BUSINESS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

The Commissioners agreed to add to the following items to their future agendas:

- a. Electronic Survey (Commissioner Shelley)
- b. In-Person Outreach (Commissioner Robillard)
- c. Welcome Packet (Commissioner Fontneau)

12. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Planning of Conservation & Development (POCD)

Acting as the liaison between the P&Z and Economic Development Commissions, Commissioner Fontneau requested that the item be added to future agendas as the P&Z Commission is seeking the input of the town's boards & commissions for the 2022 POCD. He proposed they discuss and prepare the following recommendations:

- Conduct a cluster analysis and generate a list of cottage industries, i.e., home occupations
- Re-zoning of the available industrial parcels to highway commercial, which would be a more likely use of the property.
- Provide input for grant proposals for their activities

13. OLD BUSINESS – none

14. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: Fontneau/Shelley, to adjourn the meeting at 9:34 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 4-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by: Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Salem