Town of East Haddam
Redevelopment Agency
May 23, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER
Mr. Lord called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Municipal Office Complex.

ATTENDANCE
Redevelopment Agency Members: Andrew Lord, James Curtin, Randy Dill, Caitlin Taylor, Thomas Sevigny, Jacquelin Nowell, John Cotter, William DiCristofaro, and Harvey Thomas-BOF Liaison.

Absent Member(s): Gary Laskowski and Cameron Hendry.

Other(s): First Selectman Irene Haines, David Byrd-Goodspeed Managing Director, Bob Casner, Jim Damicis-Camoin Associates, approximately 2-3 townspeople, and Ruth Ziobron via YouTube.

2. Approval of Minutes
a. April 11, 2024
Motion to approve the minutes as presented.
Dill/Cotter Passed unanimously.

3. Committee Reports
A. Executive
i. No report.
B. Environmental
- Mr. Cotter reviewed the Environmental Assessment RFP and RFQ.

C. Finance
i. Discussion of TIF proposal Camoin Associates -Tax Incremental Financing

Mr. Damicis reviewed the draft framework and policies for a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Master Plan for the Village area of East Haddam. These documents are filed at the Selectman's office.

The Agency discussed finalizing the TIF (Tax Increment Financing) proposal and shared thoughts on extending sewer lines and finding new areas for development. Mr. Lord clarified that sewer lines don't go past Ray Hill.

Mr. Lord raised concerns about generating enough revenue to support aTIF. He stated that the limited 2.7 acres may not justify implementing a TIF. He stated it was essential to consider the potential return and weigh the benefits against the costs. Mr. Damicis stated that a TIF policy and a TIF plan were distinct; the TIF policy referred

to the overall framework, while the TIF plan outlined specific details for a particular project.

First Selectman Haines asked if a Tax Incremental Finance policy could be created to incorporate various zoning areas within town to target commercial and industrial zones strategically. Mr. Damicis replied he would need to check the legal requirements in the State Statute. He suggested creating a master framework and guidelines to guide all future District development, explaining the importance of consistency with zoning policies. He cautioned against misallocation of funds between areas.

Agency members discussed the need for a TIF policy to signal a commitment to developers, other viewpoints suggested that setting aside funds annually could achieve the same goal without creating a TIF. Agency members agreed on completing phase one.

ii. Grant Research status report

Victoria Ebright-Grant Consultant presented grant opportunities.

- State Historic Preservation Office (SHIPO) grant provides up to $20,000 but requires a one-to-one match. The timing of the matching portion by the town will be researched. It can be used for preservation consultants, feasibility plans, or redevelopment plans. The SHIPO office offers a list of qualified consulting firms for conducting studies, creating reports, and providing renderings. The deadline for the application is June 14th. Ms. Ebright advised submitting this application promptly for full consideration. Stipulations or restrictions possibly placed on the scope of the project will need to be researched.
- Community Heart and Soul, founded by Lyman Orton of the Vermont Country Store, utilizes a four-step process: Imagine, Connect, Plan, and Act, aiding over 100 small cities and towns across the U.S. They offer $10,000 seed grants for resident-driven revitalization efforts, targeting communities with populations between 2,500 and 30,000. To be eligible, communities must have a leadership team, support from local leaders, and financial backing. Applications are reviewed monthly, followed by interviews for successful candidates, with funding typically secured within 30 to 60 days. While there's never been a rejection for seed grants, a matching fund is required.
- U Main Street Investment Fund, offering up to $500,000 per project. Although this funding is designated for projects with established plans, initiating dialogue is the first step. A letter has been drafted and is recommended for review and submission by the First Selectman's office to initiate discussions for potential future funding.
- State Farm offers the Good Neighbor Citizenship Company Grant for neighborhood revitalization and small business development. Details about this grant are limited online as it is invite-only. However, submitting a letter of intent is recommended as it entails low effort but holds the potential for significant opportunities.

Motion to approve the second phase for the four grant components presented for approximately $4,000.

Agency members discussed the purpose and implications of the proposed grants, notably the Community Heart and Soul grant and the Shipo grant. Concerns were raised about potential constraints of the grants, such as being locked into decisions like preserving buildings. Ms. Eright highlighted the flexibility of the Community Heart and Soul Grant. There was confusion regarding the Shipo grant's focus on historic preservation, particularly concerning the Riverhouse, with worries about being locked into preserving it and potential limitations on development opportunities. It was noted that all grants require town approval at a town meeting.

DiCristofaro /Cotter Passed unanimously.

D. Community Engagement

i. Comments on East Haddam News/Meeting Minutes

- An article from the April meeting was submitted to the East Haddam News but not published.

E. Legal

- No report.

6. Old Business

a. Discussion regarding potential recommendation to the Board of Selectmen to purchase one or more of the inactive properties in the Village district.

Tabled.

7. New Business

a. Discussion regarding new RFP.

Mr. Lord stated since Mr. Riley had withdrawn his interest and expressed no further plans, should the Agency issue a new Request for Proposal (RFP). The new RFP would be simplified, stating that the site is available for sale, subject to the approval of the site plan. He acknowledged that leasing the site wasn't feasible, as potential investors would prefer ownership.

The overall direction of the Agency was discussed. There was an emphasis on the need for clear procedures and communications with developers to avoid misunderstandings like those encountered with Mr. Riley. Mr. DiCristofaro proposed that the executive committee initiate discussions on refining the process for developers and establishing clear objectives. Mr. Cotter stressed the importance of actively engaging with stakeholders like the Goodspeed Opera House and suggested dedicating separate meetings or agenda items for such discussions.

Mr. Dill stated that he believed that the agency was unwilling to work with Mr. Riley, which led to his withdrawal from the project. He suggested that the agency listened too much to negative influences and did not provide Mr. Riley with a fair opportunity to collaborate. He suggested conducting an after-action review to learn from the experience and improve the processes for future developers.

There was discussion about the complexities of the real estate market and the challenges of mixed-use development, particularly in attracting retail tenants. The conversation also touched on the challenge of environmental remediation and the need for a comprehensive plan to address issues like arsenic contamination.

8. Public Comment

Mr. Casner expressed strong support for expanding the TIF program to include all three commercial districts, emphasizing the need for equal treatment and incentives to attract development. He highlighted the importance of infrastructure improvements and economic development efforts.

8. Adjournment at 9:26 p.m.

Dill/Curtin Passed Unanimously

Respectfully Submitted,
E. Ruth Ziobron
Recording Secretary