EAST HADDAM VILLAGE REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE

EHVRC

Members	**Alternates**
Bill Gerrish, Chair (Res.)	J.T. Smith (Res.)
Melanie Kolek, Secretary	
Will Brady	
Bob Casner	
Jim Curtin	
Randy Dill, Acting Chair	
Mark Walter	

09 December 2021

The Honorable Irene Haines, First Selectman
Erik Dill, Selectman
Theresa Govert, Selectman
Town of East Haddam
Municipal Office Complex
1 Plains Road
Moodus, Connecticut 06469

RE: East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee – Final Report

Dear Members of the Board:

On Monday, November 29, 2021, a quorum of the East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee (EHVRC) met in a Special Meeting to hear an update from the First Selectman following the joint meeting of the Selectmen and the Board of Finance to consider a referendum vote to sell the town's village property and form a Redevelopment Agency, as recommended by EHVRC in its letter to the Board of Selectmen on 03 October 2021. We believe it is important to note that EHVRC, at its meeting on October 28, 2020, voted to recommend Centerbridge Group LLC (CBG) to be the developer, that the town enter into negotiations with CBG to proceed with the development and that the town "secure citizen approval" (see EHVRC minutes of October 28, 2020).

Following the First Selectmen's report and confirmation that further action on the EHVRC recommendation was tabled, the committee had a lengthy discussion on its work to date, including difficulties finding an interested developer, the need for East Haddam voters to weigh in on whether Centerbridge Group, LLC should or should not move forward with their proposal, and public misconceptions about the municipal regulatory process which could lead to sale of the land and an approval of a development project. Members concluded that the EHVRC has completed, to the best of its ability, the charges it was given when it was reconstituted in 2017 from an earlier committee of the same name.

For purposes of this report and we offer for your review the charges we were given and action(s) taken (bold and underlined) by this committee:

EAST HADDAM VILLAGE REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE CHARGE

RESOLVED: That the East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee (EHVRC) is hereby established for the purpose of oversight and implementation of converting the town office site property into a commercially viable area in East Haddam, using the East Haddam Mobility Project, East Haddam Village Ad Hoc Committee report and the Town Offices Site Re-use Study as guiding documents. (**Response from EHVRC: It is important to note the words**

"commercially viable" in this first paragraph of our charge. Adhering to this provision of our charge, the committee found and recommended a developer that proposes a "commercially viable" project with tax revenue benefits to the town.)

Section 1. The EHVRC shall consist of seven (7) members and two (2) alternates, to be appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The term of office of said members shall continue until the project is complete and accepted by the town and the committee is discharged, except that any member may resign or be removed by a vote of the Board of selectmen at any time. The Board of Selectmen shall fill any vacancy on the EHVRC. The EHVRC shall select its own chairman and secretary. (**Response from EHVRC: Owing to the BoS and BoF decisions on November 17, 2021 not to bring the Centerbridge Group LLC proposal to the voters for a decision to move the project forward, the project cannot be considered "complete", leaving the committee in limbo.**)

Section 2. The members of the EHVRC shall not receive any compensation for their services. The necessary expenses of the committee shall be included in the estimated project cost and any appropriation to be requested by the EHVRC from the town. All records of the EHVRC shall be filed with the Town Clerk and open to public inspection in accordance with applicable state statutes. (**Response from EHVRC: All of the activities of the EHVRC, minutes, meetings and public forums are a matter of public record as required by state statutes.**)

Section 3. The EHVRC shall have the following powers and duties:

a) To consult with the Board of Selectmen, and other East Haddam Village stakeholders including but not limited to: Goodspeed Opera House, Town Officials and Commissions, Village area business owners, residents and the Connecticut Department of Transportation concerning plans for the commercial enhancement of East Haddam Village; (**Response from EHVRC: The committee did indeed consult with entities mentioned herein and invited residents to several public forums to enlist public input. Also, members of the committee include representatives from the Economic Development Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, Historic District Commission and the Inland Wetlands Commission. The First Selectman was a frequent attendee of our meetings along with attendance of the Chairman of the Board of Finance. And the public was encouraged to attend and comment at all of our meetings.**)
b) To investigate site ownership alternatives and their short and long term economic impact and report findings to the Board of Selectmen; (**Response from EHVRC: The committee spent significant time debating and considering sale vs. lease of the property to a developer. In the end it was the consensus of the committee through its own research and discussions with the developer that sale is the only option that the developer will consider.**)
c) To report on all progress to the East Haddam Economic Development Commission monthly and to the East Haddam Board of Selectmen quarterly; (**Response from EHVRC: The Chairman of the Economic Development Commission is a member of EHVRC. And, as noted earlier in this report, the First Selectman was a regular attendee at the EHVRC meetings. The presence of both these individuals fulfill the requirements of this subsection of our charge.**)
d) To interview interested developers and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen; (**Response from EHVRC: Through established procedures of the RFQ and RFP, the lone and only interested developer, Centerbridge Group LLC was interviewed, accepted and recommended to the Board of Selectmen.**)
e) To review and approve all plans for said project, and to supervise and/or provide for the

proper supervision and coordination of the project in the Town's best interest; (**Response from EHVRC: The EHVRC did, indeed, review the project proposal from Centerbridge Group LLC. We did not "approve plans" or "supervise" the project. The Centerbridge Group LLC proposal has not been presented to voters, through a referendum, for the sale of the property as recommended by EHVRC. Without a positive endorsement from voters, no "plans" will be prepared by the developer. If a positive vote, the developer would then prepare full scale "plans" which must go through the regulatory approval processes of P&Z, Historic District Commission, Building Department, Fire Marshall and others before a "Purchase and Sale Agreement" can be signed to turn the property over to the developer. It is important to note that the public has numerous opportunities to weigh in on the "plans" at each step of the regulatory process which will takes months! Sale of the property cannot, will not occur until all regulatory agency approvals are in the hands of the developer!**)

f) To coordinate with auxiliary projects, including village parking and increasing commercial development; (**Response from EHVRC: Centerbridge Group LLC has endeavored to bring into the development of the village other properties outside Town ownership to make the overall project viable for development. The Centerbridge proposal addresses parking as part of its endeavor. The primary focus of EHVRC has been the Town owned property which must first move to a vote of Town residents.**)

g) To provide to the Board of Selectmen proper estimates of the project cost and a written request for an appropriation equal to the amount estimated necessary to complete the town's portions of said project, if any, in a timely and workmanlike manner; (**Response from EHVRC: Centerbridge Group LLC has provided a preliminary project cost of fifty million dollars. Both the BoS (under Rob Smith) and the BoF (under former chair Bill DiCristofaro) were provided this number as well as estimates of auxiliary costs for road realignment, street lights, sidewalks etc. No appropriation was provided to pursue details of costs. No request for public funds has been made for any auxiliary costs.**)

h) To assist in the application for any grants that may be available to the Town for said project, and provide or execute any necessary documentation for such grant application; (**Response from EHVRC: It was suggested that grants may be available for such things as road improvements, sidewalks, street lighting etc. Until the Centerbridge proposal is approved, applying for grants is premature.**)

i) Upon the approval of said appropriation, and subject to the limits thereof, to contract with architects, engineers, contractors and others in the name and on behalf of the town to design, build and complete the town's portions of the project, if any, and approve all design and construction expenditures for the project. (**Response from EHVRC: There is no project until the voters approve the Centerbridge Group LLC proposal to purchase the Town property and plans are submitted by the developer to the various regulatory agencies for their approval. Without an approved "plan" there is no way to know what improvements would be needed outside of the Town property that might fall on the Town to complete.**)

Section 4. Upon completion of the commercial development revitalization, the Committee will make a complete report and accounting to the Board of Selectmen. (**Response from EHVRC: "Completion of the commercial development revitalization" is now in limbo. Centerbridge Group LLC has suspended any further work on their proposal until the Town moves to a vote on purchase of the property. Further, the BoS and BoF appear to be committed to the idea of a "Redevelopment Agency" to move village revitalization to "completion". That said, there is nothing more for EHVRC to do, and without further**

direction from the Board of Selectmen, we come to the end of our work under the charges given us.)

As acting chair for the last two meetings of EHVRC, I extend a sincere thank you to members of the committee for the many hours you all have dedicated to this important work for the town and its future.

With submittal of this report, the EHVRC gives notice that its final meeting of the year, December 22, 2021 is hereby cancelled. Further, we give notice to the Town Clerk that we will not be submitting a meeting schedule for 2022.

Sincerely,

Randolph (Randy) Dill
Acting Chairman

CC: Deb Denette, Town Clerk
EHVRC: W. Brady, R. Casner, J. Curtin, M. Kolek, M. Walter
Jeff Riley and Mary Wilson, Centerbridge Group, LLC