Cornwall Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes for 1/23/2024 @ 7:30 p.m. Cornwall Library and Via Zoom

In Attendance: Simon Hewett, Bianka Langner-Griggs, Oscar Anderson, Mare Rubin

Via zoom – Jane Herold, Neil Fraeunglass

Guest speaker: Rista Malanca, Director of Community and Economic Development with the Northwest Hills Council of Governments (NHCOG)

Other guests: David Keisman

The meeting called to order at 7:33

1. Approval of minutes from the January meeting.
2. Rista Malanca Director of Community and Economic Development with the NHCOG, shared her background in economic development roles and various boards/counsels in the Litchfield region. She shared the process for the 5-year comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS), which involves receiving grants to aid economic development focused on specific values and goals such as innovation, workforce development, housing, arts and culture, outdoor recreation, and diversity, among others. The draft of the plan will be available February 9th for public comment.
3. There was a discussion of how to work together with the CEDS Board and NWCOG Economic Development. Rista explained a plan will be developed for promoting the website Discover Litchfield Hills. The website uses Civic Lift to support local town calendars/events. The EDC will follow-up with the website committee and Rocco Botto to enable the calendar to connect with the Cornwall events calendar. There are also opportunities to work more closely and efficiently with the Western CT Tourism District.
4. Mare Rubin explained that the next EDC Roundtable meeting will take place on February 1, focused on “Placemaking” in Cornwall Bridge, led by Duncan Webb.
5. Mare Rubin presented initial ideas for a comprehensive Campaign for Cornwall. The goal would be to attract more visitors and promote Cornwall as a place to explore. There was discussion of the different ways we can promote Cornwall, including supporting awareness of all businesses and activities. The discussion also covered how the EDC can help enable new businesses/entrepreneurs to be attracted to Cornwall. Planning and Zoning issues can be challenging. Neil Fraeunglass has a comprehensive list of possible retail business locations that are currently empty or underutilized. Oscar Anderson proposed working with P&Z to understand what businesses can be where. There will be a follow-up meeting to review the list and create an inventory of actionable spaces.
6. Simon Hewett reported that the EDC Annual report has been submitted to P&Z and will be presented.
7. A list of EDC members contact information was distributed.
8. Neil Fraeunglass recommended all emails and social media platforms be transferred to EDC emails that are not specific to individual names. He will follow up to establish the emails and connect them to the accounts so that permissions are easily passed down to the next commission leadership. Oscar Anderson shared that Jane Hall has been setting up Dropbox folders for various town leaders and commissions.
9. A vote was approved to request the same budget of $6,500 for the coming year.
10. Discussion of Goals for 2024. Several goals will continue into the new year. New goal – identify commercial property inventory and availability, and assist and enable new entrepreneurs to establish businesses in Cornwall.
11. Jane Herold shared that she attended the website meeting and suggested to the website team to add a menu item for “Business” to make it easier to find the business listing. She shared that the website team is considering “re-branding” with new messages and that should be a collaborative process with the EDC.
12. Simon Hewett suggested a new Secretary to relieve Mare Rubin from note-taking duty. Jane Herold suggested rotating the responsibility to take the minutes. Simon also shared we need one new member of the Commission. There was a suggestion for nominating someone who works at Mohawk, or a local business owner.
13. David Keisman introduced himself and shared that he is interested in getting involved. He is currently working with Will Schenk, owner of the Cornwall Market, to help build the business and ensure it is a successful establishment as a local market and a chocolate destination. The Market is looking to add crafts, books, etc. from local creators.
14. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:04 pm.