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Economic Development Commission, Town of Stonington
DRAFT Special Meeting notes June 27, 2016

EDC members present – Blunt White, Kevin Bowdler, Danielle Chesebrough, Suzanne Lane, David Hammond, Pete Robinson. EDC members absent – Rich Balestracci, Virginia Abernathy, Joel Valenti, Ed Planeta, Ward Smith, Mark Dupont.

Town Officials present – First Selectman Rob Simmons, Warden Jeff Callahan, Director of Planning Jason Vincent. Chief of Police Darren Stewart.

Meeting convened at 5:35 pm, adjourned at 7:10

Forum Details
June 27 2016
5:30-7:00pm
The Velvet Mill

Hosted by:
The Velvet Mill and the Stonington Economic Development Commission

EDC Overview

The Velvet Mill is a wonderful historic asset that we would like to see remain part of our town. The only way for the Mill to survive is for it to be repurposed and be economically viable. The downside of economic expansion is that it creates activity, such as people coming and going and some noise depending on the type of business.

One of the Stonington Economic Development Commissions (EDC) mandates is to facilitate sustainable economic expansion in Stonington. Economic expansion can lead to an increase in the tax base, increased offerings of services and the addition of jobs, all of which are critical to the medium term survival of our Town. EDC focuses on industry clusters such as tourism, retail, elder care, manufacturing, fishing and farming etc. The group that organized tonight's meeting is specifically focused on Stonington Borough and the Velvet Mill.

In discussions with the Mill's Property Manager Eric Pivco, it was noted that the neighbors are critical to the successful expansion of the Mill. It was also noted that many of the existing tenants rely on customers coming to the Mill, but have not been able to achieve the traffic that expected and are struggling. For the past six years the Mill has been operating at a financial loss. The turnover of tenants is also high and it is a constant struggle to find replacements. Given the various issues facing the Mill, the two came together to organize a Community Dialogue where local residents, mill businesses, local officials and other relevant stakeholders could gather to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the Velvet Mill.

The dialogue was set-up to provide an opportunity for understanding and support, it is a good faith effort to assist in managing concerns of all parties, the Velvet Mill managers, the neighbors and the tenants. The EDC is committed to facilitate any topics raised that are consistent with its mission of economic expansion in Stonington.

About the Velvet Mill

For over 12 years the Velvet Mill has been home to artists and craftsmen including painters, photographers, printmakers, fiber artists, potters and sculptors, making the mill a vibrant creative community. It also is home to numerous small businesses, including an artisanal bakery, cheese shop, award winning brewery, organic Juice maker, vintage boutiques and a yoga studio.
The Mill provides a unique opportunity to provide locals and tourists a like with local goods and services, as well as more jobs in Stonington. In an ideal world, all of the Velvet Mill would be

fully rented to an eclectic group of tenants. Some as artists' studios, some as small manufacturers, yoga studios, retail outlets and eateries. The vision of the Mill management is to have a group of curated tenants that reflect the artistic nature of the Mill's core tenants.

A vibrant community is able to provide local goods and services for their own community. Not all tenants will be providing a good or service for Stonington residents, but it is an asset if you can live within walking distance of a convenience store or a craft brewery or a farmers market. More business located in the Velvet Mill will also bring additional employees who might live in our town and will definitely spend some of their income in our town.

A fully tenanted Mill with a mix of business that attracts customers to the Mill will make the Mill economically viable. This will allow for the ongoing capital improvements that an old Mill requires. A half empty Mill, puts the entire Mill at risk. Un-used and under used old buildings create a fire risk, an eye-sore and habitat for vermin.

The Historic Perspective

Liz Wood from the Stonington Historical Society gave a brief overview of the history of the Mill. She noted that in 1888 the Mill was built as partnership between the town and private investors to attract economic development for the town. The Mills at that time were a center for work, culture and community. She encouraged people to visit the Got Mill website, http://cttrust.org/cttrust/page/got-mill-presentation to learn more about the CT Trust for Historic Preservation program on Mills.

What the Velvet Mill means to the town

Borough Warden Jeff Callahan and First Selectman Rob Simmons shared their views on why the Mill was an important part of the community. Their points centered around the town's declining population and the need for the right kind of businesses moving into the Mill. In 1900, according to the census, the population of the borough was over 2,000 people, now it's 60 percent less, about 940 people. The town needs successful business to allow people to move (often times back) here and thrive. Jeff noted that it can be hard for government to legislate the perfect balance and that people need to come together and figure out a way to achieve balance. Rob expressed his view that there was considerable downside to the Mill not being able to support vibrant local artists and businesses, which was an empty Mill. He noted that the *East Elm Street* group had legitimate concerns regarding traffic, noise and alcohol. He went on to reflect that these are not new issues to the town, and was confident a solution could be found. He left the group with a parting message, "We may be two states and two towns, but one community".

Mill Management

Lisa Konicki, President of the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce and Dr. Michael Sullo, owner of the School of Fine Art (VM tenant), shared their personal and professional experiences working with Eric Pivco, Property Manager of the Velvet Mill. They spoke of his passion and intentions for the Mill project. How often he brings the perspective of the local neighbors into his work and negotiations for the few events the Mill hosted each year. They shared that Eric has been slowly working on improving the Mill's infrastructure. Doing pieces at a piece at a time. Upgrading the electrical, improving the fire safety, bringing it up to standard. The work is slow

and expensive, but its happening. He reflected that without investment it was an accident waiting to happen.

Businesses depend on the Mill

Robert Webb, owner of Charter Oak Scanning, shared his experience as a business operating in the Mill for three years. He wanted to be in Stonington and was looking for a place to incubate his small business. He reflected that this town is not an easy place to incubate a business and the Mill provided low rent and flexibility to move as you grow. He has grown from a 400 sq. ft. space to now having over 1,000 sq. ft. Since starting he has hired three people now, who all live in our town. He pointed out that he and others rely on foot traffic from bakery, brewery and farmers market. He also pointed out that his typical customer is over 40 and have a hard time finding the Mill due to lack of signs.

Morgan & Bekah, owners of POORMORGAN (tee-shirt manufacturing) have been in the Mill for four years. They reflected that the Velvet Mill provided a unique opportunity for businesses like theirs, which is considered light industrial use. In addition to being tenants, they are also neighbors as they live across from the Mill. In speaking with other neighbors she felt that those in the Mill and living around it all want the same things. They felt positive that the Mill could thrive and be a vibrant part of neighborhood, everyone working and visiting the Mill just needed to recognize and respect that the Mill sits within a neighborhood. Their shop employs four people.

Discussion with the local community

Jason Vincent, Director of Planning for the town of Stonington, led the discussion with the local community members. He pointed out that this was the first stage in a longer process. Today neighbors were asked to share their concerns. This would be information gathering the 'inventory' stage, then the EDC working with town officials and Mill Management would work on the 'assessment' phase and lastly together with all stakeholders put together 'strategies'.

The first neighbor who spoke was Rory Contin representing the newly formed "East of Elm Neighborhood Advisory Council" . She noted that the invitation to join the group was open and they welcomed new members, including Mill tenants. She noted that they were supportive and proud of the Mill as part of the history of neighborhood, and the group is in favor of its continued growth as a community of artists, artisans, and craftsmen. The concerns lie mainly in the impact certain mill activities may have on the quality of their homes and lives. The group has three main goals: Preserve a safe, quiet, family-friendly neighborhood and the historic nature of the community; Ensure that we have a unified and constructive voice in decisions affecting our neighborhood; and foster a neighborly and sustainable community in which we respect and support one another. They felt confident we could find a 'Win all Solutions'. The group had come together to identify five key concerns:

- Traffic- the need for traffic calming measures to address speeding and parking congestion
    - Comments were made about Mill employees parking on Bayview, people speeding, the heavy use of street parking during the Farmers Market. The inability for a fire truck to get down the street when cars are parked on both sides of the street.

- Signage - adherence to existing regulations/laws as signs for the mill often appear in neighbors' lawns.
- Alcohol - the impact of any increased on premise consumption
- Noise and Mill hours of operation
    - Others commented that noise of events had not been an issue, but people leaving the event were often loud.
- Security and oversight of events
    - An additional concern included wanting a fence around the pond.

Additional neighbors and Mill tenants spoke and all seemed focus on the same issues noted above. As one neighbor pointed out, they were trying to get ahead of potential issues as well as address current ones. They want to see the Mill expand, but can see issues around safety and traffic becoming increasingly important as it grows.

In closing Police Chief Darren Stewart shared that due to neighbor request a temporary speed camera was put in and the finding showed the average speed is 22 mph (speed limit is 25). He also noted that in six years there had only been 15 calls for police service. He noted that while neighbors should call the police anytime they feel it is warranted, in general you don't want the police to manage this as their role is to take enforcement. He urged the groups involved to find a balance and identify solutions together. In his closing remarks he noted that if the groups working on these challenges could solve three core issues, the others problems would likely dissolve according.

Next Steps

The EDC in coordination with the Borough and Town, Mill Project Manager, neighbors and Mill tenants will ensure all the issues raised are reviewed. After doing a full inventory, they will identify strategies to address these challenges, who can do what and with what resources. This will include further conversations with Eric Pivco, Borough and Town officials and the Police Commission.

Respectfully submitted
Stonington EDC, Danielle Chesebrough, member

Attachments:
East of Elm Neighborhood Advisory Council Charter
NAC list of Areas of Concern

East of Elm Neighborhood Advisory Council Charter

Purpose

Stonington residential and commercial neighbors in the area east of Elm Street formed the *East of Elm Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC)* to ensure representation of the neighborhood's interests and influence decision-making in regard to proposed changes that may affect the neighborhood.

Goals

- Preserve a safe, quiet, family-friendly neighborhood and the historic nature of the community.
- Ensure that we have a unified and constructive voice in decisions affecting our neighborhood.
- Foster a neighborly and sustainable community in which we respect and support one another.

Values

- Integrity—do the right thing for the neighbors, the neighborhood, and the town
- Constructive relationships—respect one another and our Town of Stonington and Stonington Borough officials
- Shared accountability—everyone is accountable for identifying potential impacts to the neighborhood, informing the NAC, and ensuring a unified NAC voice with Town and Borough officials
- Collaboration—work well together and strive to achieve all-win solutions

Norms

- Keep discussions focused.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Encourage everyone's ideas.
- Explain reasons behind positions or opinions.
- Keep conflict in the open, not hidden.
- Check to be sure all can support a decision.
- Hold monthly meetings with agendas based on NAC priorities.
- Attend meetings and be on time.
- Follow through on commitments/action items.

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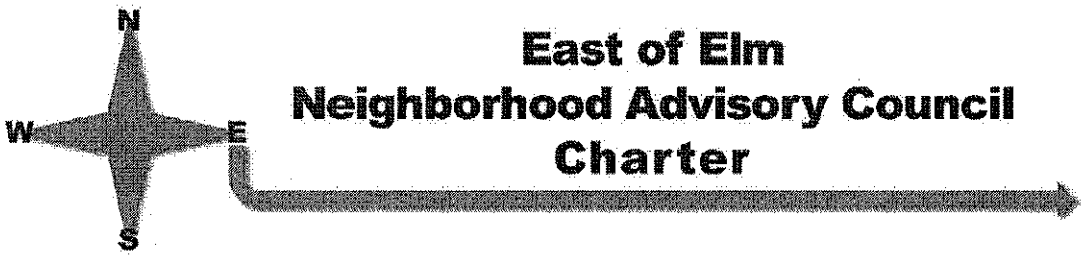

Members

Founding NAC members are:

George Avery	Jim Ceil	Tom Frohnapfel	Carol Martin	Peter Victoria
Jeff Ball	Sylvia Christiansen	Steve Grover	Alicia Rampolini	Andy Williams
Jill Bessette	Rory Contin	Rebeckah Kepple	Bob Sundman	
Keith Bessette	Jeanie Doucette	Cathy Klein	Janet Sundman	
Debbie Ceil	Richard Doucette	John Malmros	Margaret Victoria	

New members are welcome to join the council at any time.

Roles

The following roles will rotate quarterly.

Facilitator

- Schedule, plan, and coordinate team meetings and activities.
- Ensure an agenda is created and distributed before meetings.
- Monitor progress toward goals.
- Identify NAC representatives for specific meetings with Town and Borough officials and other business and government entities.
- Disseminate to NAC members the outcome of discussions with Town and Borough officials and other business and government entities.
- Ensure NAC members follow-up on commitments/action items.

Scribe

- Capture critical elements of discussion during NAC meetings.
- Record decisions made and action items.
- Distribute minutes to NAC members within 48 hours of a meeting.

Decision-Making

NAC will reach decisions via a simple majority rule. If a simple majority cannot be achieved, decision-making will defer to the Facilitator.

Charter Durability

This charter will be reviewed semi-annually and revised as required.

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To all NAC members,

Below are our areas of concern we hope to discuss at Monday's meeting with the suggestions and points that were raised at Thursday's meeting.

Our overall sentiment is "How shall we work together to solve our issues?"

Stonington Borough's Planned Industrial Regulation's Statement of purpose: "It is further recognized that any development in industrial areas must be compatible with adjacent uses and that industrial sites must be made as attractive, quiet and otherwise unobtrusive as their nature allows."

Traffic: Need for calming measures to address speeding and parking congestion

- No parking on mill side of Bayview Ave
- Residents only signs on opposite side

Signage: Adherence to existing town and state regulations

- No signs on private lawns or town property without proper permits
- Who is responsible for enforcement?

Alcohol: Impact of increased on-premise consumption

- Promoting artist/artisan/craftsmen aspect rather than restaurant/alcohol
- Find out what zoning restrictions for restaurants/bars are in place now
- Bring up the fact that initially Mill tenants were required to produce a "good" such as cheese, baked goods, T-shirts, art, etc
- Address the concern of developing the mill as a drinking destination
- Added traffic associated with high impact establishments (bars/restaurants) such as daily deliveries of food, alcohol, produce, garbage truck traffic, workforce traffic

Noise and Mill hours of operation

- Adhering to existing noise ordinances of 10 pm
- Music being indoors with doors closed so as not to infringe on neighbors
- Find out what rules/protocol Mill management has in place for hours of operation and on-site conduct

Security and oversight of events

- Having Mill management on site to oversee events and enforce noise and hours
- Cameras installed to monitor mill activity
- After hours security concerns
- Mill management accountable for what happens at the mill
- *We'd like to better understand your approach to security*
- *We'd like to be aware of what's going on and be fully informed of events*

Encourage sustainable entities such as

- Touch-down space for entrepreneurs who work from home
- Artist/artisan/craftsmen low impact tenants