

Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Economic Development Steering Committee Meeting
Town Plan Economic Development Chapter Update
Approved Minutes
June 10, 2024

Planner Matt Osborn called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

Attendance: The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 2 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Monday, June 10, 2024. The meeting was also available remotely and several people joined that way.

Bruce Riddle	Planning Commission, term expires 2/7/25
John Heath	Planning Commission, term expires 3/11/27
Colin Butler	Planning Commission, term expires 7/12/24
Havah Walther	Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce
Kim Souza	Selectboard Liaison to the Planning Commission
Jesse Pollard	Energy Commission
Meghan Asbury	Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission

Staff:

Lori Hirshfield	Director, Department of Planning and Development
Matt Osborn	Town Planner, Department of Planning and Development

Consultants:

Jason Godfrey	Better City
Serra Güllü	Better City

Others Present:

None.

Public Comments: Matt asked if there are any public comments. There were none.

Jason Godfrey started by noting that we are now moving from broad topics to specifics. Serra Güllü stated that we will be covering village centers and the prioritization of strategies. Serra presented the following definition of a village center:

“A Village Center is the heart of the community. It is an authentic place that reflects the character and culture of the community and where people come together for a variety of purposes: shopping, dining, socializing, and participating in cultural activities. The concentration of diverse uses and amenities within a walkable area creates a vibrant and dynamic environment that fosters a strong sense of place and community identity.”

Jason asked what the Steering Committee thought of the definition. Kim Souza noted that Hartford has five unique villages that are not defined by boundaries. Havah Walther added that the definition is aspirational.

Jason noted that in 2011, the Town embarked on the Village Center Project and developed vision plans. He thinks it is valuable information and that the current economic development project can take the information and move toward implementation. Lori noted that a major part of the 2011 Village Centers Project was identifying what each village brings to the Town. She added that Village Center Project led directly to the State Village Center designations for Quechee Village and Hartford Village. The intent was that we would seek designation for Wilder Village and West Hartford Village as well. Lori stated that the state has strict boundaries for the Village Center Program, but specific boundaries aren't critical to this discussion.

Kim requested a copy of the 2011 Village Center Report. Colin Butler said past studies should be accessible on-line. He asked why village centers are involved in an economic development plan. Jason responded that a sense of place equals economic gravity. It is becoming much more important.

Jason presented the following goal for village centers "create a vision for Hartford's Village Centers to become vibrant, economically dynamic hubs that enhance community life for villages and surrounding areas and cater to modern preferences for density and diverse amenities"

Jason noted three principles for village centers:

1. Identity: Each village has its own identity that is independent but related to the Town's. Must simultaneously build unity and diversity.
2. Incrementalism: Progress is the key. Movement towards a recognized objective.
3. Mobility: Ensure accessible and economical transportation options between and within village centers.

Jason stated that a Village Ambassador Program (VAP) can be utilized to implement recommendations in the 2011 Village Center Project. Bruce noted the challenges and barriers to implementation such as having key leaders, financing, property owner cooperation and property owner turnover citing his experience with Hartford Village. Kim responded that it is a chicken and egg issue and that we need to create an atmosphere for community engagement. Lori noted that the new housing and development position in the Planning and Development Department will help facilitate village projects. She suggested revisiting the vision.

There was discussion about the Visitor Ambassador Program and whether it should be formal or informal. Jason stated that grassroots efforts always seem to work better. Kim asked if there is a way that the Town can facilitate an informal group of residents with a basic structure. Lori suggested starting with defining what we want to do. She added that Go Fund Me projects have been successful.

There was discussion

June 18th Community Forum #2: Jason reported that an entirely remote community forum is scheduled for Tuesday, June 18th. He stated that he will give an overview of the project's purpose and process. They will present what we heard from the public and present the draft strategies.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 p.m.