

# **ECONOMIC CORPORATION OF NEWPORT**

Zoom

## **Minutes of March 1, 2021 – Full Board**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Hunter F. Rieseberg, President; Mark A. Pitkin, Vice President; Terry Dorr, Treasurer; Richard Bates, Secretary; Donna Mahair, Paul J. Brown, John Hooper, Bruce Jasper, Brendan Minnihan

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Ella Casey, Robert Collins

**STAFF PRESENT:** Christine Benner, Economic Development Coordinator

**CALL TO ORDER:** President Rieseberg called the meeting to order at 7:33 a.m.

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES: May 12, 2020 -** *Motion to table the minutes until the next meeting by Mr. Brown, second by Selectman Hooper. Motion passed unanimously.*

**FINANCIAL REPORT:** After review and discussion, *Motion to accept the financial report by Secretary Bates, second by Mr. Jasper. The motion passed unanimously.* President Rieseberg highlighted that it is the last year of funding for the Economic Development Coordinator position. The Board agreed that it is vital to secure and determine funding moving forward as the position has resulted in grants won well in excess of the position costs. It is a valuable resource for the community's future.

**INTRODUCTION OF NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR:** President Rieseberg introduced the Town of Newport's new Economic Development Coordinator, Christine Benner.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR UPDATE:** Mrs. Benner updated the group on a newly won CDFA CDBG grant for the Opera House rear entrance. She shared the status of each of the Town's current grants including the Riverbend Wastewater Pump Station, the Gilman Pond Water Intake System, the Childcare Feasibility Study and the Regional Transportation Corridor Feasibility Study. She is working diligently to get all of these grants compliant with both state and national requirements so we can enter the next round of grants this spring with a clean slate.

The next topic discussed was the upcoming grant opportunities and prospective projects. In her role, Mrs. Benner will be completing a TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) grant which would renovate and construct a new sidewalk system from downtown Sunapee Street all the way to the Ruger Mill Building. This improved infrastructure would not only create safer paths to the schools but a more easily accessible Main Street for many residents thereby improving walking traffic for our Main Street businesses. An AARP Community Challenge Grant is being sought for either new benches on the Town Common, wayfaring signs for the Rail Trail or other accessories for improved usage of the Rail Trail. This grant will be applied for in mid-

April. Upon the successful updating of our current Northern Borders Regional Commission grant, Mrs. Benner will be applying in the next round of NBRC's grant cycle with the goal of extending water lines from our new intake system at Gilman Pond to the downtown, replacing over 100 year old lines that are on the verge of collapse. A few other prospective CDFA CDBG grants were discussed including a possible public facilities grant for a childcare center as well as a few planning grants.

Mrs. Benner also shared an update on the School to Work program and her progress so far working closely with CTE Director, Jennifer Opalinski. In regards to business outreach, Mrs. Benner shared that in light of the rising case count throughout town, she shifted her efforts of introducing herself to Newport businesses via a personalized letter with a COVID resource handout mailed to every business. These packages would be mailed out in the next few days.

Discussion followed and Vice President Pitkin suggested pulling potential grant projects/focus areas from the recently released Newport Economic Strategic Plan. He also was eager to share the news on the Lead Abatement program being undertaken by the County and urged Mrs. Benner to work to ensure Newport's homes are a focus of this project.

**ACCEPTANCE OF FINAL VERSION OF NEWPORT'S ECONOMIC STRATEGIC PLAN:** Members of the Board received the final copy of the Strategic Plan on February 9<sup>th</sup> via email. Discussion was opened up on the study. Vice President Pitkin stressed the importance of moving forward on all of the action items indicated. Secretary Bates stated that a lot of work went into the former Franklin Study but once ECON received it, nothing happened. "We don't want this to happen again." President Rieseberg suggested having a subcommittee charged with monitoring the progress of the Plan's implementation. It was determined that Mrs. Benner will make a list of all action items listed and figure out who is/should be involved in the implementation. She will present this to the Board at our next meeting. *A motion to accept the final version of Newport's Economic Strategic Plan was made by Selectman Hooper, second by Mr. Jasper. The motion passed unanimously.*

## **FUTURE INITIATIVES/PROJECTS/REPORTS:**

### **A) INITIATIVES**

- **CDBG Housing Rehab Project:** Mrs. Benner stated that there has been no progress since Mr. Morrison originally raised the idea of a Housing Rehab Project. She has made it a priority to work with CDFA to determine how & when Newport can apply for one of these projects and make it successful.

- **Mural Update:** President Reiseberg shared that the mural on Coronis Market is well underway. The artist has set up a studio in one of the openings on Main Street and is completing panels one at a time. The artist has been hired as a contractor by Brian Coronis. As far as the Main Street mural, the current owners, the North's, have not responded to the Town & ECON's correspondence but they have been made aware that ECON does not own the mural since they purchased the property. President Rieseberg mentioned the idea of renewable murals that have been very successful in Keene and that the Library Arts Center had originally had discussions with the individual who created that organization. Mrs. Benner knows this young lady well and offered to reach out to her to restart conversations and begin to plan for these possibilities around town.
- **Newport Argus/Community Newspaper:** President Riesberg shared that there have been a few individuals in town interested in developing an online platform for local news with the possibility of a few print copies. The goal would be to fill the communication void left when the Argus was discontinued. He asked if ECON would be interested in partaking in some fashion. Mr. Jasper liked the idea and suggested ECON should put some seed money in. "People need to and deserve to hear what is going on throughout the community." Vice President Pitkin shared these sentiments however he is concerned about the limited bandwidth our Board members and staff already have. President Rieseberg will continue conversations with interested parties and update the group at the next meeting.

## **B) PROPERTIES**

- **Ash Landfill:** The most recent post closure inspection report shows the affluent is within perimeters and the Landfill is in good shape given the age. No need for additional/new upkeep. Vice President Pitkin asked if there had been a lease put in place for the Town's usage of the garage on the Ash Landfill property. President Rieseberg is going to work up a lease agreement as well as begin discussions on putting in a concrete floor to this garage so as to increase the usage year round.
- **Smith House:** Discussion followed on what is planned for this building in the future. Mrs. Benner stated this had been listed as a possible location for the off hours childcare center. We currently have an open CDBG planning grant for the childcare feasibility study which has remaining, unspent funds. There is a possibility we can make revisions to the scope of work to include a workup on what would be needed to rehab it successfully. The Board stated vehemently that they do not want to be landlords again.

## **C) REPORTS**

- D) STATUS OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE:** Mr. Jasper, a member of the Committee, updated the group on its status. The last meeting was in June of 2020 and included discussion on possibly bringing in a Ruger representative, someone from RDS, and maybe Buddy Howe. The Committee was set to have another meeting in July but the former Economic Development Coordinator never coordinated this. We

must fill 5 vacancies (1 vacancy, 4 terms expiring). Secretary Bates suggested Dennis Kathan being added to the prospect list. Mrs. Benner is going to set up a Nominating Committee meeting in the next month or so.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** The Board discussed the status of the creation of a new corporation. President Rieseberg stated that he has had limited correspondence with the law firm assisting in this matter. He is going to follow up after this meeting. Selectman Hooper asked the Board how we can continue to fund the position of Economic Development Coordinator and that we should determine this soon to ensure Mrs. Benner does not have to be uneasy about her future. President Rieseberg will add this to the agenda for our May 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and have an update for the group then.

**ADJOURN:** *Motion by Selectman Hooper to adjourn at 9:24 am, second by Treasurer Dorr. Motion passed unanimously.*